

an ordinary man

brad silberling

RED screen.

Slowly, fine detail emerges -- sunlit contours, soft depressions -- an object held delicately, caressed by human FINGERS.

A RED PEPPER.

Held aloft in reverent inspection.

A FACE

Draws close now -- brows silvered handsome with middle age, steely eyes growing softer under the spell of this sensual specimen. As if memory itself was somehow contained within its shape and color.

M (V.O.)  
*I was always inclined to be an  
ordinary man...*

A smile eases over his lips as he draws the pepper in to inhale its scent. An open face, warm and charismatic -- he could be your uncle. Or your father. This is M.

He regards the pepper happily, the beads of water dripping from its skin. At last he calls out --

M (CONT'D)  
You're drowning them.

WIDER

To reveal he's in a small grocery market, SOUNDS of a bustling city just outside the door. He's plainly dressed, stout but fit.

M (CONT'D)  
--You realize that.

He places the pepper gently inside a small bag, inspects the teeming pile for more.

M (CONT'D)  
(louder)  
By tomorrow...beauty will become  
shit.  
(bags another)  
You should *give* these away. Where  
is your shame?

No response. Silence behind him, as he turns to discover he's alone in the space. Grips the bag, heads for the counter around the corner.

ROUNDING THE CORNER

He spies the OWNER who stands oddly still behind the counter. Eyes set and unmoving. Won't make eye contact.

M (CONT'D)  
-Ey. Veggie killer.

No response. M computes this, shifts his eyes to a CHROME edge on a cooler behind the man. A SHAPE in the reflection, dark and perfectly still.

NEW ANGLE

As M steps calmly into the space behind the counter. There, crouched below the owner, a wiry GUNMAN silently presses a cheap semi-automatic into the man's midriff. A hold-up frozen in progress. As he turns, his face goes ASHEN as he looks at M with apparent recognition. Slack-jawed.

M (CONT'D)  
(calm and sharp)  
Stand up.

The gunman blinks in disbelief, mouth working silently.

M (CONT'D)  
--Up.

And as he does slowly, oddly obedient, M steps forward in disgust and, in one swift motion, SNATCHES the gun and CRACKS him across the face, felling him effortlessly, the sound of freed TEETH clattering on cement. Tosses the gun away and looks to the owner, holds up the pepper bag.

M (CONT'D)  
And a paper.

The owner begins to shake now, eyes darting from the gunman to M, but never making direct eye contact.

OWNER  
Please --

M  
(reaching for cash)  
--The paper, and this horribly  
drowned produce.

OWNER  
You must go --

M  
--I'd LIKE the paper, please.

OWNER  
(really panicked now)  
--Please General, GO. Quickly--

M begins to hand him the bag of peppers in frustration.

OWNER (CONT'D)  
--Take it-- PLEASE. Go!

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

MOVING WITH M

Strolling away from the market on this eastern European thoroughfare as, in the BACKGROUND, pedestrians clamor toward the COMMOTION coming from within now -- sounds of the owner's YELLS and violent repetitive THUDS against human flesh. M walks calmly with his produce bag, unnoticed.

M (V.O.)  
*Brave? Here's how to be brave.  
Start with the premise that there  
is always someone who is more  
afraid than you are. And set an  
example for him.*

A PEEL OF TIRES

Suddenly sounds, approaching at speed. A small yellow YUGO whips into frame menacingly, leaping the curb and CUTTING off M's path. The DRIVER vaults out his side, tosses open the door and folds M into the backseat with lightning speed, SPILLING the bag of peppers. As he races back to his seat and GUNS the engine --

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

The locks BOLT down as the car lurches back onto the city street, barely in control. M braces himself in the ridiculously small backseat, disgusted.

M  
You dropped my fucking vegetables.

The driver, breathless, can barely contain himself.

DRIVER  
--Please get down.

M  
(snorts)  
And how do you propose I do that?  
Do I look like a circus midget?

The car WHIPS sharply around a corner.

M (CONT'D)  
(SLAMMING into the side)  
--Oh Jesus Christ -- would you--

DRIVER  
We've discussed these walks.

M  
(recovering)  
--Yes, and now we see why I take  
them.

DRIVER  
We're far too compromised --

M  
-- Then get me a REAL driver, as I  
have ASKED for.

DRIVER  
General, I'm--

M  
-- You're a PILOT, Miro! You drive  
stick like a woman. Where the  
hell's Ganic?

DRIVER  
Vacation with his family, sir --

M  
-- HE could drive. And, no  
offense, but I'm a little sick of  
your face at this point. Yes,  
it's true. That soap you  
suffocate me with. Matted hair  
like a dog's ass. I tire of you.

(MORE)

M (CONT'D)  
 I want to see other people.  
 (chortles)

The driver doesn't respond.

M (CONT'D)  
 Oh, and by the way -- I see where  
 you're headed -- I know where  
 you're headed. I've slept in nine  
 beds in six months, and only ONE is  
 in this direction. --If they think  
 I'm spending one more night in that  
 hellhole Tanovic calls home, guess  
 again. Those children -- are  
 AWFUL. They're unhygienic,  
 they're undisciplined, and you can  
 tell everyone I will pitch a tent  
 in the goddamned HAGUE before I --

DRIVER  
 We're moving again, General.

This stops him.

M  
 -What?

DRIVER  
 We're on the move, sir.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- DAY

A towering, shapeless block of Communist era apartment  
 BUILDINGS which stretch as far as the eye can see, colorless  
 against the stark grey sky. The YUGO pulls up to a  
 weathered curb beneath them.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- CONTINUOUS -- DAY

M peers out the rear window, unsettled.

M  
 Who's this, then?

DRIVER

No one, sir.

(beat)

You.

M's clearly confused.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

The owner is...a friend. He's  
found space.

M

An apartment.

DRIVER

Yes.

M

My own?

DRIVER

For six months. Possibly longer.

M

Thank God.

DRIVER

He's happy to meet us --

M

Give me the key.

He holds his hand out.

DRIVER

Sir--

M

Not dropping me off at boarding  
school, for Christ's sake -- give  
me the key. Find it myself, thank  
you.

Thinking better of it, the Driver reluctantly digs into his  
pocket.

DRIVER

We'll provide you with supplies.

M

Supplies?

DRIVER  
Essentials, sir.

M  
And who would be making these purchases?

DRIVER  
There's really no need for you to leave the --

M  
Absolutely not. You're a crap shopper, Miro.  
(cracks the door)  
Tell them to leave cash at the door. Tell them.

DRIVER  
Sir --

CUT TO:

EXT. YUGO -- DAY

M climbs out of the car, regards his surroundings warily as the trunk is POPPED. Reaching inside, he retrieves his only possessions -- a worn department store bag, and a therapeutic PILLOW.

WIDER

As the Yugo pulls away, leaving him standing alone, dwarfed by the complex. A man and his pillow.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT LOBBY -- DAY

An empty, wasted expanse, not a stick of furniture. Holdover from another era. M stands inside, peers across at the elevator, when his ear is pulled by a SOUND from an adjoining room.

CUT TO:

INT. RECREATION ROOM -- DAY

More wasted space. A cold, vast room with no decoration. Empty save for a broken PING-PONG TABLE shoved up against a colorless wall. And a small SEVEN YEAR OLD who stands alone bundled in a thick parka, mindlessly whacking a ping-pong BALL off the table against the wall with a skinless paddle. He stops, sensing he has an audience. Turns to see M, standing in the doorway with his pillow, expressionless. A brief stand-off. He turns back and begins whacking the ball again.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY -- DAY

Seemingly endless, and poorly lit. Eerily quiet at midday.

M looks somewhat lost as he clutches his things and slowly makes his way up the hall, trying to match key to apartment numbers he passes. Hesitates as he arrives at a door slightly ajar, its number missing. Edging closer he eases the door further open, stops cold as, inside, he sees...

AN OLD WOMAN

Kneeling in the corner of her aging apartment, head bowed in prayer. Facing Mecca.

M'S EXPRESSION

Darkens at the sight.

THE OLD WOMAN

Slowly turns as if in response. And sees only

THE APARTMENT DOOR ACROSS THE WAY

Quickly slipping closed now.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT 3G -- DAY

M locks the door behind him, turns to take in the space.

It's hardly luxurious. Spare furniture with worn patterns and worn walls, somehow monochromatic in the dim light which barely peeks through heavy closed curtains. M studies it, unmoving. Tries a LIGHT SWITCH beside the front door.

Harsh overhead light from an aging fixture instantly accosts the space. Disgusted, he throws the switch off almost instantly.

CUT TO:

THE CURTAINS

As he throws them open to let natural light spill in from two tall windows heavily sealed with aging paint. Unsatisfied, he TEARS the curtains down, tossing them in a heap. Tries the window latch. It's useless.

WIDER NOW

As he kicks at the latch, tearing SOUNDS as the paint gradually gives. With a final blow, paint chips CRACK and drizzle down in a fine snow. He OPENS the window, and simply breathes. Turning to study his new confines again, he moves to the second window --

CUT TO:

THE CEILING

As M stands perched on a chair, reaching up to dismantle the overhead light fixture, removing the dusty bulb.

CUT TO:

THE LIVING ROOM

M stands oddly still in the center of the room now, windows closed again. He trains his ear, then slowly revolves on the spot, listening in all directions.

CLOSE ON THE COMMON WALL

To the neighboring apartment, as he gently places his ear against the surface, closes his eyes in concentration.

CUT TO:

A CLOCK RADIO

BLINKS faintly, perched in a corner in disuse. As his hands scoop it up --

WIDER

M sizes up the floor space, selects a spot on the hardwood, places the clock radio down. Switching it on, he dials in reception. Impatiently gliding past snippets of popular music, he arrives at an older recording of a TRADITIONAL SERBIAN INSTRUMENTAL. Satisfied, he adjusts the VOLUME up.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY -- DAY

Cracking open the front door, M's eye peers out, scans the empty hallway.

WIDER

AS he emerges, slips the door closed behind him. Confirming he's unseen, he places his ear to the wall, listening for the MUSIC, assessing sound leakage. BEAT, then he methodically moves several paces down the hall, listens again.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- DUSK

M arranges his few belongings in a lone bureau across from the sagging twin bed. From the department store bag, he removes a small SCARF, oddly delicate, places it on the bureau with great care. From the bottom of the bag he produces two small leather CARRYING CASES. Opens the first, revealing a well worn TRAVEL CHESS SET, happily intact. Placing it with care on the bureau, he cracks open the second case, peering inside.

CUT TO:

THE BED

M slowly sits, testing firmness. Bounces a bit. A kid at camp. He's not pleased.

CUT TO:

DOOR HINGES

As they're popped open with a utility KNIFE.

WIDER

To reveal M as he REMOVES an old wooden closet DOOR in the corner of the room.

CLOSE ON MATTRESS

As it's lifted now, and the door SLIDES between it and the aging bed frame. A perfect brace.

M

Sits again, assesses. Approves.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN -- DUSK

M stands in the small alcove this apartment offers as a kitchen, tests the hot water delivery. Unimpressed. A small dented kettle sits on the stove nearby.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

M sips something steaming from an old floral mug. Stands in the middle of the empty apartment. The silence is deafening. He SWITCHES the radio on again, turns the music up.

CUT TO:

INT. RECREATION ROOM -- NIGHT

WIDE

As M now WHACKS the ping-pong ball against the wall in the style of the young expert from earlier, losing himself in the metronome rhythm to combat his solitude. A small SOUND suddenly pulls his ear -- he WHIPS around breathlessly, peering into the half-lit corners of the room, grips the paddle defensively. Truly frightened. Nothing. Slowly gathers himself, turns and resumes.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

M sits on the bed in shorts and undershirt. Places his therapeutic PILLOW with great care, adjusts and readjusts its position. Satisfied, he gazes at the room. Rolls his neck. Makes a decision. This day is done. As he SWITCHES off the bedside lamp --

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- MORNING

CLOSE ON M

As light spill awakens him. He peers around in confusion, eyes darting at his surroundings.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

M peers up into a cupboard in his underwear, spies an old coffee press. As he reaches for it -- the SOUND of something SLIDING under the front door pulls his ear.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT DOOR -- DAY

A FOLDED NEWSPAPER

Rests wedged in the space beneath the door. He unfolds it, releasing contents inside: several pre-paid PHONE CARDS, a small sleeve of MEDICATION, and a too-thin band of CASH. His expression sours. Unfolding the newspaper, his eye falls on the bottom corner of the front page, where an article has clearly been REMOVED. REDACTED. His eyes flare, furious.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT PLAZA -- DAY

Where two young TODDLERS, bundled up against the cold, peer up in wonder as leaves of discarded NEWSPAPER flutter down now from three floors above, like snow.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

M finishes tying his shoes, rises and smooths his hair with a sure hand -- when a SOUND from the other room grabs his attention.

CUT TO:

THE FRONT DOOR

As shockingly, keys RATTLE from the outside, loudly attacking the lock. After a beat, the lock SNAPS open, the handle rises and falls, and in through the door steps

A YOUNG WOMAN

Early-mid twenties, plainly dressed with a small backpack over her shoulder, which she shrugs off and quickly FREEZES IN HER TRACKS as she looks up. Shocked to stillness.

ACROSS FROM HER

M now stands ten feet away, arm calmly extended with a small SIDEARM trained squarely at her head.

THE GIRL

Remains frozen, the smallest SOUND escaping the back of her throat. Terrified.

M

studies her, unflinching. The stand-off continues in exquisite SILENCE, seemingly without end. Until, at last,

M

Yes?

The young woman can't breathe. And it's clear from her expression that the only thing more shocking than the gun in her face is the man who holds it...whom she clearly recognizes now, based on the look in her eyes. Another eternity, until...

GIRL

...Mrs. Boskovich...

M

Apparently not.

GIRL

...No.

M  
No.

Beat.

M (CONT'D)  
She was expecting you.

She nods imperceptibly.

M (CONT'D)  
And that's why you've let yourself  
into my apartment.

Another nod.

M (CONT'D)  
And you are...

GIRL  
...Tanja.

M  
Tanja.

BEAT. More please.

GIRL  
(swallows)  
...the maid.

M  
Ah.

He sizes her up.

M (CONT'D)  
Well. It appears Mrs. Boskovich  
has broken her lease...  
Unexpectedly. Without telling the  
maid.

She swallows, frozen.

M (CONT'D)  
Your bag, please.

She slowly, cautiously tosses her backpack to his feet, never taking her eyes off him. He easily, expertly rifles the contents of the bag without breaking his gaze at her, tosses the pack aside.

M (CONT'D)  
And now your clothes.

She blanches. Doesn't move.

M (CONT'D)  
I don't enjoy surprises. Please...

He aims patiently. Slowly, she begins to remove her sweater, and then her blouse. He waves his gun at her jeans. Mortified, she pops the buttons, slides them off her, until she stands facing him in only bra and panties.

M (CONT'D)  
Turn around please. Slowly.

She slowly turns on the spot, pale, clean skin utterly exposed. Arrives back to meet his look.

M (CONT'D)  
...No tattoos? At your age? How dull. Where are your *passions*?  
(narrows gaze)  
Unless you've chosen to cover them up for some reason?

Waves toward the bathroom.

M (CONT'D)  
If you'll be kind enough to step into the shower and rinse thoroughly.

She eyes him in disbelief.

M (CONT'D)  
No worries, I won't be joining you.

No choice, she reluctantly crosses to the bathroom. WE hear the SHOWER turn on. M listens intently. BEAT.

M (CONT'D)  
How's the plumbing?

No response.

The shower SQUEAKS off.

M (CONT'D)  
I trust you know where the towels are...

BEAT. He looks up to find Tanja standing before him, naked and dripping, no attempt to cover herself now. No hidden markings of any kind. She meets his eyes, defiant, slowly ROTATES before he even speaks. He's visibly struck as he takes in her youthful form, heart sagging for a beat -- a glimmer in his eyes, something other than lust. Recognition? Finally,

M (CONT'D)

How much did she pay you?

She's thrown by the question. Standing stark naked.

M (CONT'D)

Good Mrs. Boskovich -- how much did she pay you?

TANJA

...Fifteen. An hour.

M

I'll pay you more. What are your skills? What were your chores?

TANJA

...Cleaning...I-- cleaning, washing...

M

Show me your hands.

She meets his eyes, cautiously raises her palms as he steps closer. He gently takes hold of them, studies them intently for confirmation. She holds her breath as he evaluates. Tense moment.

M (CONT'D)

How old are you?

TANJA

...Twenty-six.

M

Your parents put these hands to work?

TANJA

My parents are dead.

M lifts his look, regards her up close. It's painfully intimate.

M  
 You come how often?  
 (small smile)  
 ...For Mrs. Boskovich.

TANJA  
 ...Once...each week. Tuesdays...

M  
 --I'll need you more.

She looks at him like he's mad.

M (CONT'D)  
 You have others? Others you see?

TANJA  
 (thrown)  
 ...yes...

M  
 No more. You work for me now. I  
 need you full time. As you can  
 see.

The empty, small apartment. He smiles at her expression.

M (CONT'D)  
 ...A man needs a maid.

She slowly removes her hands.

TANJA  
 I...thank you...sir. I...I think I  
 should go...

M  
 Ah, but that won't be possible now,  
 will it?

Meets her look -- he knows that she knows. His identity.

M (CONT'D)  
 You do have my key, after all...  
 Don't you?

She averts her eyes, silent.

M (CONT'D)  
 ...So I am yours. And you will be  
 mine.... My little secret.

He brushes a drop of water off her nose.

M (CONT'D)  
 Show me your skills. Where do  
 you start?  
 (off her look)  
 The kitchen, the bath...the  
 bedroom?

TANJA  
 ...Windows.

M  
 The windows -- excellent. Let's  
 begin.

She eyes him squarely.

TANJA  
 May I get dressed?

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

CLOSE ON WINDOW

As Tanja's hand unsteadily begins to work a pane of glass.

REVEAL M

Standing uncomfortably close behind her as she works, now  
 clothed -- watching every move like a hawk.

M  
 Your hand is shaking.

She steels herself, attempts to calm her hand as she  
 continues.

M (CONT'D)  
 Do I make you nervous?

She doesn't respond. He continues to study her moves.

M (CONT'D)  
 Well, you've completely missed the  
 corners -- I trust you'll return  
 for those when it suits you.

She stiffens, sharply moves her rag to the corner of the pane  
 and begins to wipe.

M (CONT'D)  
 Hardly very efficient, are you?  
 Three minutes a pane? At this  
 rate you'll be here all af--

TANJA  
 (tightly)  
 --I'm sorry, I'm not used to being  
 timed.

M  
 At fifteen an hour? You damn well  
 should be. Took that poor woman  
 for all she was worth, didn't you?

No response.

M (CONT'D)  
 --Didn't you?

TANJA  
 She had no complaints.

M  
 And whose fault was that? She  
 lacked leadership. My men always  
 take to constructive criticism.  
 They shine.

She moves on to the next pane, simmering.

M (CONT'D)  
 So what other skills, then?  
 Besides fogging windows. You  
 cook?

TANJA  
 Cook?

M  
 Yes, cook. Prepare meals.  
 Sustenance.

TANJA  
 No. I don't cook.

M  
 At your age?

TANJA  
 I was never taught.

M  
Criminal. I trust you eat.

TANJA  
Yes. I eat.

M  
Good. For me, you'll cook.

He straightens, heads for the door.

M (CONT'D)  
First we shop.

She turns, shocked at the prospect -- *out there?*

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET -- DAY

Tanja looks anxious to the point of bursting as they make their on foot away from the monolithic apartment complex. Like she's walking with a moving target. Her pace is sped up accordingly, eyes darting about.

M  
I'm sorry, do you need to pee?

TANJA  
--*Beg* your pardon?

M  
Slow down.

She does, no less stressed.

M (CONT'D)  
You're nervous.

TANJA  
Shouldn't you be?

M  
Because I'm walking? In the open?  
(snorts)  
Join the chorus.

He reads her nerves.

M (CONT'D)  
 You've nothing to fear.  
 You see, I'm not really here.

She doesn't follow.

M (CONT'D)  
 At this very moment?...I'm hidden  
 in a mountain barracks. I'm  
 skiing in northern Slovenia. I'm  
 sunning on the Dalmatian coast.  
 Tending sheep on a Serbian  
 mountaintop. Toasting with Putin  
 in Kiev -- *and* in Moscow. I have  
 it on very good authority. Friend  
 of a friend?...*swears* he saw me.  
 (winks)  
 I am everywhere. And nowhere.  
 (pleased)  
 I am myth.

They round a corner, busier street life ahead of them.

M (CONT'D)  
 Three times they've offered me  
 plastic surgery. Three times --  
 begged me to change my face. This  
 face. Now *that* would be a crime.

She marvels at his bravado.

M (CONT'D)  
 They know they'll never catch me.  
 All of them, they're just guests in  
 our houses. This is our house.  
 (small smile)  
 But my friends who waste their  
 hours watching over me like nervous  
 hens...they're not so trusting.  
 They're here now, you know.

She tenses, eyes darting.

M (CONT'D)  
 Yugo, two blocks back. No front  
 plate. Black mini ahead at two  
 o'clock.  
 (beams)  
 They must be dying. "How does he  
 manage so quickly?? And such an  
 attractive young thing!" Ha!  
 Come, I'll show you --  
 (MORE)

M (CONT'D)  
 (grabs her hand)  
 Run!

He suddenly leads her in a new direction, dashing across the street toward another intersection. On cue, the CARS he's called out SCRAMBLE in the distance, helpless to keep up.

M (CONT'D)  
 Ha!

He pulls her in yet another direction, enjoying the chaos he's making as the cars helplessly try to react.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEDESTRIAN LANE -- DAY

They race up the lane like school children, slowing to a stop by a small news KIOSK. M peals with laughter.

M  
 ...I'm sorry, that never gets old.

He fights to catch his breath. Tanja eyes him like he's mad.

M (CONT'D)  
 Come, the first lesson.

He steers her to the kiosk.

M (CONT'D)  
 Royals. Always. And no fucking filters.

He hands her a folded bill.

TANJA  
 ...You're still smoking?

M  
 (smiles)  
 ...So you *do* know something of me.  
 (taps his chest)  
 Hmm?-- How 'bout that? A heart that's too large. Ha! Joke's on them. Smoke -- God yes. Old Sulovic -- finest officer in our military's history? Only cigarettes were able to kill the man -- nothing else.

(MORE)

M (CONT'D)  
 (pushes her forward)  
 Get a paper.

She awkwardly steps up, hands the bill to the aging kiosk WORKER, orders as M struggles to right his breathing. At last, she turns, goods in hand, an odd expression as she meets M's eyes, nods at the kiosk man.

M straightens, steps up to the kiosk window. Extends his hand knowingly. The old man hands him a pen bashfully, slides a paper receipt his way.

MAN  
 ...For my son.

M  
 Of course.

He signs his AUTOGRAPH, to Tanja's amazement.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

CLOSE ON MARKET BAGS

As M unloads fresh produce, milk, flour, and two bottles of slivovitz. He lifts a red pepper to the sunlight for Tanja to appreciate.

M  
 This color...this shape. For this  
 we fight wars.  
 (sheer disgust)  
 Gorgeous vegetables -- raped by the  
 Turks...boiling away every last  
 vestige of nature's goodness --  
 they slaughter their cuisine -- you  
 know that. Now *there's* a crime.

Tanja silently puts away the groceries as M begins to wash fresh vegetables in the sink. As she removes the newspaper--

M (CONT'D)  
 Read.

She hesitates.

M (CONT'D)  
 Bottom third, on the right.

We follow her eyes to the very section of paper previously REDACTED in M's earlier copy, now whole.

M (CONT'D)  
Don't think -- read.

TANJA  
(reacts to article)  
...I--

M  
Read the words. I'm damn well dyslexic, so if you don't want to sit here all night while I flail, save us both some time. Go on.

She pulls it closer, eyes him warily. Then,

TANJA  
(quietly reads)  
"As key members of the European Union prepare to gather and international pressure mounts--"

M  
--This is reading?? Come on, then -  
- with inflection! Give it some life!

She clears her throat, resumes.

TANJA  
(barely more animated)  
"...Government officials today conceded that the country's application to the European Union to attain coveted EU economic status have been hampered by the failure to capture and deliver into custody General --

M  
-- Oh I could have given them a much better picture! Look at that.

TANJA  
"...indicted for war crimes, and crimes against humanity by a Hague tribunal, in connection with the massacre of seven thousand fighting age men and boys in the closing days of the war, under his command.  
(MORE)

TANJA (CONT'D)

Government officials continue to reassure the international community that every effort is being made to ascertain the whereabouts of the fugitive military leader, who they insist must be well hidden --

M

--Ha!

He leans out the open window --

M (CONT'D)

HELLO!! HELLLLOOO!!!

He yanks his head back in, steaming.

M (CONT'D)

--Fucking cowards. Can't stand up on their own two feet -- look at me! Look how well hidden! As if they're not paying for all this themselves!

TANJA

..."The United States this week officially raised its offer to ten million dollars U.S. for any parties assisting in the location and capture of the general --"

M

--Oh, they'll all be out now...cockroaches --

TANJA

"...widely reviled by the international community, though still considered a hero by some of his own countrymen. Government leaders, while acknowledging the country's deepening economic isolation, refused to speculate as to a date when the General's capture and arrest might be expected."

M

Yeah, let 'em check their calendars -- that should take a fucking year or so.

(MORE)

M (CONT'D)  
 God forbid they should have to make  
 a decision.  
 (fumes)

Tanja places the paper down. M looks at her, regaining  
 composure.

M (CONT'D)  
 ...What is this country of yours?

She meets his look.

M (CONT'D)  
 Bows and curtsies? "Here's some  
 allowance, now go to your room?"  
 Is that it? After all of this?

She's silent.

M (CONT'D)  
 You say nothing. A generation of  
 young people, saying nothing.  
 (nods)  
 All right. Then you are my silent  
 witness. Witness this:  
 I will NEVER hide... And I will  
 never be taken.

He holds her look. Studies her reaction.

M (CONT'D)  
 Lesson two. We cook.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- NIGHT

A rousing TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTAL BEGINS AS --

CLOSE ON CLOCK RADIO

As the cord is yanked from the living room wall.

CLOSE ON A MATCH STRIKING

Touching off an old gas burner.

CLOSE ON CLOCK RADIO

As it's plunked down on the kitchen counter.

CLOSE ON OIL

As it's swirled into a rusted PAN.

CLOSE ON THE RADIO DIAL

As it finds home and the volume is CRANKED UP. MUSIC RISES  
now and carries over --

CLOSE ON MILK

Splashing into flour

CLOSE ON DOUGH

Being roughly shaped by masculine hands.

WIDER ON TANJA

The sorcerer's apprentice, now having a go at rolling out the  
dough. M hawks over her closely again. He URGES her on  
dramatically -- more strength! More effort!

CLOSE ON PAN

As colors swirl -- vegetables dance --

CLOSE ON HANDS

Tanja's, tentatively sprinkling SALT over the bread dough --

WIDER

As M grabs her hands and gloriously DUMPS all of the salt in  
a thick shower.

A WINDOW CURTAIN

Billows, fluffed into the air --

A SMALL TABLE

As M lands the curtain on top with expert ease -- an unlikely  
but majestic table covering...

CROOKED, MELTED CANDLES

As they're yanked from a rusty drawer --

A MATCH FLAME

Touches a crooked wick.

A STEAMING LOAF OF BREAD

Is cut now into generous slices by a crude POCKET KNIFE.

THE RADIO

As thick fingers turn up the VOLUME for the music's final CRESCENDO.

WIDER NOW

As M and Tanja stand still before plates of beautiful food. He holds his hand up to her, eyes closed as he makes them wait while the music GROWS, GROWS, and...ENDS.

Opens his eyes. Nods.

M

Go, maid.

As she moves for the plates --

CUT TO:

THE TABLE -- NIGHT

They finish their meal in silence. He peers across the candle glow.

M

The Peasant's Feast. Four centuries of life and culture, distilled into one dish. My dying day, I shall eat this meal...taste my home...and be done.

She meets his look, gazes down at the one remaining piece of BREAD. He nods gallantly. She snatches it up.

M (CONT'D)

...How will you ever make a suitable bride?

TANJA

(chews)

What makes you assume I'd do the cooking?

M smiles -- touche.

TANJA (CONT'D)

...And how do you know I'm not already married?

M  
 (smiles)  
 I've seen your hands...

M gently reaches out, LIFTS her fingers...the visible lack of evidence.

TANJA  
 I'll never wear a ring.

M  
 Not dressed like that, you won't.

TANJA  
 (looks down)  
 And what's wrong with this?

M  
 Nothing that can't be fixed.

She CHOMPS down on the end of the bread, narrowing her eyes at him. He studies her carefully.

M (CONT'D)  
 So this life of yours. These  
 twenty-six lengthy years. The  
 highlights, please.

She chews, offering nothing.

M (CONT'D)  
 First chapter -- you were born, of  
 course.

More silence.

M (CONT'D)  
 ...Where?

TANJA  
 Here.

M  
 The city?

She nods.

M (CONT'D)  
 City girl. Of course. And your  
 parents...

No response.

M (CONT'D)  
 (enjoying this)  
 From where do they hail?

TANJA  
 (measured)  
 Same.

M  
 City folks as well... Now, that's  
 convenient.  
 (beat)  
 And their families?

The air cools. It's clear he's fishing.

M (CONT'D)  
 Surely your people come from  
 somewhere. A village with their  
 name on it?

TANJA  
 I never knew my grandparents.

M  
 Really. And your parents, you  
 say...

TANJA  
 I told you.

M  
 Yes. Yes you did. And how did  
 they perish?

BEAT.

TANJA  
 Car accident.

M  
 Together?

She nods.

M (CONT'D)  
 How unfortunate. And I must say a  
 bit unusual.

TANJA  
 How so.

M

Well we aren't the worst drivers here. Crack-up here or there after the bars close, yes of course, but -- both of them. Gone just like that. That's catastrophic.

She holds his look, steely.

M (CONT'D)

Leaving you all alone. At what age?

TANJA

Seventeen.

M

Of course. Old enough to fend for yourself. Independence.

(beat)

And school? Why aren't you in school?

TANJA

(flatly)

My parents died.

M

Money, yes. Always money. And so we witness the birth of a maid.

He settles in, holding serve.

M (CONT'D)

And friends?

She shrugs dismissively.

M (CONT'D)

No friends?

TANJA

No time.

M

Mrs. Boskovitch, no doubt. Slave-driving bitch.

She doesn't smile.

M (CONT'D)

Boys?

(no response)

There must be boys. Ripe specimen  
like yourself.

Her look says it all. He cocks his head, calculating.

M (CONT'D)

No boys...no friends...no family...  
Tanja, my silent maid, I'm afraid  
you are as invisible as I am.

(nods)

We're ghosts.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON TWO SHORT GLASSES

As a bottle of slivovitz SLAMS home, pouring generously into  
both.

M

...lesson three...

M AND TANJA

Sit opposite each other, drawing the glasses up and throwing  
the contents back like experts, never breaking their looks.

M (CONT'D)

...lesson four...

He pours again. They toss the drinks back. Tanja holds her  
own with him, a competitive look in her eye.

TANJA

...Five, please.

M regards her, impressed.

M

Very good. Very good, maid...

CLINK, pour, and down it goes. They hold each other's  
looks, recovering. M's feeling it now, teeters a bit.

M (CONT'D)

Lesson six... six is the balls.  
Six is the sport of kings...

He rises, weaves his way unsteadily into the other room.

M (CONT'D) (O.S.)  
Six will show what you're really  
made of... your fire... your  
quality of mercy.

He returns, pausing a moment to BELCH loudly, then slams his CARRYING CASE down between them. Pours one more SHOT for each of them, then dramatically flips the case open -- revealing his CHESS BOARD. Tanja throws her shot back, eyes the board warily.

M (CONT'D)  
(salivating)  
Never met a military man who didn't  
like the game. Napoleon himself  
loved playing simultaneous games  
against his marshals -- and who do  
you think won?  
(roars)  
And he was just a short fuck!--  
You're *much* taller than Napoleon!

He sees the reluctance in her eyes.

M (CONT'D)  
(in his cups now)  
Oh come on! I even made my  
*enemies* play -- and they respected  
me! I know, you're thinking --  
you're thinking, we'll sure,  
fuckers let you win or you'd shoot  
them -- but not true! Not true!  
Play to win, yes, but I *respect* my  
opponent -- even those blue hat  
NATO fucks, God love 'em! So  
friend or foe, you take me on!

He weaves a bit as he awaits her response.

M (CONT'D)  
TAKE me on, dammit!!

TANJA  
I can't.

M  
--WHAT??

TANJA  
I don't. Know how. To *play*.

M  
--Try!

TANJA  
--I can't!

M  
(roars)  
FIGHT, DAMMIT!!

She's silenced.

M (CONT'D)  
--WORTHLESS!! Worthless you are!!

He SLAMS the case closed.

M (CONT'D)  
Then GO!! GO, if you won't fight!!

She eyes him, incredulous.

M (CONT'D)  
Are you deaf as well?? GO!!!

TANJA  
...You'd let me.

M  
LET you?? Are you a fucking  
hostage?! Haven't you read? I  
don't TAKE hostages!

She rises warily.

M (CONT'D)  
--GO!! Out of my sight!!

She moves to the door.

M (CONT'D)  
-- But I expect you back, maid!  
You are mine now. Worthless --  
but MINE.

She quickly EXITS. Her FOOTSTEPS quickly recede down the hall. M sits alone. Eyes on the empty seat across from him.

AT THE WINDOW

He arrives with the bottle, gazes out hollowly at the plaza below. Through the gloom he makes out

THE YUGO

Sitting alone in the distance like a sentinel, shrouded in darkness.

TANJA

Emerges at last below, quickly making her way across the plaza.

He studies her as she goes, her purposeful gait touching off a sudden --

SMASH CUT TO:

*FLASHBACK -- A MATCHING ANGLE*

*Viewed from a window above, a YOUNG WOMAN, maybe 20, walks away on a bright city street, raven haired and self assured. She turns back with a simple wave and a glowing smile.*

CUT BACK TO:

TANJA'S RECEDING FIGURE

Eerily parallel, but no such look back. M watches her disappear into the darkness, silently wagering she'll not be back. MUSIC concludes on the radio across the room.

ANNOUNCER

...Music from the Sons of Serbia,  
 guests at tomorrow evening's dance  
 of traditions at Veteran's Hall.  
 Doors open to the public at seven  
 o'clock...

WIDER NOW

As M makes another dent in his bottle, turns to gaze at his confines, a ghost in the moonlight.

CUT TO:

INT. RECREATION ROOM -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON BOTTLE

Perched alone on the broken ping-pong table top, vibrating.

WIDER

As M whacks the ping-pong ball again with fierce rhythm. For the amount of drink he's consumed, he's chillingly in control. Without explanation, a SOUND once again pulls his ear -- he WHIPS around breathlessly as before, peering even more intently into the half-lit corners of the room. Gripping the paddle. Truly terrified. Again -- nothing.

He PAUSES briefly to refill his glass, never taking his eyes off the darkened space. Throws back the shot. And then resumes his game.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- MORNING

CLOSE ON M

Head a thousand pounds against his therapeutic pillow, as he's accosted by a narrow shaft of morning light. Forcing his leaden lids open, he strains to focus, discovers

HIS CLOTHES

Folded neatly in a small pile, a foot away from him. SOUNDS and smells from the outer room draw him up to a woozy seat.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- MORNING

M emerges like a bear from hibernation, rights himself against the bedroom door as he focuses blood-shot eyes across the space, clearly shocked to see

TANJA

Who stands at the stove, poking at something in a pan. Last night's dishes are washed and at attention in a make-shift drying rack. If she hears him, she doesn't acknowledge it.

He crosses to the table where the proper morning PAPER awaits, takes this all in with obvious surprise as he slowly sits. At last, she plates up something BURNED, carries it over calmly, deposits it in front of M without ever bothering to make eye contact.

He stares at the dish, watches her unhurried retreat to the stove, then slowly lifts his fork, takes a first bite. A small smile curls his lips.

M

You really can't cook, can you?

He happily takes another bite.

M (CONT'D)

Fucking dreadful.

She turns at the stove, drying her hands with a towel. A silent, comfortable look between them.

M (CONT'D)

...Good morning.

TANJA

Good morning.

She pours coffee from an old press, sets the cup down in front of him.

TANJA (CONT'D)

...You'll need that.

(to kill the taste)

This gets a smile. She moves back to the counter, finds his box of ROYALS, lifts it silently to ask permission. He nods. She LIGHTS up, leans back against the stove, taking a deep drag. Watches him as she slowly exhales. He pushes away the plate with joyous distaste, beckons. She crosses, HANDS him the lit cigarette. He sits back and inhales, studies her in return.

M

So which of us is more surprised?

TANJA

What choice did I have. You kidnapped Mrs. Boskovitch.

He smiles.

TANJA (CONT'D)

And I assume you pay in cash.

Smart girl. He finishes the cigarette off, peers at her as he snuffs it out.

M

Last night. You didn't ask one question. Not one.

Studies her reaction.

M (CONT'D)

I know a thousand journalists would cut off their right testicle just for the chance. Both, in fact. And you...?

She casually pours herself a cup of coffee.

M (CONT'D)

So this is the state of youth today. Complete disinterest.

She sips her coffee, avoiding eye contact.

M (CONT'D)

Or is it fear? Are you afraid of me?

The question hangs.

TANJA

It's really none of my concern.

M

--My actions.

She shakes no.

M (CONT'D)

Yet...aren't you the least bit curious?

No response. He studies her.

M (CONT'D)

...Not in the slightest? *Is he, in fact, the Devil?*

TANJA

It's none of my concern.

M

No questions. No judgment.

BEAT.

M (CONT'D)

I don't know if I believe you.

She's still now as he shifts in his seat. Tortured BEAT.

M (CONT'D)

You see, I -- I have no such  
luxury. I am old, and I do have  
questions. I want answers, maid.

(rises)

Show me your life.

She eyes him warily.

M (CONT'D)

You've seen mine...

(the room)

...in all its glory. Your turn.  
The life of a city girl. Today I  
am your pupil.

OFF Tanja,

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOLYARD -- DAY

TEENS congregate, huddling against the cold, trading gossip  
and passing cigarettes. As they have for time immemorial.

THROUGH A NEARBY FENCE

Tanja and M approach, study the familiar tableau.

M

God, were we ever so unappealing?

It's clear from Tanja's eyes -- she holds little nostalgia  
for the scene.

M (CONT'D)

And which one were you? Where was  
Tanja in this mix?

TANJA

Nowhere.

(beat)

I hid. Empty classrooms -- third  
floor, mostly. Until lunch was  
over.

M

Hid.

TANJA

With a book.

M

Why?

TANJA

You blind? Look at them.

M

Hid every day.

She nods.

M (CONT'D)

That's a lot of books. You were smart...

TANJA

Too smart. Why do you think I hid.

He peers at the yard.

M

And where was history made? Where did we kiss our first boy?

TANJA

He kissed me.  
(nods at outlying  
building)  
There by the fountain.

M

Drawn out of hiding, were we?

TANJA

Tactical error. I was thirsty.

M smiles, pictures the scene.

TANJA (CONT'D)

He never made that mistake again.

M

What was his name?

TANJA

Mr. Antonovich.

M reacts.

TANJA (CONT'D)

(wry)  
...the librarian.

M  
Pigs.

TANJA  
Yes you are.

M  
But surely other kisses have  
followed...

She offers nothing up.

M (CONT'D)  
We're not all perverted librarians.

TANJA  
...No?

M studies her.

M  
That untrusting?

She won't meet his look, but he sees her clearly.

M (CONT'D)  
You've never had a boyfriend, have  
you maid?

TANJA  
Define boyfriend.

M  
Someone you share a meal with  
between fucking.

Her silence tells all.

M (CONT'D)  
At twenty-three? Oh we do have to  
get to the bottom of this, don't  
we?

She peers back at the school uncomfortably. He follows.

M (CONT'D)  
And where did you bleed? The first  
time.

She considers the question, its bluntness.

TANJA

Second floor. My homeroom seat.  
Wouldn't leave that chair all  
morning. They had to carry me  
out.

M

We weren't rejoicing?

TANJA

Jesus, the fantasies men have.  
God no. It's a horror.

M peers out at the yard.

M

My daughter found me in a bunker.  
Fifth hour of maneuvers, and a  
corporal comes racing out to me  
with a field phone. Four radio  
transfers, they track me down -- I  
assume the war has started, and  
there she is, that voice -- "I  
couldn't find mom". My men got  
very drunk that day, and they still  
don't know why.

TANJA

My father made me clean the seat  
and apologize.

M

Most men would. We're terrified.  
By the mystery of young women.

(smiles)

Absolute terror. One day, we're  
bathing little girls, cheek to  
cheek, the next -- the door is  
locked. For good.

(beat)

I took her shopping after that day.  
To quell my fears.

TANJA

Mine wouldn't be caught dead.

M

But what a shame. How else to  
pierce the veil... and learn your  
mysterious ways?

His eyes settle on her.

M (CONT'D)  
Show me home.

TANJA  
(thrown)  
--?

M  
Your home please. Home is next.

Tanja eyes him warily, clearly unsettled.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

The SOUND of keys. From near darkness, the front door parts, revealing M beside Tanja who removes the key, steps inside, clearly on edge. M hangs back.

M  
Do you know how long it's been  
since a young woman invited me into  
her apartment?

TANJA  
I didn't invite you.

He steps into the small studio space, eyes investigating every detail. What he sees is spartan at best -- empty walls and spare decor, with few of any personal touches. Tanja feels the inquiry.

M  
Tell me this is temporary.

TANJA  
It's not.

M  
I've seen detention cells with more  
character.

TANJA  
You would know. Turn around please  
-- this door doesn't close.

She crosses into the small bathroom, closes a weathered accordion door as far as it will go. M obeys, steps deeper into the tiny space. Eyes searching. No books. No decorations. No evidence.

M  
My God. Would it kill you to hang  
up a picture?

TANJA (O.S.)  
Of what?

M  
(nods)  
Need we say more.

He studies her single bed, SITS to test it.

M (CONT'D)  
No wonder you don't have company.  
You'd cripple them. May I fix  
this?

TANJA  
No you may not.

He rises, quietly opens her CLOSET. Heart sinks as he studies the lean collection of clothes, youthfully utilitarian. Peering up, his eye fixes on a SHAPE on the top shelf, tucked away in the shadows. Reacts to SOMETHING we do not see.

A FLUSH sounds off-screen. He quickly eases the closet closed as Tanja reappears.

M  
For such a big reader, your library  
is...how shall I say?... non-  
existent.

TANJA  
Books take up space.

M  
Yes. And give away our secrets.

He eyes her squarely. She meets his look, unflinching. He finally breaks off, regards the space.

M (CONT'D)  
Your mother would not approve.

TANJA  
My mother never approved.

He takes a final glance around, somehow saddened by it all.

M  
I'm suffocating. I need a  
cigarette. Take us away maid.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHOPPING DISTRICT --DAY

M AND TANJA

Land WINDED against a corner wall, out of sight, beaming  
after a sprint. Game on. He reaches for a smoke, but has  
lost his pack. He spies a nearby KIOSK.

M  
Go maid.

CUT TO:

EXT. KIOSK -- DAY

Tanja collects two packs of ROYALS. The BOY behind the  
counter offers a wide smile as predicted. Tanja reacts  
knowingly, turns around and discovers -- she's alone. M is  
nowhere in sight. Stomach dropping, she peers around, sets  
off quickly along

A LINE OF STOREFRONTS

Trying her best to blend in among slightly more fashionable  
mid-day shoppers, she PEERS into one shop window after  
another, panic rising. Picking up her pace, she lets out a  
START as she runs headlong into --

M

Who stands waiting outside a WOMEN'S BOUTIQUE.

TANJA  
(pissed)  
--Where did you--

M  
Third stall in the back. Collect  
what you see, head straight to the  
cashier.

He stuffs a bill into her hands.

M (CONT'D)  
I have nothing smaller.

She looks at him, completely confused. Before she can protest --

M (CONT'D)  
 --I may be invisible, but let's not  
 push our luck, shall we? Go.

She hesitates, and he waves her in sharply, snatching the cigarettes from her.

CUT TO:

INT. BOUTIQUE -- DAY

Tanja enters, clearly uneasy in such fashionable surroundings. Face flushing, she faintly returns the nod of greeting from a SALESWOMAN and quickly moves through the store, trying not to draw any more attention than she already has. Finding a row of three CHANGING STALLS, she hesitates. Peering around to insure she's not noticed, she steps to the third STALL, discovers the CURTAIN is closed.

FROM INSIDE

We see the CURTAIN PART, and hang on Tanja's expression as she stares at what's inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOUTIQUE -- DAY

THROUGH THE WINDOW

We watch as Tanja receives change from the cordial SALESWOMAN, awkwardly accepts the SHOPPING BAG she's handed. Her attempt to appear casual is barely holding as she steps outside to find --

M

Finishing a smoke, his back to the street. She eyes him sharply, awaiting explanation as she grips the bag.

M  
 Your father would be so proud.

Face flushing, she thrusts the bag toward him.

M (CONT'D)  
 --Indulge me.

She doesn't look happy.

M (CONT'D)  
Change please?

He holds his hand out. Her face steels, pissed, and then, to his surprise, she strides right PAST HIM, clutching the cash.

WIDER

As he does his best to keep up, but damn she's fast. Finally catching up, he watches in confusion as she suddenly STOPS, then turns heel and marches straight into a MEN'S STORE. Dumbfounded, he hesitates outside, then thinking better of it -- steps in.

CUT TO:

INT. MEN'S STORE -- DAY

M steers himself to a sales rack of HATS near the door for cover as he tries to spot Tanja. Grabbing the first one he sees, he places it on, peers in a small MIRROR and sees

TANJA

Who clearly sees him now, flanked by a SALESMAN. With a fiery expression, she steps up to a DRESS SHIRT rack, baldly sizes up M by eye across the aisle, then GRABS a selection. Handing it to the salesman, she moves on to the jackets. As M turns to watch this remarkable display, she makes no attempt to cover as she openly STUDIES him again, then PULLS one out sharply. Dumps it on the salesman again, who's too busy juggling clothes to notice. As she marches CLOSER to M now, he pulls his hat lower. Torturing him, she stops at a wall display of pants only FEET away now, again turns to size him up, TILTING her head for emphasis.

He's out. Fumbling the hat back onto the rack, he makes a bee-line for the exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEN'S STORE -- DAY

Tanja strides out of the store, HIS AND HER BAGS now in either hand. Marching up to M in the mouth of an adjacent alleyway, she thrusts the men's store purchase squarely at him, eyes his clothes pointedly.

TANJA

Nothing that can't be fixed.

She's got his number. She hands him the skeletal remains of his money, holds her own bag at arm's distance.

TANJA (CONT'D)

So now? We do what with these?

M

Why....now we pierce the veil.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL -- NIGHT

FROM DARKNESS

Lights FLICKER ON. Revealing a timeless space. Aging wood floors, well trodden. Hanging fixtures from another era. Folding chairs lining the smoke stained walls. An aging HALL MANAGER in a three-piece suit and dark sunglasses shuffles out to the center of the floor, puffs on his cigarette as he tosses TALC slowly in all directions, drifting over the dance floor like fairy dust. The sound of DOORS opening echoes through the space as older COUPLES and a few younger SINGLES emerge into the room, quietly taking seats. They watch as the manager finishes his preparation, a patient ritual. As he slowly exits across the floor --

CUT TO:

EXT. DANCE HALL ENTRANCE -- NIGHT

Arrivals continue to file inside. At the back of the crowd, as yet unseen, REVEAL --

M AND TANJA. Resplendent in their new garb. Tanja, almost unrecognizable in a fashionable dress, is a bundle of nerves. She peers around anxiously -- too many bodies, too exposed a situation. M takes her hand, utterly calm. She looks at him sharply -- are they really going to do this? He's unfazed.

M

Men are invisible in the presence of beauty... You'll see.

She grips his hand tighter, unconvinced.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL -- NIGHT

With a final theatrical flourish, the lights SNAP ON to their brightest, the MUSIC begins, and on cue, the couples extinguish cigarettes, rise from their seats, and make their way onto the dance floor.

M AND TANJA

Filter into their midst. It's almost too much for her -- head lowered, she can barely raise her eyes. M stops, turns to face her formally, and offers his hand. Slowly taking it like a lifeline, she finds his eyes. He nods reassuringly, then begins to LEAD.

THE BAND

Warms into the piece, a traditional slice of local folk which, along with the setting, seems to blur time and space.

COUPLES

Merge and sway, lost in their own moments. Incredible faces that hold the history of the entire region in their features.

TANJA'S EYES

Dart right and left as she's led across the floor. Gradually, her face begins to soften. Remarkable as it seems, it's true -- they appear unnoticed.

FROM ABOVE

We see them move merge and meld into the incredible, breathing pattern that is now the dance floor. A sight to behold.

M

Finds her eyes now, enjoys the sight as she finally relaxes into their dance, returning his gaze, the room disappearing around them. She smiles, oddly vulnerable. A surprisingly tender moment. He pulls her closer, and for a glorious moment they are indistinguishable from the swirl of couples around them... spouses, lovers, fathers and daughters.

THE BAND

Bring the number on home, concluding with a lively flourish.

THE DANCE FLOOR

Responds, dancers parting, turning to the band with appreciative APPLAUSE.

M AND TANJA

Join in the ovation, glowing. Tanja is flush with the unexpected freedom of the moment -- here, amidst such a crowd. She turns to him, beaming. As the next number BEGINS, dancers resume, some retreating to seating on the side for a smoke or a drink. Tanja holds her hand out now for M in invitation.

M

(touch winded)

Age before beauty, I'm afraid.  
When bladders call...

(nods toward back  
restrooms)

I shall return...

He kisses her hand, heads for the back of the hall. She skirts her eyes self-consciously as couples around her alight. In an instant, she's swallowed up in a swirl of movement.

CUT TO:

MINUTES LATER

THE BAND

Brings the number to a close. The dancers part, APPLAUD again as they catch their breath and ties are loosened.

TANJA

Stands off to the side now, joining in the applause. Peers back toward the restroom area at the back of the hall, no sign of M. Looking back, she notes the movement of several MEN from around the room, each heading in the restroom's direction. Her eyes narrow, on alert.

TANJA'S P.O.V.

Two more MEN peel off the side wall. Did they just exchange a look? As they head toward the restroom -- PAN to glimpse another on the opposite wall, peeling off to do the same.

TANJA

Blanches. Pulse racing, she looks about helplessly as the MUSIC resumes, dancers blocking her view of the back corner. OFF her panic,

CUT TO:

INT. BACK HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Narrow and smoke-filled. WOMEN congregating outside the ladies room PART as another MAN cuts between them, moving purposefully for the men's room at the end of the hallway. With a small glance over his shoulder, he SLIDES through the door, and

TANJA

At the head of the hallway, witnesses the whole thing...

CUT TO:

INT. MEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Through a CLOUD of cigarette smoke, we see the small room is packed with MEN who now encircle M...

...And suddenly ROAR with laughter.

This is no ambush -- it's the king holding court with his loyal subjects. Hacking, cigarette filled laughter -- he's their hero. All the more shocking then, when --

THE DOOR

Suddenly SMASHES open and --

TANJA

ROLLS THROUGH THE DOOR, gripping a shiny black SEMI-AUTOMATIC and drawing down on them in a stance that's far too professional.

THE GROUP

Stare back at her, WIDE-EYED, cigarettes dangling lazily.

TANJA'S FACE

Gradually falls, as she bears witness to her own monumental fuck-up...

M

Takes in the sight with an expression that's impossible to describe.

After an excruciating BEAT...

M

Gentlemen...meet my maid.

ON Tanja, dying a hundred deaths.

M moves toward her, nods to the others.

M (CONT'D)

If you'll excuse us...

CUT TO:

EXT. REAR OF DANCE HALL -- NIGHT

M spills out the rear service entrance, DRAGGING Tanja by the arm --

M

--Well this explains your cooking--

He SHOVES her up against the wall in this darkened alley.

M (CONT'D)

--So you're NOT mine, are you?

-You're theirs.

TANJA

--No--

SILENCES her with his hand around her throat.

M

--God knows you're not a maid --  
those piss poor skills?

(snaps)

--Why??

TANJA

--They--

M

(TIGHTENS his grip)

--WHAT?

TANJA

--They knew you'd never have me!  
 (pants)  
 You'd never take protection -- not  
 if it wasn't on your terms.

M

--Ah, well at least they know me by  
 now. That's encouraging...

TANJA

--The paper -- what we read, it's  
 all true -- the noose is  
 tightening...

M

--So they send you.

TANJA

They thought...

M

--Speak!

TANJA

(flushes)  
 ...They thought I'd...keep you  
 interested. Enough to stay off  
 the street.

He SNORTS, eyes her with disgust.

M

So which is it? Are you an actress  
 or a whore?

TIGHTENS his grip.

M (CONT'D)

Not that both aren't possible.

TANJA

N--!

M

--Let's see those skills then, huh?  
 (almost choking her now)  
 --Let's see just how good a whore  
 they bought me--

She FIGHTS back but he overpowers her, a bull unleashed.

M (CONT'D)

--Let's see you keep me OCCUPIED--

TANJA

--No!--

M

--Let's--

He quickly DRAINS of color, begins to SLUMP, GASPING -- and in an instant, Tanja's no longer fighting him off, but fighting to HOLD HIM UP.

TANJA

No -- NO!!

She whips her head around helplessly, no help in sight -- and too dangerous to call out.

TANJA (CONT'D)

--NO!!

She desperately tries to shoulder his weight.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

It's quite a sight. Tanja kicks off her heels as she struggles to drag him along, semi-conscious. Peering around desperately, her blood runs cold as she spies -- a POLICE CRUISER motors on slow patrol up the boulevard. Heading their direction. No possible way to outrun them. From the other direction --

A STREETCAR

Makes its way on weathered tracks. The police cruiser presses closer. An unwitting race she has no control over. Dying, she holds her breath and pulls M close as -- at the last possible second, the streetcar SHIELDS them from view, slowing.

CUT TO:

INT. STREETCAR -- NIGHT

Two adjoining cars, ghostly at this time of night. Pouring on the effort, Tanja drags M up through the rear doors, slumps him into a corner seat. Peering ahead she sees

A TIRED CONDUCTOR

Making his way past silent customers in the first car, checking tickets as the tram gets underway.

She sits beside M's slumped form, pulse racing as

THE CONDUCTOR

Glances in her direction, slowly begins to make his way back.

TANJA

Out of options, makes a snap decision. She DRAPES her body over M's, blocking the view, and begins KISSING him, grinding her body to justify his slumped posture.

THE CONDUCTOR

Nears, sours at the sight. As the tram lurches to a stop and a SIREN approaches--

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETCAR -- NIGHT

Tanja staggers off with M in tow, barely draped around her shoulder, fearing the worst. The streetcar pulls out, REVEALING the SIREN's source -- an AMBULANCE, racing past toward a cluster of buildings huddled in the near distance. A trailing POLICE unit sends Tanja lurching with M into the shadows, watching its destination and realizing she has no choice.

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM -- NIGHT

Tanja drags M past a couple of sorry souls who sit in a waiting area, half asleep. Up ahead -- TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS huddle at a nurse's station, perusing paperwork and communicating via radios. Tanja drops her head, musters a last bit of muscle and hauls him straight into an empty TREATMENT BAY, whips the CURTAIN closed around them.

CUT TO:

INT. TREATMENT BAY -- CONTINUOUS

She drops his hulking body onto the waiting gurney, doubles over from exhaustion, dry heaving. Her dress is trashed at this point, her face a horror of running make-up as she WHIPS around at the sound of the CURTAIN opening. A YOUNG INTERN steps in, indignant.

INTERN

--I'm sorry, you can't --

He does a massive DOUBLE-TAKE as his eyes shift from Tanja to the face he recognizes on the gurney. Expression falling.

TANJA

...That's right.

She slides out her gun, levels it at him calmly, closing the curtain. Cinderella with a piece.

TANJA (CONT'D)

...And you're gonna help him.  
Cardiomyopathy. He's got an  
enlarged--

INTERN

--I know what cardiomyopathy is.

TANJA

Then do something about it, before  
he goes into full arrest.

INTERN

(backpedals)

--I can't--

TANJA

You're going to make sure this  
patient walks out of here tonight,  
and as much as you'll be DYING to  
open your mouth, you're not gonna  
say a word, because God  
knows --

She snatches his HOSPITAL SECURITY TAG off his scrubs, brandishes it for collateral -- it's hers now.

TANJA (CONT'D)

(reads)

-- MILO BEGYOVICH -- won't want the  
world to know he conspired to keep  
a wanted war criminal in excellent  
health. Now will he?

OFF the intern's bloodless expression,

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM -- MORNING

Dark, but for a slice of light peeking through the heavy closed curtains, which TRACES the seated form of Tanja, who's clearly fallen asleep on a long night's vigil. As she slowly blinks awake, she discovers she's now being watched by...

M

Who lies quietly in the bed, head a lead weight against his faithful therapeutic pillow, eyes resting on her. It's unclear how long he's been awake. Neither feels the need to speak. Simply breathe, taking each other in.

Finally,

M

(hoarse)

Do you know how many lovers comrade Tito took at one time? At his peak? --pardon the expression. I read this in a book... Fourteen.

(impressed)

Fourteen...

He meets her eyes.

M (CONT'D)

I have never taken one.

(beat)

And I will never harm you.

TANJA

(meets his look)

No. You won't.

M

That was an apology.

TANJA

I heard you.

Detente established.

TANJA (CONT'D)

You could have died last night.

M  
 Never. My maid wouldn't allow it.  
 (a smile)  
 You are mine, after all.

She's silent.

M (CONT'D)  
 A monogamist and a romantic.  
 Hardly fits the bill, does it?  
 (eyes drift)  
 My first tour in Italy -- I was  
 newly married and really missing my  
 wife. I wanted to send her a  
 letter from the ship, so I put it  
 in an envelope and addressed it to  
 her. And I put the envelope,  
 along with ten dollars and ten  
 cigarettes, in a bottle. The  
 money and cigarettes were for  
 whoever found the bottle and sent  
 my message of love to her. So as  
 we were passing through the Stretto  
 di Messina -- I flung the bottle  
 into the sea.

Tanja bites -- "and?"

M (CONT'D)  
 She got the letter less than three  
 weeks later.  
 (smiles)  
 ...Along with ten dollars, and ten  
 cigarettes. You've gotta love  
 Italians.

TANJA  
 Where is your wife?

M  
 Anywhere I'm not, apparently. Our  
 home, I assume? I actually have no  
 idea at this point. She won't  
 speak to me.

He studies her.

M (CONT'D)  
 Quite a pair, aren't we? I can't  
 keep a relationship, and you're too  
 scared to have one.

Off her reaction --

M (CONT'D)

Oh, please. Allow me to save you years of therapy. Daddy's dead, you hide for a living -- boringly textbook, my dear. Blink and you'll be sixty.

Her silence -- he's clearly hit home.

M (CONT'D)

But then you know all of this don't you? --If you're sitting here with me. Who are we kidding? Whereas you.. You're just full of surprises.

(beat)

You don't have a penis, do you?

Off her reaction --

M (CONT'D)

You certainly did last night. Hadn't realized I needed a babysitter...

TANJA

General--

M

Who trained you?

TANJA

You know I can't tell you that.

M

....Really? That risky now, am I?

TANJA

We don't want to make it more complicated for you.

M

--"We"? "WE"? --How old are you again? Already it's "WE"?? They own you that quickly?

TANJA

No one owns me.

M

No -- you *choose* to erase your life at age twenty-six. Change an old man's diapers.

TANJA  
 (tightly)  
 However I can serve.

M  
 --Serve. Please. We all serve  
 ourselves. Period.

He studies her.

M (CONT'D)  
 So this is how you avenge your  
 parents?

He sees it in her eyes -- direct hit.

M (CONT'D)  
 (snorts)  
 Car accident. How did it happen?

TANJA  
 Their car was bombed.

M  
 Ah, well, *in* a car anyway -- that  
 part was true. They were with us?

She nods.

M (CONT'D)  
 So now you take their place,  
 balance is restored -- the cycle  
 continues.

She's silent.

M (CONT'D)  
 And to what end? What are your  
 hopes?

TANJA  
 My *hopes*?

M  
 Young woman trades her life away--  
 surely she has reasons. Besides  
 hiding from boys.

TANJA  
 Security for our people.. Our home  
 restored.  
 (pointedly)  
 Aren't they yours?

M's noticeably silent. She shifts uncomfortably at this.

M

Be very careful, my girl.

TANJA

I'm fine. Thank you.

M

---You think your good service protects you.

(beat)

Do you have any *idea* what I've done...in service to my country? I can share some details --

TANJA

(uncomfortable)

--That's not necessary.

M

--Really? Still not curious? About the level of *skill* we achieved in annihilating the human form? The speed, the *volume* --

TANJA

--Please d--

M

--That tribunal? Would BLUSH if they knew just how far off they were. The *real* numbers? I mean, if we're gonna get it right, let's get it right, people--

TANJA

--Stop--

M

--And for that service? That kind of dedication? Why, I should only assume my country's perpetual gratitude... No?

(waves at his empty confines)

...This fine lifestyle?

He eyes her pointedly.

M (CONT'D)

Be very, very careful.

He sags against his pillow, his fatigue showing.

M (CONT'D)

And now, maid... if you'd do me the kind *service*...of helping me up off this fucking bed...

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM -- MORNING

THE RADIO

Sits perched on the sink, a haunting traditional CHANT echoing across the tiles.

IN THE MIRROR

TWO FACES -- M and Tanja. With great care, Tanja brushes shaving CREAM on his stubbled cheeks from a small cup. He adjusts his chin for her, never taking his eyes off her in the mirror. At last, as she finishes, he reaches out, lifts a RAZOR off the lip of the sink...

And hands it to her. Closing his eyes in calm surrender, he turns and rests his head against the sink, TILTING his chin away for her. Utterly exposed. Struck by the gesture, she hesitates, studying his neck, this bull of a man. And slowly, delicately, she begins to slide the blade across his skin. Scraping away soap and whiskers with great care. It's incredibly intimate. M eases his eyes open as she works, takes her in, inches apart.

M

Who was this man, to have such a daughter?

Tanja's eyes well, against her will. She grabs a towel to cover, gently begins to remove soap and wipe his skin clean. Helps him up to sitting again.

M (CONT'D)

There's something else for you I forgot. In the living room.

She eyes him suspiciously. He urges her on with a nod.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Tanja edges into the room unsurely.

M (O.S.)  
...On the floor.

Her eyes search, fall onto an object beneath the window. Her expression change is instant and breathtaking -- surprised, embarrassed, vulnerable.

A VIOLIN CASE

Sits alone. Pristine.

M (CONT'D)  
Thought I saw that shape in your apartment? Matter of fact that was the *only* thing I saw in your apartment. It was yours, yes? Not a weapon? From mom and dad I presume.

Her silence affirms it.

M (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Would you mind?

TANJA  
...No.

M (O.S.)  
And why not?

TANJA  
I don't play in front of others.

M (O.S.)  
You're not in front of others.  
You're utterly alone. Remember, I don't exist...

She hesitates.

M (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Please.

As she wavers --

CUT BACK TO:

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

M holds perfectly still as he listens, strains to hear movement...waits...waits... until at last -- the sound of bow gently meets STRINGS... He holds his breath transfixed.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- SAME TIME

Tanja, back to camera, fights through self-consciousness, slowly giving over to the humble voice of the wistful traditional melody she plays. Her playing is simple, unpolished and incredibly felt.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. BATHROOM --SAME TIME

Carried by the music's spell, M slowly turns with towel to inspect his face, then finds his eyes in reflection. It's a stark, startling moment, as he studies himself almost without recognition, then gradually bores in with a chilling combination of self-loathing and seething... at last arriving at a spent, hollow sense of resolve.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- SAME TIME

As Tanja finishes a final lingering note, she sits silently self-consciousness returning, finally turns when she feels --

M

Who rests against the bathroom doorway. Eyes in her quiet appreciation. At last,

M

Do you own a car, ma'am?

She looks at him, incredulous.

M (CONT'D)

--Hey, for all I know, you're a cabbie. Nothing would surprise me at this point.

TANJA

...And why do we need a car?

M  
Time for a trip.

TANJA  
Yes, that's...exactly what they  
don't want you doing right now.

M  
Precisely.

He crosses to the bedroom to dress.

TANJA  
Your heart won't stand another  
round like last night.

M  
All the more reason. "The noose is  
tightening" -- your words verbatim,  
yes? Well then there's no time to  
waste.

(before she protests)  
--I am still your employer, and I  
have stated my desire. So now,  
maid -- make it happen.

TANJA  
And where...are we going?

M's response is simply silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK -- DAY

FROM BEHIND

FOLLOW Tanja as she walks alone on the sidewalk, eyes forward  
and calm, seemingly paying no attention to the few vehicles  
PARKED by the curb.

THIRTY FEET BEHIND HER

M follows at safe distance, watching her with growing  
curiosity.

TANJA

Calmly stops, eyes still forward. Then, without warning,  
she crosses quickly to a YUGO at the curb, lifts the HANDLE  
on the passenger door, and slides inside, immediately  
DISAPPEARING beneath the dash.

M

Gapes at in amazement, peers around in disbelief, as --

THE CAR

Roars to life, freshly hot-wired. Tanja straightens up behind the steering wheel, THROWS the car in REVERSE, and FLOORS it back to a stop right next to M. His expression is priceless.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- CONTINUOUS -- DAY

M drops into the passenger, eyes meeting Tanja's.

TANJA

You wanted a car.

M

Yes. And you've taken Miro's.

(beams)

...My driver.

Tanja goes ASHEN as she looks around quickly at the now familiar yellow YUGO. M's loving it.

M (CONT'D)

He won't be needing it now.

Drive.

She THROWS it in gear, anxiously peels out. And after a BEAT --

ACROSS THE STREET

A familiar figure emerges from a side alley, a freshly purchased bag of supplies under his arm, cigarette dangling. MIRO. Thumbing a text on his phone, he's halfway across the street before he notices...something's missing.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- MOVING -- DAY

P.O.V. THROUGH WINDSHIELD

As the car sprints for a swift city exit, it ROUNDS A BEND revealing a POLICE CHECK-POINT, newly erected, cars funneling into a single lane where OFFICERS eyeball each passing vehicle, before waving them on.

TANJA

Tenses.

M

Calm...

She holds her breath as she peers in the REAR-VIEW, and any thought of retreat is immediately crushed by

P.O.V. REAR-VIEW

A POLICE cruiser closes in behind her, then slides into the adjoining service lane.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHECKPOINT -- CONTINUOUS

WIDER

As the police cruiser joins another UNIT blocking the right lane, ANOTHER on the left -- it's a virtual vise. And the Yugo's trapped right in it, two cars from inspection.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- CONTINUOUS

TANJA

swallows, eases the car as smoothly forward as possible as the car ahead moves up. Anxious to avoid drawing suspicion, she wills her eyes forward, looks like she's about to burst.

M

...Calm...

One car away now -- she can't help herself, shifts her eyes toward the POLICE unit -- to discover that both OFFICERS driver-side now react to a young FEMALE TRAFFIC OFFICER who stands only yards away in the intersection, blowing her whistle impatiently at departing traffic. Enjoying her gusto, they tease her gamely. She laughingly dismisses their advances, loving the attention.

Tanja and M now shift their gazes right, where they discover the POLICE in the car beside them are watching the whole exchange, and now begin TEXTING the traffic officer to playfully interrupt the flirtation. As she breaks off and reaches for her phone, the COPS crack up, wildly oblivious to M, who openly stares at them now in bemusement, only FEET AWAY.

M (CONT'D)  
Isn't it wonderful?

And with an absent wave of the hand on Tanja's side, the officers move her along, and she is gone...

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAY

FROM HIGH ABOVE

The YUGO is a small skiff on a sea of undulating hills, threading its way through a narrow pass and into an emerging valley.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

M soaks in the landscape as Tanja darts anxious looks in the rearview mirror -- though it's clear that they're very much alone on the road. They pass a prominent new sign indicating the BORDER CROSSING thirty kilometers ahead, the frontier of a newly divided state.

M  
Same rocks...same hills...different name. Idiocy.  
(scans the horizon)  
You'll never know your true homeland. "*Ethnic division*".  
Dirty little secret? Christian, Turk... before all this? No one gave a shit who their neighbor was. They just WERE. It worked. Then the break-up, out come the maps...lines pulled out of their asses... suddenly we're ethnic. Divided. No different -- just with guns at each other's heads, fighting over map creases we never knew existed.

TANJA

No different? Their God--

M

(snaps)

God has nothing to do with it.  
Only the land he created. We  
defend it -- it changes -- someone  
new is in our way. And they're  
eliminated.

(nods)

I have no use for God, and he  
certainly has no place in war.

Tanja treads carefully now.

TANJA

They're eliminated.

M

--Ah, the questions. Now they  
come. Now that you're out of  
hiding. Maybe you'll finally get  
laid.

TANJA

May I?

M

What choice do I have? You've got  
me captive.

TANJA

At the end...we eliminated--

M

--I eliminated. Don't take credit  
where credit's not due-- it's  
unbecoming.

TANJA

Wasn't the battle already  
lost...when the order was given--

M

--Don't be coy. I gave the order.

BEAT.

M (CONT'D)

Go on, then. Finish it.

She doesn't.

M (CONT'D)

--Don't insult me. The massacre is what you meant. Isn't it?

She's silent.

M (CONT'D)

(disgusted)

God, you're just like my daughter. They've polluted you all.

Massacre. Numbers are meaningless --it was a deposit on the future.

(glares at her)

How DARE you judge me? Is that why your parents died-- so you could judge my actions?

TANJA

I'm simply trying to --

M

I could throw you out of this car right now for treason.

TANJA

They weren't alive to explain it, so forgive me.

M

--Doesn't reflect so well on you, then does it? -- throw yourself into a mission you're clueless about, just to figure out who the hell you are.

TANJA

I'm only asking the question-- a country of young people don't understand.

M

-- I owe them NOTHING. They owe ME. ALL of you!

Cold silence fills the car. At last,

M (CONT'D)

Just...drive, will you. Make yourself useful.

TANJA

(exhausted)

Please tell me where we're going.

M

You're the bookworm. You tell me.

She's clueless.

M (CONT'D)

"In the spring of '42, as German and Ustaza stole a generation of fathers from their sons, the General was born in the simple village of..."

TANJA

--Boznovici??

M

Brava.

TANJA

We're--

M

Going home.

TANJA

Unprotected??

M

Whatever do you mean? I've brought my maid...

Tanja looks like she could throw up.

TANJA

But you've never been back.

M

God no. Far too dangerous.

She shoots him a look. He's fucking with her.

TANJA

Please tell me why now.

M

(smiles)

...I have a ride.

She just shakes her head. He gazes out the window.

M (CONT'D)

I said my wife is there...but you know?

(MORE)

M (CONT'D)

I don't even know if that's true.  
Communication -- the first casualty  
of war.

(smiles)

...Or maybe that's just a bullshit  
excuse.

BEAT.

M (CONT'D)

When the first fight broke out and  
I shipped north? My daughter was  
just starting med school. Talking  
to her then? --Now *that* was tough.  
And, trust me, it had nothing to do  
with combat. Young people never  
want to talk to their parents -- do  
you? Why should she be any  
different?

(nods)

Until pretty soon it wasn't just  
her. It did get hard to speak.  
And then hard became impossible.  
And eventually... communication was  
whatever she read about me in the  
morning paper.

(bitter)

News. You're too young to  
remember when news became  
entertainment. Good guys, bad  
guys -- the whole fucking thing's  
suddenly a bad western, and  
everyone wants a villain. A  
melodrama, right there on the  
nightly news -- and hurry we need a  
villain. Casting -- it's just  
casting. The whole Hague  
tribunal? -- it's just there to  
cast Hiroshima and Nagasaki,  
Auschwitz, Dachau, Cambodia, and  
the Gulf War into oblivion and make  
us the black sheep of the planet  
until the next brutal war is  
dreamed up by the same sorry fucks  
who wrote the script for this one.  
But until then...

(beat)

Casting. And guess who plays the  
villain.

He gazes at the valley ahead.

M (CONT'D)

...How is she supposed to hear all this? Her *father*? How long can she hear all this before it finally becomes truth? A young woman - a good, sweet young woman -- she's supposed to swallow all this, and *survive*?

(snorts)

*They* killed her -- they took her -- every last one of them -- the West, the media, the merchants of *shit*.

BEAT.

M (CONT'D)

And then they took her funeral. Which meant of course I couldn't get near it -- couldn't bury my own daughter -- and that unforgiveable fact...took my marriage.

He gazes at Tanja.

M (CONT'D)

Tell me -- which is more tragic? That after all this, we neither won nor lost the war? Or that ten year's on, the homeland's biggest hero? -- has no home left to speak of...

OFF Tanja,

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE TAVERNA -- DAY

A small aging structure nestled at the foot of a hill, very much alone on this stretch of rural highway. Its charm is somewhat offset by the obvious POCKMARKS it bears from the recent conflict. The YUGO slows on the dirt shoulder nearby, no other customers in sight.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- CONTINUOUS -- DAY

Tanja shoots looks in both rear-views, on high alert now, and not happy.

M  
 (smiles)  
 Hungry?

TANJA  
 You can't be serious.

His look says otherwise.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
 Here?

She quickly scans the structure ahead.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
 It's not even open.

M eyes the old place fondly.

M  
 It's always open.

Before she can protest, he rolls out the door...

CUT TO:

EXT. TAVERNA -- DAY

As M lowers himself at a family-style table under a shaded pergola, Tanja drops onto the bench across from him, blood running cold as she spies the proprietor -- a stooped old WOMAN in traditional local garb and Muslim head covering.

TANJA  
 (hisses tightly)  
 --Do you not see where we are?

M  
 (placid)  
 Yes. We're twenty kilometers from  
 my village.

The old woman shuffles slowly toward the table, clutching a basket of bread. Tanja holds her breath, fearing the worst, as the woman slowly leans over and sets the basket down, revealing two milky eyes. She's BLIND. And inches from M -  
 - the greatest enemy her people have ever known.

M (CONT'D)  
 (quietly)  
 ...thank you.

He studies her with evident fondness as she turns to head back to the kitchen.

M (CONT'D)  
 ...When I was young? That woman  
 knew every stupid move I made on  
 this road...  
 (smiles)  
 ...and at this table.

He watches after her, smile easing.

M (CONT'D)  
 And now...

He turns back to Tanja.

M (CONT'D)  
 ...Now she'd never forgive me.  
 (beat)  
 The good memories always die  
 first...

Tanja holds his look.

TANJA  
 You know we can't stay long.

He nods, eyes drift over to a beaten payphone cabin peeking around the corner of the restaurant.

CUT TO:

EXT. PAYPHONE -- DAY

M stands before the phone, holding one of the pre-paid PHONE CARDS delivered to him earlier, clearly a novice in this transaction. Lifting the receiver, he dials a number, then tries inserting the card several times into a card SLOT below the keypad, until finally--

M  
 (straightens at sound of  
 operator's voice, eyes  
 the card)  
 --uh--

He holds the card AWAY from him, struggling to read numbers with his eyesight --

M (CONT'D)  
 --ZERO, ZERO, NINE, ZERO, TWO --  
 TWO?  
 (squints)  
 --TWO. SIX, SIX, THREE...  
 (beat)  
 Yes, local.

He shifts nervously as the line begins to RING. Swallows, smoothing stray hairs unconsciously. The RINGING continues -  
 - until at last,

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
 (answers)  
 ...Hello?

The voice is mature, tentative -- and from M's reaction upon hearing it, we have to assume it's his WIFE. He grips the booth for support, off balance at the sound of her voice.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 --Hello?

He moves to speak -- until a telltale SECOND PICK-UP CLICK is heard across the line -- a surveillance cue -- freezing the words in his mouth.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 --Hello.

His face falls, lost, as he slowly hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

EXT. TABLE -- DAY

Tanja pays the woman at the table, notices M who stands several yards away now in silence, reads his expression. As the old woman pockets her money and turns to make her way back inside, she crosses M in her path. Without stopping, or an ounce of other acknowledgement, she lifts her hand up and BRUSHES his cheek gently as she passes.

His heart stops, turning to watch her as she goes.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- MOVING -- DAY

Two riders lost in silence now, the old woman's gesture reverberating...

CUT TO:

EXT. BOZNOVICI OVERLOOK -- DAY

A bird's eye view of this rural hamlet, whose modesty and beauty have survived the ages. Spectacular red fields of peppers in the distance, a source of local pride. And nearby -- a stunning sight: hundreds and hundreds of coal black CROWS line two lengths of suspended phone lines, peering down toward the village with keen interest.

REVERSE

on M and Tanja, taking in the view from a protected vantage point above. M drinks in the sight, so much time lost. Tanja can't take her eyes off the crows. Their chorus of calls.

M

...They're always here. Always have been. Waiting for life to fail. You don't think of them as particularly patient, but...  
(nods knowingly)

He scans the town.

M (CONT'D)

They've had their chances. When I was a baby -- tiny little thing, unbearably cute of course -- my mother got too sick to nurse me...  
(points into distance)  
That roof -- the other one there? There. My father was sick as well. He'd be dead two years later, anyway -- Nazis. But I should, by rites, have died then. A prisoner, of all things -- an Italian they put up in our house -- yes, I know, again with the Italians -- he fed me by hand. Nursed me. Twice a day. He kept me alive.

TANJA

You remember his name?

He shakes no, thinking back.

M  
 But I remember what he called me.  
 Before he left... "Mali".  
 (smiles)  
 I have no idea what it means.

He eyes the crows as he stands.

M (CONT'D)  
 They're very, very patient.

OFF TANJA, unsettled,

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- DAY

As they drop into their seats and slam doors behind them, M sits expectantly. Tanja makes no motion to turn the car over. She finally faces him squarely.

TANJA  
 Now we go back.

M  
 (thrown)  
 ...What? --

TANJA  
 Back.

He begins to boil.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
 We came. You saw. --

M  
 --Give me the keys.

TANJA  
 --NO.

M  
 --The keys.

TANJA  
 --It's suicide.

M  
 --It's my right!

TANJA  
You HAVE no rights.

He glares at her, shocked by her directness.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
--You lost those years ago. You're a fugitive. You're a responsibility. You are here by the grace of a handful of loyal friends who have put their lives and families at risk to protect you and feed you and nurse you and you have done nothing but *shit* on every last one of them.

BEAT.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
Now I'm sorry for your many losses, but this is what is. We go back.

M  
Then leave me.

TANJA  
I can't do that.

M  
Why?? Why worry, if I'm such a burden?  
(rolling now)  
You think these idiots would actually try and take me here?  
It's too obvious! They don't do obvious.

She's unmoved. He draws a breath, speaks calmly.

M (CONT'D)  
Tanja. My beloved maid. All that you see here, I lost many years ago. Yes, in service to my homeland. I don't ask for pity. How can I? I am nothing now.

He meets her eyes.

M (CONT'D)  
What harm can it do to let a ghost wander?

Tanja sits perfectly still, expressionless. BEAT, then,

TANJA  
 (pissed)  
 Get in the back.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO BACKSEAT -- MOMENTS LATER

M slams the door behind himself as he slides into the backseat. Tanja adjusts the rear-view mirror, makes eye contact.

TANJA  
 Now get down.

M  
 (groans)  
 ...Uhh -- You too?

TANJA  
 --Stay down.

In a perfect call-back to the top of the film, M once again struggles to press himself down in the cramped back-seat as she puts the car in gear.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- MOVING -- DAY

OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS, the beginning of town floats by.

TANJA  
 (tense)  
 Fuck me how do we do this.

M  
 Follow my words.

TANJA  
 --What?

M  
 I guide, you drive. Slow down.

As she does, M hunkers down lower, and surprisingly CLOSES HIS EYES now. Reads a map of memory...

M (CONT'D)

The first split ahead -- the cafe  
on the right -- two tables and no  
business... turn there.

TANJA

--Turn?

M

--Right.

She does. Inside the cafe, a set of eyes note her as she  
passes. She fights to stay focused.

TANJA

--And?

M

Straight. Now, the road's gonna  
curve...curve right...now --

Perfectly on cue, it does. A small smile crosses his lips.

M (CONT'D)

Slowly...slowly. Good. Okay, now,  
end of the block -- building on the  
corner...

TANJA

Yep...

M

Police station.

TANJA

Oh fuck me.

M

--Take. The turn.

She holds her breath as she takes the turn. Two LOCAL  
OFFICERS stand smoking outside, track her as she makes the  
turn.

M (CONT'D)

Now wave.

TANJA

(hisses)

--What?

He snickers. She squeezes her eyes closed, hating him.

M  
Almost there...

More EYES on her as she passes -- in doorways, leaning against cars... she feels them all, desperately plays for cool.

M (CONT'D)  
Now. Just up on the right -- small market with a green sign.

TANJA  
Green?...

M  
Sign. Old drunk on the bench -- definitely asleep by now.

TANJA  
(peers ahead)  
...No.

M  
What do you mean no?

TANJA  
--There's nothing there. No sign --

M  
It's gone?

TANJA  
There's nothing there. Empty...

M  
(genuinely thrown)  
...it's...

TANJA  
Yes, it's gone -- what do I --?

He opens his eyes, a bit lost now.

M  
Stop at the corner.

She brings the car to a stop, eyes locked tightly on her rearview mirrors. He doesn't speak.

TANJA  
...Come on now.

M  
 (subdued)  
 Turn right. End of the street.  
 Park...park along the wall.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE STREET -- DAY

WIDE NOW

As the Yugo pulls up to a stop along an old plaster wall.  
 Beyond it, REVEALED now over a small grass berm --

The village CEMETERY. As intimate as the town itself.  
 Weathered, modest grave markers spanning more than three  
 centuries.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. YUGO -- CONTINUOUS -- DAY

Tanja reacts to the sight, their destination all too clear  
 now as

M

Rises to a seat in back, uncharacteristically quiet now.

BEAT, then,

M  
 Five minutes.

As she moves to speak --

M (CONT'D)  
 Five minutes, and we go.

TANJA  
 You know we can't do that.

M  
 Do not take this away.

TANJA  
 And watch it end here? How does  
 that help her?

M  
 Never ask a father that.

He scans the sea of headstones.

M (CONT'D)  
...She'll know.

Tanja sits silently, mind turning over. She turns back to face him.

TANJA  
You will stay. In this car.  
(cuts off his protest)  
--In this car. And not move an  
inch. Unless I say so. Is that  
clear?

He nods silently.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
(screwing up her courage)  
Hopefully I'll pass. I could...be  
a friend.

M  
(meets her eyes)  
Yes. You could be her friend.

He undoes the small SCARF he's worn discreetly around his neck -- the same scarf we saw him unpack with such care in his apartment. He wraps it around her neck. She takes in the gesture, meets his eyes.

TANJA  
For God's sake please don't move.  
Not until I say so. And if I take  
this off -- for any reason -- it's  
off. We're done. You understand?

He nods, no protest now. She turns to go, hesitates.

TANJA (CONT'D)  
Tell me her name?

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

CLOSE ON WILDFLOWER

A small white bloom peeking out from a clump of weeds along the berm. Tanja's hand delicately uproots it.

WIDE

As Tanja rises, small offering in hand, gingerly crosses into the expanse of headstones. Beginning her search, she gazes up to discover

A LINE OF SMALL SHOPS

Arcs CLOSELY around the cemetery, previously unseen from behind the wall. Her stomach drops. She's incredibly exposed.

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- SAME TIME

M watches her closely, hanging on her every step.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- SAME TIME

CLOSE ON TANJA

Eyes scanning headstones and names as she moves, gazing up imperceptibly at --

THE STOREFRONTS

Searching for any sign of movement. It's eerily still.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. YUGO -- SAME TIME

M

Wavering now, gripping the front seat back, face flush as he watches her painfully slow progress.

CUT BACK TO:

TANJA

Anxiety growing, scanning the storefronts again.

TANJA'S P.O.V.

Panning rapidly from facade to facade, shapes and shadows inside revealing little.

## PAST HEADSTONES

Tracking with her as she presses on, gauging her pace, desperate to not draw a attention to her search. Eyes falling back to the parade of names, she slows as she arrives at a newer STONE which sits slightly off on its own. Her expression falls as she reads engraving we do not see.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. YUGO -- SAME TIME

## P.O.V. THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

As Tanja STOPS in the distance, her search clearly at its conclusion.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. GRAVE -- SAME TIME

Tanja stands before the grave, moved by this odd connection now -- a girl much like herself, a young woman she'll never know.

Breaking the spell, she raises her eyes with resolve, ready to signal -- when --

## A SLIGHT MOVEMENT

Catches her eye. Directly across, a SILHOUETTE eases out of sight in a shop doorway, disappearing behind window reflection -- was that a cell phone in hand? Before she can breathe, movement out of the corner of her eye grabs her attention. Whipping her head around, she spies in horror--

M

WALKING steadily toward her from the car in the distance. He's jumped the gun, determined, and unaware.

## TANJA

Snaps her look back to the storefronts. Sliver of a SECOND SILHOUETTE barely visible just inside a doorway further down the row, phone to ear, disappearing instantly. Pulse pounding, she looks back to M in panic. He marches on, resolute, seconds to emerging out from behind the wall into plain view, IGNORING the look in her eyes. A small desperate shake of her head brings no more response at this distance.

Helpless, she finally GRABS the scarf around her neck, and with great intention PULLS it free, laying it over the headstone. He recklessly IGNORES this as well, not to be stopped -- mere feet from stepping into open view.

Helpless, Tanja moves -- reaching under her coat, she pulls out her SEMI-AUTOMATIC and aims at him to force his stop as she races to close the distance, a final desperate effort. And as his eyes finally meet hers across the distance a SHOT rings out. Tanja is felled instantly.

ON M

A scream trapped in the back of his throat, face a mask of horror and anguish the likes of which he's never known. Before he can move he's GRABBED from out of FRAME, yanked off his feet--

CUT TO:

INT. YUGO -- DAY

As M is shoved into the backseat, held down and out of sight by --

MIRO

His driver. He tosses his gun as he throws the car into REVERSE, slams on the accelerator.

EXT. YUGO -- MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

As the car REVERSES back onto the connecting street, revealing another small SEDAN in the distance where two plainly dressed MEN efficiently dump Tanja's body into the trunk. As a POLICE UNIT races past the far intersection in the direction of the cemetery --

INT. YUGO -- MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

Miro steels himself as he heads for the same intersection as a SECOND police unit screams past. He leans on the accelerator as he makes the opposite turn to head out of town, forcibly HOLDING M's head down and out of sight.

ON M

A felled animal trapped on the floor of the backseat, lost in anguish and loss only his enemies have known at his hands.

FROM THE WINDOW OUTSIDE

His sounds are inaudible as his eyes look up helplessly toward the light, and

IN REFLECTION

We see what he now sees...

HUNDREDS OF CROWS, taken to the air, flying toward their prey at last, their patience rewarded...

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DUSK

The yugo and follow car race past old TAVERNA, silently retreating into darkness, neither noting

THE OLD WOMAN

Who rests alone in a chair now, lost in the long shadows fast asleep...

CUT TO:

INT. APARMENT -- NIGHT

FROM DARKNESS

HARSH OVERHEAD LIGHT switches on.

MIRO

Slips his head inside the apartment door, quickly scans the room, then steps back.

CLOSE ON M

Slowly emerging from the darkness, haggard and hollowed, as he takes a first step back inside the space, afraid to face the impossible absence inside. Behind him, MIRO leans in from the hallway and CLOSES the door with sharp finality. The sound of not one, but two BOLTS from outside now follows, ECHOING in M's ears. He stands perfectly still, eyes haunted... then suddenly SPINS in panic to the door and grabs the handle. He finds it LOCKED SOLID. And begins POUNDING and SHOUTING at the top of his lungs, a caged animal.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY -- SAME TIME

CAMERA EASES BACK

As the walls M so carefully tested earlier now do their job, MUFFLING all but the faintest trace of his tortured outburst inside.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- NIGHT

The monolithic structure now looking very much like the prison block it's become, all traces of sound gone as Miro lights a smoke and strides past camera, never looking back.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY -- DAY

Empty and eerily silent as the first time we saw it. A SILHOUETTE approaches from the distance, something tucked under an arm. Slows in front of apartment 3G.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

Familiar sound of KEYS unlocking the door from the hallway. In an earlier moment it would be Tanja walking through the door next, but now it's only an unrecognizable face, a street LIEUTENANT. He enters, crosses with routine familiarity to the kitchen where he drops the newspaper, shoves a scrawny bag into the fridge, taps his cigarette ASH into the sink, perfunctorily moves a dirty dish from one side of the counter to the other. The routine over before it's started, he switches on the RADIO as he passes it, filling the space with a TRADITIONAL VOCAL BALLAD that's eerily reminiscent of the melody Tanja played earlier. He grabs the newspaper, crosses up to drop it on the dining table near camera, and heads back out the door. As the lock RE-BOLTS from the other side and the sound echoes through the room, ease back

to REVEAL...

M

Who's been here the whole time, forced to witness this imitation of life with cruel regularity now as he sits at the kitchen table he'll never be joined at again.

Invisible. HOLD on this bull of a man, without size or stature. Felled by memory, and the infiniteness of time.

BLACK OUT.