

NINA

Intersex's Story

ORIGINAL STORY AND SCREENPLAY by

Massimiliano (Max) Amato & Adam Victor

1 INT. SOFIA. NINA'S HOME. DAWN

Sofia: the present day.

The lifeless bodies of two men lie on the floor. Pools of blood and a pistol lie next to the dead bodies. A plainclothes policeman, his regulation issue pistol drawn, moves cautiously through the rooms in the flat. Other policemen follow him.

Rapid cuts: an emptied-out cupboard; two suitcases heaped with clothes on the bed. Dirty clothes over the back of a chair. On the floor, a pair of mud-splattered women's shoes.

We move along the narrow corridor leading to the bathroom... The policeman bursts in and then lowers his pistol. A young woman in a state of oblivion is lying in the tub, the water bloodied and red. Her face is very beautiful, very pale, and shows signs of violence. Her eyes are as transparent as the sea. They focus on infinity.

POLICEMAN

Ma'am, can you hear me?

The woman doesn't answer. The policeman whips off his belt and binds it tightly around her arm to stop her haemorrhaging. In the background, ambulance sirens close in.

CUT TO:

Forensic scientists sweep the bedroom for clues. The policeman scans the crime scene, deep in thought. Another officer comes over to him holding a piece of ID.

POLICE OFFICER

Did you already radio this in to headquarters?

The policeman takes the papers and gives them a brief glance.

OPENING CREDITS SCROLL DOWN THE RIGHT HAND SIDE OF THE FRAME

2 EXT. SOFIA. ENTRANCE TO THE BUILDING. STREET. DAWN

Several patrol cars are parked outside the building, along with three ambulances, their hazard lights blinking. Policemen and ambulance personnel bustle in and out.

In the background, radio messages from the communications centre: brief coded messages, each suffixed by a beep.

The woman we saw before is carried out on a gurney and loaded into an ambulance. The policeman climbs in before the back door closes shut.

CUT TO:

3 EXT. SOFIA. CAMERA CAR AMBULANCE. DAWN

The ambulance drives off. In the background, engine noise and a siren. A hand slips an oxygen mask over the woman's face.

The policeman clutches the ID document in his hands.

Close-up of the ID document: the photo is of the woman from a few years earlier. Name and date/place of birth are legible: NINA SAMAC Born Varna, Bulgaria 25 September 1977.

The needle from the drip slides into the vein. The ambulance jars at every bump, as does the image.

The engine and siren gradually die away. In the background, the sound of gusting wind.

FADE TO BLACK - END OF OPENING CREDITS

4 EXT. VARNA. AERIAL SHOT. DAWN

The flashback begins.

A low, slow-mo flight over the Black Sea. In the distance is the port of Varna, a seaside town in Bulgaria.

Our flight continues over the town's port district. From aloft, we see ships, cranes, hangars and warehouses. Our point of view descends gently to a road, where we pick up and follow an old Russian-made car as it drives along.

5 EXT. VARNA. CAMERA CAR. DAWN

Houses, blocks of flats, shops and closed front doors glide by along the street. A woman of around 25, with a very gentle, sweet face, is driving. A heavily pregnant woman of around the same age is sitting next to her. They are approaching a hospital. The car slows down and stops outside the Emergencies department. A tired-looking nurse walks over to the car window.

CUT TO:

6 INT. VARNA. HOSPITAL. CORRIDORS AND DELIVERY ROOM. DAY

The woman who is about to give birth is wheeled along narrow, winding corridors. The neon ceiling lights file past like lights in a tunnel.

Caption: Varna, 1977

Two nurses hold the pregnant woman's hands.

OBSTETRICIAN (V.O.)

Go on, one more hard push!

The woman grimaces with pain and pushes with all her might.

OBSTETRICIAN

That's the ticket! One more time...
Good girl!

A nurse dabs a sponge at the young mother's brow. Next thing, we hear a newborn baby's mewling cry.

OBSTETRICIAN

Congratulations, a beautiful baby girl!
(To the nurse) Go give her a good clean up, and then over to the scales.

The elderly nurse busy cleaning the newborn baby notices something.

NURSE

Doctor, come and take a look!

The obstetrician plods over and takes a quick glance at the infant. He too notices something slightly out of the ordinary, but doesn't seem to give it too much weight.

OBSTETRICIAN

Hand the baby girl to her mother
now, everything's as it should be.

The nurse obeys without a word. She walks over to the woman who has just given birth and places the newborn baby on her chest.

NURSE

Here's your daughter, ma'am. I need to get some information about the father, and the little girl's name for her birth certificate.

ADELE

Put down my last name. She's called Nina Samac.

The nurse realizes that Adele must be a single mum. She's also a foreigner.

NURSE

I see. Your date and place of birth, please?

The doctor leaves the operating theatre.

ADELE

Belgrade, March 3, 1950. (Beat). I noticed you talking to the doctor just now. Is anything wrong?

NURSE

No, nothing's wrong. Everything is fine.

CUT TO:

7 EXT. VARNA. SAMAC HOME. DUSK

A couple of days later.

The old Russian-made car pulls up outside a small apartment building near the port. Visible in the distance, the sea is ruffled by a strong, gusting wind. Adele gets out of the car. She pulls out a Moses basket and big, floppy bag. Nobody is waiting to greet her. Danka, the friend who drove her to the hospital, also gets out of the car. The wind scrabbles at the women's hair.

DANKA

Hold on! I'll give you a hand.

ADELE

I can manage.

DANKA

Let me know if you need anything.

ADELE

I will.

Danka gets back behind the wheel and parks nearby. Adele walks over to the front door of the building. The building is very 1960s: tall, anonymous, a great many floors festooned with balconies.

CUT TO:

8 INT./EXT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. DUSK

The door to the flat swings open and the lights are turned on. There's very little in the way of furniture; what there is is cheap. After closing the front door behind her, Adele walks across the living room and into the bedroom. The bedroom windows look out over the sea. At the horizon, the sky is lit up by post-sunset slashes of orange. The Moses basket is placed on the bed. Adele looks down in wonder at the blissfully sleeping baby.

CUT TO:

From the balcony we see the opening external shot, this time from another angle, at dusk: the sea, boats, cranes and hangars. The last orange and mauve brushstrokes sink to the horizon. Somebody lights a cigarette and takes a couple of deep draws on it. Adele's emotionless gaze is lost in the distance.

FADE TO BLACK

9 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. BATHROOM. DAY

One month later.

Adele's naked back reflects in the bathroom mirror. Fresh out of the shower, she wraps a body belt around her waist and pulls it tight to flatten her belly.

CUT TO:

A breast pump on her breast, its reservoir collecting the plentiful, flowing milk. Although it's a rather painful exercise, the young mother is determined to finish the job.

The morning silence is shattered by the sound of the doorbell. Adele walks over to the front door. She opens it to see Danka, a little cold and a little sleepy.

DANKA

Did I wake you?

ADELE

No. Come in.

The two friends walk over to the baby, careful not to make too much noise. Danka gazes admiringly at the chubby-cheeked tot, now a month old, and deep in sleep.

DANKA

My, she's grown. She's truly gorgeous!

Adele slips on a white blouse and motions for Danka to follow her into the kitchen.

ADELE

She had a feed at six. Warm one of those little jars of milk at nine and pour it into her bottle. Try giving it to her even if she's still sleeping... If she cries, there's a dummy in the glass over there... If you have any problems, anything, give me a call. Just don't mention the baby...

Danka nods. Adele picks up her big bag and leaves. In the background, the sound of a lorry turning around.

CUT TO:

10 EXT. VARNA. FACTORY. DAY

A big industrial plant comprising a number of large warehouses in what is a predominantly agricultural town. Two big lorries emerge from the main gates. Like a small battalion, dozens of workers advance across the square, their bodies rigid with cold and the prospect of work. Their faces, still swollen with sleep, come into and out of view. Adele is in their midst. In the background, the sound of industrial machinery.

CUT TO:

11 INT. VARNA. FACTORY. DAY

The machinery creates a deafening racket. The all-metal architecture of the plant makes the place look like a work camp. Nobody says a thing. The workers move in a choreography that portrays the toil and alienation of factory work. Adele's hands expertly assemble metal components on a production line. The huge clock hanging on the wall reads 11:00 a.m.

CUT TO:

From the foreman's office, we see Adele leave her station. The burly foreman, in his fifties and dressed in work clothes, scowls as he watches her timidly approach his window.

ADELE

I need to take five minutes.

FOREMAN

Make sure it's no more than five.

Adele nods. The foreman's eyes bore into her back as she walks towards the exit.

CUT TO:

Light steps along corridors and passageways, and finally a phone on the wall of a large room from which a number of corridors fan out. Adele goes over and picks up the handset. We see Adele in profile, her lips moving.

ADELE

How is she?

DANKA (V.O.)

Everything's fine. The poppet just had her feed and now she's sleeping. How about you?

ADELE

All right. Dog tired but all right.
Gotta go now, I'll call back later.

Adele hangs up the phone, sweeps a handkerchief over her forehead, and heads back the way she came. From behind, we see her getting smaller and smaller as she moves down the long corridor.

In the background, the Bulgarian TV news signature tune.

CUT TO:

12 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. AFTERNOON

Stock footage ca. 1983 on a small TV set. The news item is about Ali Agca and the "Bulgarian Connection" in the attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

Nina is now six years old. She's wearing a red dress that sets off her golden-blond hair and light grey eyes. She's sitting close to the TV. All of her dolls are laid out on the floor, including the latest arrival, a Barbie-type doll still in her cellophane cocoon.

Adele, a little older and sporting a different hairstyle, walks into the room carrying a birthday cake. Family friend Danka is also present. She too looks a little different - not much, just a little. Six candles burn on top of the cake.

ADELE

Don't you want to celebrate your birthday or not?

Nina spins round with great enthusiasm.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Come on then, blow out the candles.

Adele and Danka start singing 'Happy Birthday' in Serbo-Croat, their native language. Nina snuffs out the candles in one go.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

('Happy Birthday' in Serbo-Croat)
Now make a wish. Remember, don't tell!

The little girl closes her eyes for a few seconds, and then looks out towards the sea, determination written on her face. Adele and Danka smile at such seriousness, and then pluck the candles from the cake.

DANKA

You get to cut the first slice.

The knife sinks through soft cream.

NINA

Can I have two?

ADELE

Two what?

NINA

Slices of cake?

ADELE

Of course you can...

The little girl tucks in with gusto, cream oozing everywhere.

CUT TO:

13 EXT. VARNA. PRIMARY SCHOOL. DAY

We pan left to right over a building complex. Adele, Danka and little Nina are standing outside the local school. We see mother and daughter in profile.

NINA

Aren't you going to take me in?

ADELE

I've got to dash or I'll miss my bus. Danka'll take you up... After the lesson she'll be at the gate to fetch you.

NINA

All right.

Adele gives her daughter a kiss and then sets off towards the bus stop. The little girl plucks up her courage and marches into the school, Danka by her side.

CUT TO:

14 INT. VARNA. PRIMARY SCHOOL. DAY

It's the first day of school. Most of the little girls are nervous. The rows farthest from the front of the class fill first. Nina makes her entrance. She strides up to the teacher's desk, a resolute look on her face. Danka looks in for a second, just long enough to wave to the teacher.

NINA

Good morning, Miss teacher. Is this Year one?

TEACHER

Yes it is. Go sit yourself down.

Nina turns round to survey the other girls and the free seats. Despite her humble origins, she is better turned out than her classmates: not a hair out of place, and of course uncommonly beautiful. The light filtering through the window reflects in her eyes.

There's a special quality about her that captures the attention of all present.

TEACHER (CONT.'D)
What's your name?

NINA
(Standing up proudly)
Nina Samac.

The teacher smiles at so much pride and determination in the little girl.

CUT TO:

15 EXT. VARNA. MAIN ROAD. CAMERA CAR. DAY

Danka's ancient car races along the main road into town.

CUT TO:

16 EXT. VARNA. CAMERA CAR. DAY

Danka is at the wheel, driving in her nonchalant style. Next to her sits Adele. Nina is in the back.

ADELE
(Lighting up yet another cigarette)
Did you make friends at school?

NINA
No.

DANKA (V.O.)
Well, it's only the first day.

NINA
Mum... Why do I have to go the doctor if I'm not ill?

Neither Adele nor Danka reply.

NINA (CONT.'D)
I don't want to go to the doctor's.

DANKA (V.O.)
Aren't you happy to go for a spin round town?

It's Nina's turn not to reply.

ADELE
What's your teacher like? Is she nice?

NINA

The nicest of all. We did the alphabet today, we had to find the name of a thing for each letter. It was great fun...

CUT TO:

17 EXT. VARNA. MEDICAL CLINIC. DAY

Danka drives into the medical centre car park and pulls up outside the entrance. Adele gets out of the car.

ADELE

(To Danka)

You may as well go for a coffee or something, this could take a while.

The car drives off as mother and daughter walk into the medical centre. We're breathing down their necks, like guardian angels.

CUT TO:

18 INT. Varna. MEDICAL CLINIC. DAY

The clinic's glass doors slide open automatically. Holding her daughter's hand, Adele walks over to the lifts. Patients and doctors bustle around the place.

NINA

I don't want to go to the doctor's!
Mummy, I'm scared!

ADELE

Come on, don't be a baby! We're late as it is.

CUT TO:

The lift emits an electric sigh as it begins to rise. Nina examines herself in the mirror. She checks the pleats of her skirt and whether her hands are clean. She's satisfied. Adele fails to notice her daughter's amusing gestures. She's too busy staring at the rapidly-climbing floor numbers.

CUT TO:

19 INT. VARNA. MEDICAL CLINIC. DAY

A female clerical worker at the medical centre picks up a medical file that has slipped to the ground.

ADELE (V.O.)

Good afternoon.

FEMALE CLERICAL WORKER

Good afternoon.

ADELE

We have an appointment with the urologist, Dr Siderov.

FEMALE CLERICAL WORKER

Name?

ADELE

Samac.

The clerical worker checks down her list and then dials through to the doctor.

FEMALE CLERICAL WORKER

Doctor Siderov, Mrs. Samac is here...

(beat)

Go on in. Second door on the right.

Adele and Nina walk over to the door and enter.

CUT TO:

A burly, middle-aged doctor with a friendly face gets up from behind his desk and holds out a hand to Adele.

DOCTOR SIDEROV

Sit down, please, I've just got off the phone with Dr Georgiev. You must be Nina, right? Your mother didn't tell me how pretty you are.

Nina smiles reluctantly. One compliment is not enough to put her at ease.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)

If you wouldn't mind getting the girl to undress...

The doctor meticulously washes his hands while Adele helps Nina take her clothes off behind a small free-standing curtain. Nina lies down on the examination bed, clearly afraid.

The doctor lowers his back-lit magnifying glass. His gigantic eyes scrutinize the girl's abdominal area. Adele remains nearby to calm her daughter, who feels very much like an insect under observation.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
When you wee, does it come out from
here or here?

NINA
There.

DOCTOR SIDEROV
Right. Does it hurt when I push
here?

NINA
No.

DOCTOR SIDEROV
Right, now, a quick x-ray and we're
all done.

Nina nods, pleased. It took less time than she feared. The doctor covers the child's chest with a lead-lined blanket, and then positions the head of an x-ray machine.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
Lie very still!

The doctor retreats behind a pane of glass where he presses a number of buttons. He comes back over to Nina a few seconds later to remove the protective cloak.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
You can get her to pop her clothes
back on now.

As Adele dresses her daughter again, the doctor places two x-rays against a backlit screen and examines them very closely. A cloud passes over his face - the expression of a man who has just spotted something that concerns him.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
(To the girl)
How would you like a lemon-
flavoured lolly?

Nina's face lights up. The doctor picks up the phone.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
Get a lolly for the little girl and
keep her company while I talk with
Mrs. Samac.

The doctor puts down the phone.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
Run along now, mummy'll be with you
shortly.

The little girl leaves the room to find a nurse with an
ice lolly.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
(Pausing for a beat)
Madam, your daughter has a rare
malformation. In effect, she has
two sexual organs. It's still early
days to know which way things will
develop. My opinion is... Um,
medically speaking, Nina is more of
a little boy than a little girl.

ADELE
If this is a joke... I've never met
a girl more girly than my daughter.

DOCTOR SIDEROV
I am as surprised as you. I can
find no trace of a true uterus. In
a few years' time, Nina could well
become virile and take on male
physical attributes.

Adele is dumbstruck.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
One thing I will say is that your
daughter's case requires a more
specialized doctor than I. There's
a clinic I can recommend in Moscow,
but if you'd like to see one of our
doctors first, I can fix an
appointment with one of my
colleagues.

Adele merely stares incredulously at the doctor.

DOCTOR SIDEROV (CONT.'D)
I can imagine how you must be
feeling, but there is no other
course of action open to us...

City sounds filter in from afar.

CUT TO:

20 EXT. VARNA. CAMERA CAR. DAY

Danka's gaze is fixed on the rear-view mirror. Adele and
Nina reach the car and climb in.

DANKA (V.O.)

How'd it go?

NINA

I got a lemon ice lolly!

DANKA (V.O.)

See? I told you there was no need to be frightened. (To Adele) Did everything go OK?

ADELE

I'll tell you later!

Visibly shocked, Adele rubs at her forehead as if she has a headache. Danka realizes that there's something wrong. She starts the car and drives off without asking any more questions. Through the car window, the town of Varna drifts past.

CUT TO:

21 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. NIGHT

Some dirty dishes, an ashtray full of cigarette butts and two small glasses sit on the table. Adele fills the glasses with vodka and places the empty bottle down in the middle of the table. Danka sips at her glass, her mind far away. Adele lights her millionth cigarette of the evening. Neither of them says a thing.

Nina is up, hiding behind the glass door to the kitchen. The little girl has heard what the adults were saying. Lit solely by the light filtering in from the kitchen, she stands there motionless for a few moments, and then soundlessly disappears down the dark corridor.

In the distance we hear the sound of children playing.

CUT TO:

22 EXT. VARNA. PRIMARY SCHOOL. PLAYGROUND. DAY

A classmate blindfolds Nina with a red ribbon. The other girls are ready to start playing. Nina tentatively moves forward. Her hands clutch at thin air as her friends dodge out of her way.

The school bell signals the end of break. The schoolkids start filtering back into the building. Nina is left alone in the middle of the yard. She removes the blindfold to find her mother standing in front of her.

NINA

Mamma. What are you doing here?

ADELE

Come with me and I'll tell you...

Nina puts her hand in her mother's and trots along to the school gates.

NINA

Are you taking me to the doctor's?

Adele is taken aback. The little girl's instinct is unerring.

ADELE

Yes, but there's no need to worry,
it'll be quick...

CUT TO:

23 INT. VARNA. DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM DAY

Another clinic, another waiting room. Nina is perched on a small couch. A kid about her own age sits opposite. The little boy has a striking face with memorable almond-shaped eyes.

NINA

What's your name?

LITTLE BOY

Dim.

NINA

What kind of name is Dim? I never heard that one before...

DIM

It's my grandfather's name.
Dimitri. What's your name?

NINA

Nina. But it's not my grandfather's name! (Beat) Want to play a guessing game?

DIM

How do you play?

NINA

Just watch. I'm going to put this coin in one hand. You have to guess which hand it's hidden in.

Nina slips her hands behind her back and then pulls them out again, fists clenched. The little boy thinks for a moment before deciding.

DIM

That one.

Nina's hand opens. The coin lies on her palm. A half smile flashes across the little boy's face. Nina gives the boy the coin.

NINA

Nice work! Your turn now.

CUT TO:

A phalanx of endocrinology diplomas hanging on the wall. The doctor is an old man whose face exudes wisdom and intelligence. He is leafing through lab reports and Doctor Siderov's x-rays.

ENDOCRINOLOGIST

I'll be frank with you, ma'am. My opinion goes against my colleague's... Look here. These are your daughter's testosterone levels. They're much lower than the average in males... I can't be absolutely certain, but the syndrome your daughter has may have been triggered by a hormone imbalance in the uterus during the pregnancy.

ADELE

So what do you advise me to do?

ENDOCRINOLOGIST

Take her to Moscow, by all means. Their opinion will be useful, but don't rush into any hasty decisions. Hormone treatment and surgery may be sufficient to resolve everything. In your daughter's case, however, her receptors may fail to recognize testosterone...

We close in on an increasingly worried Adele.

24 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. NIGHT

Ballet practice in front of the TV. Nina, in a leotard, tries her best to follow the moves of the ballerina on TV. The expressions that flit across her face (in imitation of the dancer's) and her poorly coordinated movements verge on the comical. The little girl ties herself into impossible knots before ending up in a heap on the floor.

Within view, Adele is carefully folding clothes into a beaten-up old leather suitcase.

In the background, we hear the sound of a speeding train.

CUT TO:

25 INT. MOSCOW. TRAIN. DUSK

The gloomy yet evocative Russian landscape slips past out of the window. Vast expanses of unspoiled nature alternate with stark industrial zones. Nina is fascinated. She looks out, nose pressed against the glass. Reflections and glints of light are mirrored in her rapt eyes.

On the seat opposite, Adele too is staring out at the landscape. Her face is haunted by worry.

The train pulls into Moscow's imposing Central Station. Adele gets to her feet and pulls down the leather suitcase.

NINA

Are we there, Mum?

ADELE

Yes. Put your coat on, it's going to be very cold.

The little girl slips into her overcoat with her trademark almost regal pride.

CUT TO:

26 EXT./INT. MOSCOW. RAILWAY STATION. DAY

A river of passengers, all muffled up, all with red noses and cheeks, flowing towards the exits. Adele and Nina are in their midst, looking a little more out of place than anyone else. Police and soldiers are also in evidence.

27 EXT. MOSCOW. CAMERA CAR TAXI. DAY

A taxi carrying Nina and Adele drives through town. Views of a metropolis far bigger and far more majestic than Varna. In the distance we see a huge hospital. The building is stark cold war architecture, from a time when East and Capitalist West were locked in a battle of technology.

CUT TO:

28 INT. MOSCOW. HOSPITAL. DAY

Nina's body passes through a primordial CAT scan machine. X-rays against a backlit display. A rather young, distinguished looking surgeon compares the results with reference x-rays. Highly impressed by such advanced technology, Adele waits for the great man to make his pronouncement.

NINA

I'm dying for a wee. Please can I go to the toilet now?

DOCTOR SALNICOV

(In Russian)

Yes. It's back there.

Nina skips into the bathroom. Her mother is still waiting for the consultant to make his diagnosis.

DOCTOR SALNICOV (CONT.'D)

We really should run a tissue biopsy to be completely sure... Regardless of that, internally the situation is less ambiguous. We'll be able to sort everything out with the right hormone therapy and surgery...

ADELE

(In halting Russian)

The endocrinologist told me hormone treatment may not work. He would give female hormones in my daughter's case. I'm sorry I don't understand these things. It seems you are not all in agreement.

DOCTOR SALNICOV

Our job is to interpret nature. As far as we're concerned, this is the right way to proceed. 46 xy chromosomes, karyotype factor 7... That's a boy.

CUT TO:

Nina sitting on the toilet. A mirror covers the back of the door to one side of her. The doctor's muffled voice penetrates. The little girl somehow intuits the sense of the conversation in Russian.

ADELE (V.O.)

To me, she's a girl. If you tell me that it is the best thing for her good to be a boy...

DOCTOR SALNICOV (V.O.)

After hormone treatment and a few operations she will be within the range of normal.

ADELE (V.O.)

What type of operations?

DOCTOR SALNICOV (V.O.)

You should leave the technical details to us...

ADELE (V.O.)

I have the right to know what kind of operations you want to do to her.

DOCTOR SALNICOV (V.O.)

First, hormone treatment. When she's a little older we'll need to perform reconstruction and ablation operations. You must trust us. I cannot guarantee certain functions, but to all intents and purposes in every other respect your child will be a male.

Nina quizzically looks herself up and down in the mirror.

CUT TO:

29 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. NIGHT

Blond locks fall to the floor like dry autumn leaves. Adele is cutting off her daughter's hair with kitchen scissors. The little girl watches herself in the mirror.

NINA

Does it have to be short really?

ADELE

If we're going to do it, we may as well do it right.

Another couple of snips and the job's done. Nina looks like a little boy, though there's still one or two details to sort out.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Here, put on these trousers and trainers.

Nina quickly puts them on, curious to see the finished effect.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Now walk up and down like a boy. You have to believe it. If you don't believe it, no one will.

Nina overdoes her attempt to walk like a boy. Her face creases into a series of weird expressions. For a second, mother and daughter look like they're enjoying themselves, then they both come back to earth with a bang. They're both anxious.

Adele picks up the phone and dials a number. Nina, out of focus, continues to walk up and down.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Mrs. Tavlov? Nina Samac's mother here. Is this a good time to talk?

CUT TO:

30 EXT. VARNA. PRIMARY SCHOOL. DAY

Nina's training shoes clomp along the roughly-hewn pavement. Dressed like a perfect little scamp, Nina and her mother walk up to the deserted school gates.

ADELE

If anybody teases you, anybody asks you any questions, you don't have to say a thing. Mummy's going to look after everything. Go on up now, and don't worry...

Adele plants a kiss on Nina's forehead. The little boy/girl strides off, feigning self-confidence, like a soldier carrying out orders to march to the front. The scene ends with Adele's expression radiating worry.

CUT TO:

31 INT. VARNA. PRIMARY SCHOOL. DAY

Class has already started. Nina's place is empty. The little girls chant out the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet. A knock comes at the door.

TEACHER

Come in!

The door slowly swings open and Nina walks in. The teacher's jaw drops. An inquisitive silence falls over the room, before all the little girls start chattering at once.

TEACHER (CONT.'D)

Be quiet. Sit down.

The teacher moves over to the boy/girl as if to protect him/her.

TEACHER (CONT.'D)

(Softly) Your mummy told me all about it. You'll be transferred to the boys' class in a few days' time. Don't worry, everything will be fine... (To the class) Right, let's carry on from the letter...

Nina sits down in her place, intimidated.

CUT TO:

32 EXT. VARNA. SCHOOL. PLAYGROUND. DAY

A slice of apple pie wrapped in a clean napkin. Hands daubed in felt tip pen bring the pie up to a mouth. Nina's sitting on a cement bench. Break has just started. Her classmates stand some way off. Three of them come over. A little bit further away, some teachers are talking and glancing over at Nina,

LITTLE GIRL

Why have you cut your hair so short?

NINA

The doctor said I had to...

LITTLE GIRL 2

Can I touch your hair?

The little girl runs her hand through Nina's crew cut hair.

LITTLE GIRL 3

It makes you look like a boy!

The boy/girl's face freezes into an innocent and moving expression.

CUT TO:

33 INT. SOFIA. HOSPITAL. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT. DAY

The present day.

The policeman we saw in the opening scene looks through the windows in the door to the intensive care ward. They are working on Nina Samac to stop the haemorrhaging. Soon afterwards, a doctor emerges from the operating room and slips off his mask.

DOCTOR

She's lost a lot of blood. We've put her into an induced coma. We'll know whether or not she's out of danger in 48 hours.

POLICEMAN

There'll be a couple of men guarding the door. Let them know if you notice anything untoward.

DOCTOR

Okey doke.

The doctor is about to leave when something comes to mind.

DOCTOR (CONT.'D)

There was one thing... It appears that the patient underwent significant surgery in the past...

POLICEMAN

What kind of surgery?

DOCTOR

It's hard to say. We're looking into it right now... She may even be a transsexual, it's not completely clear. We'll let you know when we know.

The policeman remains impassive. The doctor heads off down the corridor. Another policeman walks over, an older cop with a weary look on his face.

OFFICER STANKO

Morning, Detective Superintendent.

POLICEMAN

Morning. The head nurse will point out the doctors on shift. You and Boris take turns on surveillance. Keep an eye on the emergency exits. You'll also have to watch people who visit other patients. Check the ID of anybody going into the ward.

OFFICER STANKO

OK.

The man left on guard scrutinizes the place while his colleague heads for the exit.

CUT TO:

34 EXT. VARNA. COAST ROAD. DAY

The flashback resumes.

Caption: Varna, 1987.

A strong wind sends waves crashing onto the Black Sea coast. Well-worn leather trainers kick at stones. Nina has metamorphosed into Mirko, a boy of around 10 with mussed-up blonde hair and hollow cheeks. His light grey eyes are the only thing that give Nina away. The little boy looks nervous as he walks along the pavement, on the street that runs along the port zone. Out of the blue, he is jarred as a ball hits him on the shoulder. Two boys around his age stand on the far side of the street.

BOY

Give us our ball back, you freak!

Mirko kicks the ball away in the opposite direction, goading his aggressors. They chase after him and catch up. Mirko gets pushed around and slapped.

BOY'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Back in the house the both of you,
right now!

A woman leans out of the window of a building.

BOY'S MOTHER

As for you, get the hell out of here!

The mischievous lads let go of Mirko, pick up their ball and leave. Mirko carries on walking, glancing over his shoulders every now and then. The boys are laughing their socks off behind him. The scene closes on Mirko's wary, resentful face.

CUT TO:

35 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. DAY

Looking a little ground down by life and the encroaching years, Adele takes a small pill bottle out of the bathroom cabinet and hands a couple of pills to her son. The boy puts them in his mouth. As soon as his mother leaves he spits them into the toilet. One flush and they're gone.

CUT TO:

Mirko striding into the living room and over to the window. The open sea and the huge ships leaving port reflect his desire to get away. Adele scrutinizes her son. She empathizes enormously; she too would leave if she could.

ADELE

I bought you some things. Try them on.

A football kit is spread out on the couch: top, shorts and socks. A pair of pretty expensive football boots sits on the floor.

CUT TO:

36 EXT. VARNA. SPORTS CENTRE. DAY

Thick cloud blankets the sky. A group of boys are playing a practice match in a muddy field. Adele and Mirko walk through the entrance gates and over to the fence around the pitch.

ADELE

Wait here.

The boy does as he's told. He looks like he'd rather be anywhere than here. The oversized sports bag he's carrying drops to the ground. His mother starts talking to a man in a tracksuit. A few seconds later, the coach and Adele come over.

COACH

Go get yourself changed in the
changing rooms, then we'll see what
you've got.

Mirko slouches off towards the door of a tatty old brown
brick building.

CUT TO:

37 INT. VARNA. SPORTS CENTRE. CHANGING ROOM. DAY

The changing room floor is half-flooded with the outflow
of the showers. Older boys stroll around the place half
naked. Mirko perches on a bench. Reluctantly he
undresses, eyes glued to the ground.

CUT TO:

38 EXT. VARNA. SPORTS CENTRE. FOOTBALL PITCH. DAY

Adele has found a seat on the grandstand behind one of
the goals. Her son walks onto the pitch in his brand-new
outfit. The coach whistles to stop the match and
introduce the latest recruit. The match resumes.
Initially, Mirko runs up and down chasing the action
without getting a sniff at the ball. He runs less
powerfully than the other boys, though he's actually
quite athletic. The ball finally comes his way. He
doesn't hold on to it for long - a heavy tackle by an
opposing defender sends him flying into the mud.

Adele watches the scene with her usual phlegm.

Mirko gets up and starts playing again. The ball comes
back to him. This time he skilfully sidesteps a couple of
opponents, then once again he's knocked to the ground by
a beefy defender.

Adele's jaw clenches a little.

The game resumes. Mirko feels a rush of blood to the head
as he piles into a midfielder coming rapidly towards him.
He hooks the ball away with one foot, and knocks it up
onto his other foot -- a very nice bit of skill. A slide
rule pass to a teammate, who manages to round another
player... Only for the ball to fly up into the air. Mirko
is the quickest to calculate where the ball is going to
drop. He races into position, smacks it on the volley
with every ounce of anger and strength in his body. What
a goal!

Adele jumps to her feet before her self-control kicks
back in. Mirko's teammates buzz round him in elation.

COACH

Nice one, Mirko! What'd I tell ya, lads? It's all about being in the right place at the right time. Know what your opponent's up to before he does. You have to be able to read the game and stay focused.

We're not fooled by the smile on Mirko's sweaty face; he's doing his best to live up to expectations though in actual fact he doesn't care.

CUT TO:

39 INT. VARNA. SPORTS CENTRE. CHANGING ROOM. DAY

The other boys strip off for a shower. Mirko is the only one who puts on his street clothes without a wash. One of the boys comes over.

Close-up on almond-shaped eyes.

DIM

That was a great pass you made to me from a tough angle. Are you playing for us now?

MIRKO

(A little angry)
Don't ask me, it's my mum who makes all the decisions!

Mirko flings his sweaty top into his bag. For a few moments, Dim looks at him quizzically.

MIRKO (CONT.'D)

What are you staring at?

DIM

Nothing...

Dim wanders off as Mirko looks daggers at his back.

CUT TO:

40 EXT. VARNA. SPORTS CENTRE. EVENING

Adele and the coach are having a quick chat outside the changing room.

COACH

He may be a bit slight but he gets stuck in. He seems more switched on than the other boys. I can put him in the team if you like. Training's four nights a week. We don't mess around here...

Mirko emerges from the changing room carrying his sports bag. He goes over to his mother. His hair and face are still damp with sweat. He looks tired. And pissed off.

ADELE

The coach says you did well, but if you want to be on the team you have to train four times a week. What do you reckon?

Mirko is unsure. He mulls it over, and levels a challenging look at his mother. The coach can't help but notice this rather odd atmosphere between mother and son.

CUT TO:

41 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. DAY

Stock footage on TV of the opening ceremony for the 1988 European championship. Mirko, his head now completely shaven, stares at the box, a bored look on his face. Adele is giving the windows in the kitchen a good clean.

ADELE

Mirko, we can't keep putting this off forever... For one reason or another we've skipped every one of your doctors' visits. The treatment isn't having much effect... Are you actually taking those pills?

Mirko keeps staring at the TV in silence.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Are you listening to me?

MIRKO

You give me them every day.

ADELE

I sometimes have my suspicions you get rid of them when I'm not looking...

MIRKO

Why can't we just leave everything as it is? I'm doing what you want me to do. I'm playing football, I'm one of the stars on the team...

ADELE

That's not what I'm talking about... In a few years you'll start being interested in girls. You like girls, don't you?

MIRKO

Yeah.

As he speaks, Mirko is distracted by a particularly handsome football player being interviewed on TV.

ADELE

Well, the day will come when you start going out with girls, you know, the first kiss and everything... Have you ever kissed a girl?

MIRKO

No.

ADELE

When kids grow, they start feeling natural impulses...

MIRKO

What are you on about?

ADELE

(Flustered)
You know perfectly well what I'm on about. We've talked about this stuff hundreds of times!

The boy gets up and turns off the TV.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Where are you going now?

Mirko walks into the bathroom without bothering to reply. He closes the door behind him. A resigned Adele dries her hands on a kitchen towel. The doorbell rings. Adele goes to open the door.

POSTMAN

Letter for you.

ADELE

Thanks.

POSTMAN

My pleasure!

Adele closes the door behind her. Anxiously, she extracts the letter from the envelope. Close-up on letter: Legal Medicine Appointment.

CUT TO:

42 INT. VARNA. GOVERNMENT MEDICAL FACILITY. DAY

Three men in white coats are standing in a squalid health clinic room, lit by flickering neon. All of the men have pasty, glum faces. They look more like soldiers than doctors. Mirko is undergoing what can only be described as a rather unpleasant medical examination. One of the doctors takes this opportunity to lecture his young assistants. The doctors cluster round the bed on which the boy is lying, completely oblivious to him feeling like some kind of lab rat.

DOCTOR

The hormone treatment plus a series of surgical operations will correct this malformation.

(To Mirko)

Keep your legs open.

Mirko obeys wordlessly.

DOCTOR (CONT.'D)

Fill in the personal information sheet and hand it to the boy's mother.

(To Mirko)

Put your clothes on now.

Mirko gets up from the bed and starts to get dressed, his back turned to the doctors.

CUT TO:

43 INT. VARNA. GOVERNMENT MEDICAL FACILITY. WAITING ROOM. DAY

Adele is waiting in the clinic's entrance hall. The lad we saw in the sports centre changing rooms, Dim, is sitting opposite her. The boy's parents are with him: his father has a flinty face; his mother is strikingly young. Dim and Adele's eyes meet fleetingly. In the meantime, one of the young doctors who was in the room with Mirko walks over to Adele.

ASSISTANT

All finished now, ma'am. Here's his certificate. Hand it in at the public records office and the clerks will take it from there.

ADELE

Where's my son?

ASSISTANT

He's getting dressed.

Adele rapidly skim reads through the documents, and then looks up to see Mirko emerging from the consulting rooms, his head bowed. She can immediately tell that her son has suffered yet another humiliation. She goes over to him and leads him away from this horrible place.

CUT TO:

44 EXT. VARNA. DRINKS STAND. DAY

Seagulls wheel round in the sky. A strong onshore wind speeds the clouds along, over a drinks stand near the port. Mirko and Adele are sitting at a table, each nursing a soft drink. Port workers occupy the other tables, smoking and chatting.

MIRKO

Mum. I've had enough of playing football. I don't want to do it anymore!

ADELE

What? What happened?

MIRKO

Nothing happened.

ADELE

That would be a pity, you're so good at it...

MIRKO

Crap. All of the others are stronger than I am. I can't keep up with them... But that's not the problem. I can't be bothered running around after a stupid ball. I've had enough...

ADELE

What do you want to do?

The expression on Mirko's face suddenly changes. His eyes light up with a particular glint.

MIRKO

I want to go somewhere else, move to another town, start at a new school...

Adele takes a little time to respond.

ADELE

I'd like the same things, only right now... Now is not the time...

Mirko scrunches up his nose and stares off into the distance. Seagulls circle high and free in the sky.

CUT TO:

45 EXT. SOFIA. CAMERA CAR. STREET. DAY

The present day.

The policeman is being driven by his fellow officer. He's holding mugshots of the two men found dead at Nina Samac's flat. The car inches along a semi-deserted street, towards a man waiting at a bus stop. The car pulls up. The window winds down.

POLICEMAN

These two ring any bells?

The informer comes over to give the mugshots a quick look.

INFORMER

Hired muscle, Moldovans...

POLICEMAN

Yeah?... Who hired them?

INFORMER

Couldn't tell you right now. I can find out.

The informer ambles off down the street. The police car glides away from the curb.

FELLOW POLICEMAN

Now what?

CUT TO:

46 INT. VARNA. GYM. DAY

Caption: Varna 1993

A rundown gym where the apparatus and barbells have all seen better days. The bodies of athletes at the gym are reflected in grubby mirrors. Mirko is now 16 and a very good-looking teenager. His butch haircut and the fact that his bound breasts are somewhat flattened are not enough to completely deflect suspicions that this particular he is in fact a she. (Director's note: these scenes use a teenage actress dressed and made up to look like a boy).

Young bodybuilders work out nearby, staring at themselves in the mirror as they pump iron to engorge already big muscles.

Mirko works out alone, an outsider in this macho environment. Something in his eyes tells us his long-repressed femininity is threatening to run amok amid all this testosterone. It is getting harder and harder for him to keep up the fiction.

Mirko finishes off his training and heads for the changing room.

CUT TO:

Muscular young men under the showers. As usual, Mirko changes without stripping all the way. His clear eyes hazard a not-quite-innocent peek or two. At the far end of the changing room, two lads are talking quietly and glancing in Mirko's direction.

CUT TO:

47 EXT. VARNA. COAST ROAD. DUSK

The sun is setting. For once, everything is still. Eerily still. Mirko is taking the coast road home, toting his sports bag. The two lads from the changing rooms are walking along on the far side of the road, in line with Mirko. Mirko notices them. The boys cross the road to follow him. They look like they're up to no good. To be on the safe side, Mirko breaks into a run. A long chase ends down a blind alley. The expression on Mirko's face is more irritation than fear. He drops his bag and squares up to face his two adversaries.

CUT TO:

48 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. BATHROOM. EVENING

The front door to the flat opens and shuts. The sports bag droops to the floor. From behind, we see Mirko sneak into the bathroom. Adele looks up from the couch, suspicious.

CUT TO:

Blood dripping into the bathroom sink. Mirko splashes cold water onto his face. Blood gushes from his nostrils. Adele opens the door and stiffens at the sight of her son, bloodied and upset.

ADELE

Who did this to you?

MIRKO

Get out.

ADELE

Wait, I'll be back with some ice!

Adele leaves. Mirko is holding back tears. He keeps splashing water on his face to prevent his mother from seeing the worst. She returns with an ice-filled napkin. She hands it to her son.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Are you going to tell me what happened?

MIRKO

What's it look like? I had a fight.

ADELE

What about?

The boy says nothing. He places the ice across the bridge of his nose and closes his eyes.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Don't tell me if you don't want to.
Dinner's on the table. And remember
to take your pills.

Mirko is overcome by a wave of anger. He wrenches open the bathroom cabinet and flings the little glass pill jar to the ground. It explodes, sending shards of glass everywhere. Pills bounce across the tiles like billiard balls.

MIRKO

No! I've had enough of this shit!
I've had enough of this charade.
I'm a girl. More of a girl than you
are!

Adele freezes. Mirko stares at her in fierce challenge.

ADELE

You mean you want to start
everything all over again? Undo
everything we've done? I think it's
a little too late for that...

MIRKO

If you don't help me I'll kill
myself!

Adele is shocked by such determination, but she can't
honestly say she didn't expect it. She thinks for a few
moments before responding.

ADELE

All right, if that's the way you
want it...

The boy throws his arms around his mother.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

All I've ever wanted is to do
what's right for you...

MIRKO

I know mum, I know...

CUT TO:

49 INT. MOSCOW. HOSPITAL. DAY

Doctor Salnicov, now a few years older, is sitting behind
his desk. He glances through the results of the latest
examinations, compares the old and new x-rays, and looks
a little disconcerted. Suddenly he is much less sure of
his conclusions.

DOCTOR SALNICOV

(In Russian)

Yes, there are several anomalies...
But if your daughter has 46 xy
chromosomes, as far as medical
science is concerned that makes her
a boy.

Mirko makes his contribution to the conversation by
suddenly stripping off.

Mother and doctor are dumbstruck. The body Mirko reveals is unmistakably curvaceous and feminine. Concealed malformations aside, Mirko is a beautiful girl who right now is glowering at the doctor. The doctor blushes, looks down at the floor and says nothing for a long, long time.

ADELE

(In her still-halting Russian)
We've done the research, there are cases around the world of AIS women...

DOCTOR SALNICOV

Yes, we know about this condition... There is a way forward, but I need to discuss it first with the hospital managers.

CUT TO:

50 INT. MOSCOW. HOSPITAL. MEETING ROOM. DAY

Doctor Salnicov is talking with the hospital managers.

DOCTOR SALNICOV

It's called AIS: Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome. The patient is female... We got it wrong.

ENDOCRINOLOGIST

I concur. Their endocrinologist was right when he said that her receptors didn't recognize testosterone. Hormone therapy has had zero effect...

HOSPITAL MANAGER

Surely hormone therapy didn't work because the patient didn't follow the treatment!

The doctors in the team seem annoyed. The manager gets to his feet before anybody has a chance to reply.

CUT TO:

51 INT. SOFIA. POLICE STATION. OFFICE. DAY

The present day.

A jet of coffee is poured into a cup. The uniformed policeman from the opening scene, the one who found Nina Samac's ID, hands over the forensic report.

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN
Fingerprints from the woman and one
other person were found on the
pistol. No prints from the
Moldovans...

The policeman sips distractedly at his coffee.

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN (CONT.'D)
The gun's Samac's. She got that
beating some time earlier. Not
where we found her...

POLICEMAN
What are you suggesting?

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN
An attempted robbery that went
wrong?

POLICEMAN
The woman was running away from
somebody. The packed suitcases...

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN
Could be, but it doesn't change the
fact she was armed, and she pulled
the trigger. When she realized what
she'd done, she tried to top
herself...

The policeman is anything but convinced.

POLICEMAN
How about the weapon?

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN
Used but clean...

POLICEMAN
Contact the police station in
Varna. See if she has friends or
relatives. Find out who she worked
with, who she's been spending time
with recently...

The uniformed officer leaves. The policeman lights up a
cigarette.

CUT TO:

52 EXT. VARNA. COAST ROAD. CAMERA CAR. DAY

The flashback resumes.

Two motorbikes speed along a deserted coast road, spring sunshine illuminating a fast-moving panorama. Hair flying in the wind, the boys driving and girls riding pillion are carefree. One of the passengers is a very beautiful young woman. It's Nina, now 18. We recognize the clear grey eyes we saw in the little girl and in Mirko as a boy.

CUT TO:

53 EXT. VARNA. BEACH. DAY

Nina and Nadia walk barefoot through sand dunes. The two boys walk ahead of them on the deserted beach. The sun is directly overhead, the Black Sea in high colour.

TODOR

What did I say? Nice spot, huh? And nobody to ruin things for us...

NADIA

Anybody fancy a dip?

TODOR

Thought you'd never ask!

The boys strip down to their underpants. Both boys are white as sheets, apart from downy black body hair. Nina is a little embarrassed. She's also rather excited.

NADIA

You do realize that the water is going to be freezing. You'll both die of a heart attack.

IVAN

Whoa, you don't know who you're talking to! You girls stay here like good little things and get lunch ready while we go catch a wave...

The lads race down to the sea screaming at the top of their lungs before plunging into the cold waters. The girls look on, laughing hard.

NADIA

They are out of their minds.

NINA

If you want to join them...

NADIA

How about you?

NINA

I'll do the sandwiches.

Nadia pulls off her T-shirt and trousers, and then runs down to the sea. Their distant shouts reach Nina.

TODOR/IVAN

Nina! Nina! Nina!

Nina is caught in two minds.

CUT TO:

FOOTAGE FROM SUPPORT BOAT

The boys watch Nina undressing and timidly approaching the water.

IVAN

Boy, is she pretty!

Just for a moment, Nadia feels a sudden spasm of jealousy, in spite of being happy as her best friend wades into the fun.

TODOR

(With a hint of complicity)
All right, I'll leave her to you!

Nadia sticks her tongue out at the boy in mock pique.

TODOR (CONT.'D)

Just kidding!

NADIA

Just being an idiot...

Nina takes her time getting into the water. She isn't a very good swimmer.

NINA

Brrr, cold as ice! Can you touch the bottom where you are?

TODOR

Go warm her up Ivan, I'll look after Nadia.

The boys fling themselves at the girls. Nina and Nadia scream and slip away like eels.

CUT TO:

Empty bottles of beer lie scattered in the sand. A gust of wind sends a plastic bag and paper napkins flying.

The boys and girls sit in a circle passing around a cigarette. Nina is the last to take a puff. She hesitates for a second before taking a long drag. She bursts out coughing, eyes reddened, while the others crack up. Todor rises and motions for Nadia to follow. The girl mulls it over for a second, glances at Nina to see if it's ok, and then heads off with her beau. Nina and Ivan are left alone on the beach.

CUT TO:

54 EXT. VARNA. BEACH. DAY

Nadia and Todor reach a secluded little spot. The kissing and hugging begins.

CUT TO:

Nina and Ivan, staring wordlessly out to sea. Their hair ripples in the light breeze.

CUT TO:

Nadia straightens herself up after they've done the deed. She pats down her hair with her hands. Todor, still sweating, wriggles back into his trousers.

TODOR

What are the other two up to?

Nadia takes a peek through the dunes.

NADIA

They're sitting down.

TODOR

Ivan doesn't know a thing about Nina. I'd probably better warn him so things don't get complicated...

NADIA

You worry about your own problems and nothing'll get complicated!

Nadia walks off, disappointed.

TODOR

What did I do? What did I say wrong? You're impossible to talk to! Hey, wait!

CUT TO:

55 EXT. VARNA. TONY'S BAR. AFTERNOON

The gaudy signboard and a great many parked cars indicate we're at a very popular bar/restaurant, one of the city's first privately-run establishments. Nadia walks into the bar with Nina.

CUT TO:

The man at the cash register is Tony. The wrong side of 40, tough and burly, he's dressed in blue jeans and a military green capped-sleeve T-shirt. There's a tattoo on his right arm, and a couple of rings on his fingers. The old rogue glances up as Nadia and Nina step in from outside.

NADIA

Hi, Uncle. This is the friend I was telling you about.

TONY

Hi. You didn't say she's such a looker...

Nina's smile is intended to divert the compliment.

TONY (CONT.'D)

Right, I'll give you your T-shirt and then talk you through the job. It's not hard, all you have to do is get on with the customers. They come here because they want to be looked after. Got it?

Nina nods. From under the cash desk, Tony pulls out a cellophane-wrapped t-shirt with the bar's logo.

TONY (CONT.'D)

Get changed in the room back there.

NADIA

I'll pick you up later.

NINA

Sure...

CUT TO:

56 INT. VARNA. TONY'S BAR. BACK ROOM. EVENING

Nina walks into the room that serves as a changing room, closing the door behind her. The old door handle doesn't work properly, so the door opens slightly.

Tony walks by and ogles the girl as she removes her blouse. Nina slips into the T-shirt. She takes a deep breath, as if to wish herself luck on her first summer job.

FADE TO BLACK:

57 EXT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. NIGHT

It is particularly hot. Adele is lounging on the balcony, tired out and gleaming with sweat. She stares down the street. From her high vantage point, we watch Nina getting out of a Western European-made car. Adele's gaze lazily follows the car as it drives off into the night. In the background, we hear the sound of keys in the door. The door shuts.

NINA (V.O.)

You still up?

ADELE

You know I can't sleep until you get back. Who gave you a lift?

NINA

A friend...

ADELE

How can he afford a car like that?

NINA

You should see his motorbike. His father imports them from Germany...

A suspicious expression crosses Adele's face.

NINA (CONT.'D)

Don't worry, I know how to look after myself. I'm off to take a shower. Go to bed, you look tired.

CUT TO:

58 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. BATHROOM. DAY

Bright sunlight filters through the window. Nina applies make up in front of the mirror. She's still new at this. Cherry red lipstick on her full lips and a little mascara on her lashes add to her uncommon beauty. Now for the hair...

59 INT. VARNA. TONY'S BAR. NIGHT

All eyes swivel to Nina as she walks into the bar. Her blossoming beauty inspires reactions in the onlookers ranging from admiration to lust.

TONY

Just look at that! Only at Tony's can you satisfy your belly and your eyes at the same time. And I don't add any extra to the bill...

Nina is a little embarrassed. Some of the looks she's getting are a little more invasive than she'd have liked. She heads to the back room to change.

CUSTOMER

How do you keep your hands off of her? I catch sight of her only a few minutes a day. You have her parading in front of you all damn evening. Maybe that explains why you keep dashing to the toilet every five minutes...

The customer laughs lecherously.

TONY

We're not all wankers like you!

The customer pays his bill and leaves without saying goodbye.

After putting on her branded T-shirt, Nina takes up her position behind the counter where she starts tidying up beer mugs. Ivan, the boy with the motorbike she was with on the beach, comes in and sits down at the bar.

NINA

What'll it be?

IVAN

A beer.

Nina pours a draught beer and slides the glass onto the counter.

NINA

Haven't seen you around for a while...

IVAN

Dad's been working me to the bone.
Had me driving round all over the
place, picking up and dropping off
cars. Last trip, the car I was
driving broke down. Middle of
bloody nowhere. Unbelievable. I had
to walk 5 miles under this sun!
Been in touch with Nadia and Todor?

NINA

They took off yesterday.

IVAN

No messing around! (Beat) How about
going somewhere with me this
weekend?

NINA

I'm working...

IVAN

You must have a day off! Work,
work, work makes Nina a dull girl.

Nina dwells on it for a second.

CUT TO:

60 EXT. COAST ROAD. SUNSET

Nina is driving Ivan's Golf GT rather recklessly along a
little-used road that runs along the sea.

IVAN

Ease off or you'll get us killed!

NINA

Press the pedal and put it in third
now, yes?

IVAN

Yes, but don't mash the accelerator
like that, you're going way too
fast!

Nina is having some problems with the accelerator. The
car picks up even more speed. Ivan muscles in. He pulls
the handbrake, then yanks the steering wheel to steer
into the resulting skid. The car comes to a halt facing
the wrong direction, and then stalls.

IVAN (CONT.'D)

You almost drove us into the sea!
You are really, actually crazy!

Nina is exhilarated by the experience. Ivan is stunned by the girl's courage and determination. The sun slowly descends, painting the horizon a stunning shade of orange red. Ivan takes this as a cue for a kiss. Nina lets him kiss her. She's pretty keen, at least until his hands start heading south when she stops him.

CUT TO:

61 INT. MOSCOW. CONFERENCE CENTRE. DAY

A packed out conference hall. Doctor Salnicov is presenting a slide show, x-rays and photos on Nina's case to an audience of surgeons.

DOCTOR SALNICOV

(In Russian)

This is a truly singular case, the only one of its kind I've seen. Despite 46 xy chromosomes and factor 7 karyotype, this patient is a woman. With some of our American colleagues, we subscribe to the Androgen Insensitive Syndrome theory.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT

Are you planning to ablate the male genitals? And the urinary tract, what about that?

DOCTOR SALNICOV

As you can see from this x-ray, the urinary canal is in the correct position... Ablation is only required in this area. Though abnormal, the uterus produces oestrogens...

The conference audience includes a journalist who is jotting down notes.

CUT TO:

62 EXT. VARNA. GARAGE. DAY

Ivan parks an imported car outside his father's garage. Nina gets out of the car, dressed in a miniskirt, a white blouse knotted at the waist, and very simple sandals. She also sports a rather unique tattoo of an orchid on one ankle.

IVAN

Wait for me here. I'll just drop
off the keys and then we can go.

A middle-aged man and woman in vaguely fashionable
clothes walk out of the garage.

IVAN'S FATHER

Ivan!

Ivan turns and walks towards his parents.

IVAN

Hi Dad.
(Handing the keys to his
father). Paperwork's in the glove
box.
Nina, meet my parents.

IVAN'S FATHER

Nice to meet you.

Nina manages a forced smile as she shakes hands with
Ivan's parents. Ivan's mother is noticeably less warm
towards her than his father was. Ivan's mother looks her
up and down. Her gaze comes to rest on Nina's tattooed
ankle.

FADE TO BLACK

63 INT. VARNA. IVAN'S HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT

Ivan and his parents are eating dinner in the kitchen.
The room is so overflowing with every possible kind of
domestic appliance that it's over the top and in poor
taste.

IVAN

She's just a friend, but I think
she's really very much my type. Not
a schemer like other girls I've
met. You know, the girls who have
one eye on our money. She's
straight up. Then she goes and does
something that really surprises me!
All the things women are useless
at, she just breezes through.

IVAN'S MOTHER

What does this wonder woman do in
life?

IVAN

She works at Tony's place, and she's a student. She's kind of perfect!

IVAN'S FATHER

Somebody like that wouldn't go amiss in our family. She'll bear children healthy as oxes.

The lady of the house clatters the dishes as she clears them away. She is by no means of the same mind.

IVAN'S MOTHER

You men can't see the wood for the trees. There's something odd about that girl...

IVAN'S FATHER

You mean fit. Something fit about that girl, like you when you were that age!

Father and son guffaw with laughter.

CUT TO:

64 EXT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. DAY

Nina walks out of the bathroom in just her bra. Adele's emptying out her work bag.

ADELE

I hardly ever see you these days. Between that Ivan and work, you're only ever passing through.

NINA

Know where my blouse is, mum?

ADELE

I ironed it for you. It's on the chair.

Nina picks up the blouse and slips into it.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

Are you going to be late?

NINA

No.

ADELE

That's what you always say, and then you're not back 'til the sun's nearly up. Do you need any money?

NINA

No.

Nina gives her mother a kiss and then heads towards the door. She is obviously, evidently, a very happy girl.

CUT TO:

65 EXT. VARNA. STREET. DAY

Ivan's Golf GT is parked beneath Nina's place. He beeps and Nina skips over. Adele watches suspiciously from the balcony.

CUT TO:

66 INT. VARNA. HAIRDRESSER. DAY

Ivan's mother is at the hairdresser's, under the dryer, her hair studded with curlers. She leafs through a magazine as her hair is being set. A few pages on, her expression changes. Suddenly, she's deadly serious and on the qui vive. The feature she's looking at is a series of photos of a young woman whose eyes are masked by a black band. One picture in particular strikes the woman.

Close-up on the photo: the girl has a tattoo just like Nina's. Ivan's mother rips out the pages and stuffs them into her handbag. Nobody notices.

CUT TO:

67 INT. VARNA. CINEMA. NIGHT

Fragments of a film on screen. In the background, a simultaneous translation into Bulgarian. Nina and Ivan are in one of the front rows, a little to one side. Ivan takes advantage of the moment and tries it on. Nina lets him kiss her passionately, but she allow his hand to rove down below.

68 INT. VARNA. IVAN'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Ivan's mother is on the couch in front of the TV. The pages of the article that shocked her lie on the cushion next to her. In the background, voices from a light entertainment show. Her husband gets home. She switches off the TV. Without even saying hello, she thrusts the article into his hand.

IVAN'S FATHER

What's this?

IVAN'S MOTHER

This, I believe, is your son's girlfriend. Read it and tell me what we're going to do about it.

His face turns red. Incredulousness is written over his face.

IVAN'S FATHER

I have never seen anything like this in my life! Have you talked with him?

IVAN'S MOTHER

No. I wanted to talk to you first...

At that very moment somebody comes into the house. Ivan pokes his head into the room and, right behind him, Nina.

IVAN

Look who I've brought!

His parents are open-mouthed. Mustering a minimum of decorum, Ivan's mother greets Nina with a peck on the cheek. Ivan's father quickly folds up the magazine pages and furtively slips them into his pocket.

IVAN'S MOTHER

How are you dear?

NINA

Well thank you. And you?

IVAN'S MOTHER

Fine, fine... Let's go into the kitchen and fix a snack for everyone.

CUT TO:

Nina and Ivan sitting next to one another. Ivan's father is at the head of the table, sipping nervously at his beer.

IVAN

I'm planning to take Nina to Germany at the end of the month!

IVAN'S MOTHER

How about some potatoes, Nina?

NINA

Thanks, yes.

IVAN'S MOTHER

They're particularly good...

The whole atmosphere is stilted. Ivan's father keeps glancing at Nina strangely. Ivan's mother is trying her level best to act naturally. Ivan has not picked up on the weird atmosphere. Nina, on the other hand, can feel there's something amiss. The boy's mother finally sits down at the table with everyone else. She sticks her fork into a slice of braised meat. Her hand shakes slightly. Nina notices. Her expression freezes.

CUT TO:

69 EXT. VARNA. CAMERA CAR. NIGHT

The central divider glides smoothly by. The night sky is dark and moonless. Ivan is driving casually, as if he didn't want the journey to end. Nina nervously lights up a cigarette and takes two quick drags - a gesture that makes her look very much like her mother.

IVAN

I didn't know you smoked!

NINA

That time on the beach, remember? I smoke on the sly, when I'm alone...

IVAN

Give us a drag then...

They draw closer and closer to Nina's apartment building. Ivan pulls over not far from her front door. He kills the engine and headlights. They stare into one another's eyes, exchange a passionate kiss, and then Nina abruptly tears herself away.

IVAN (CONT.'D)

Hey, what's wrong?

NINA

I have to go.

IVAN

Pick you up at Tony's tomorrow evening?

NINA

Sure. See ya.

Nina gets out of the car. Ivan turns on the headlights. He waits for the girl to reach the front door. The car's lights pick Nina out as it heads off.

CUT TO:

70 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. NIGHT

Through the window, Adele watches the car drive off. She is clutching the same magazine Ivan's parents had at home. The flat door opens. Nina walks in stealthily before seeing that the living room light is on.

Nina looks at her mother, in her work clothes by the window.

NINA

What's up, ma? How come you're still dressed?

ADELE

Sit down with me dear. We need to talk.

Nina sits down on the couch. She has an inkling her mother's going to tell her something she's not going to like. Adele hands the open magazine to her daughter. Nina reads carefully through the article. She displays no resentment.

ADELE (CONT.'D)

I called the hospital, and I called the magazine... They said they took every precaution... They're bloody well going to pay for this.

NINA

Don't. There's no point.

ADELE

What, they can get away with murder just because they slap a little black strip on the photos? Oh no, missy, they're not going to get away with it.

NINA

Mum, don't. I'm asking you not to get involved. This is about me, not you... (Beat). Mum, I have to get out of here. I have to get out of here or I'll go crazy.

ADELE

I know. I'd like to go somewhere else too, but I don't see how. Where can we go? What about work? If I give up this job and can't find another?

Nina gets up from the couch and slopes off to the bathroom. Adele rips the magazine into teeny tiny pieces.

CUT TO:

71 INT. VARNA. IVAN'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Ivan has returned home. He walks down the corridor to the kitchen. His parents are sitting at the table, waiting for him. The magazine is on the table, folded open to the article. His mother sweeps a hand over her forehead in embarrassment. His father wordlessly slides the pages over to his son. Ivan casts his eyes over the article. He doesn't understand.

IVAN'S MOTHER

That's Nina!

IVAN'S FATHER

We don't want you to have anything to do with that girl or whatever she is!

IVAN'S MOTHER

Slow down! We don't know the whole story yet...

IVAN'S FATHER

We know everything we need to know. End of discussion.

Ivan is gobsmacked. He glances over the article a second time.

His eyes alight on the photos. Suddenly he darts to the kitchen sink, as if he's about to wretch. He coughs, and then sprays cold water on to his face.

CUT TO:

72 EXT. VARNA. TONY'S BAR. NIGHT

The lights go out on the Tony's bar sign. Nina is waiting by the side of the road. Tony pulls down the metal blinds outside the bar.

TONY

Hey, what are you doing standing there like a lamp post?

NINA

Waiting for Ivan.

TONY

Need a lift?

NINA

No, I'll wait thanks. He said he'd be late...

TONY

You sure?

NINA

Sure...

Tony waves goodbye and climbs into his Russian-made UAZ 4x4. Nina waves back. As Tony drives off, Ivan's Golf GT approaches slowly from the other direction. The car slows. Nina starts to walk towards the car. Ivan changes his mind and speeds off.

CUT TO:

72B. EXT. VARNA. CAMERA CAR IVAN. NIGHT

In the rearview mirror, Nina standing alone in the middle of the street, getting smaller and smaller.

CUT TO:

73 INT. SOFIA. POLICE STATION. NIGHT

The present day.

In sequence, ID documents for Nina's mother Adele Samac, Mirko Samac, and then Nina as a girl.

The policeman scrutinizes them closely. Medical records are strewn over the table. He looks closely at them too, then gets to his feet and goes over to the window. From his POV we see the city by night. The streetlights glint back from his almond-shaped eyes.

CUT TO:

74 EXT. VARNA. TONY'S BAR. NIGHT

The flashback resumes.

The bar is empty. Nina tallies up her tips. Tony closes the cash register and downs a vodka in one. Visibly drunk, he shoots her a louche look.

TONY

Haven't seen much of that Ivan round here. Did you dump him or something?

NINA

Yeah.

Tony doesn't necessarily believe her, not that it matters.

TONY

How'd you do?

NINA

Not bad.

Tony hands her an envelope with her month's wages.

TONY

I put a little extra in for you. The place has been really jumping since you started working here. You deserve it.

NINA

Thanks.

TONY

Get the bottle of vodka out of the freezer. Time to celebrate, you and me.

Nina gets the bottle and two shot glasses.

TONY (CONT.'D)
You're pretty quick on the uptake,
no?

Nina is aware that things are moving into unknown territory. She doesn't seem to mind. She fills her glass a second time and knocks it back in one.

TONY (CONT.'D)
Leaving me high and dry, are you?

Nina fills the glasses once more. Tony comes over, cinches her round the waist and pulls her in close. A second later, he's kissing her neck and feeling her up. There's no coercion involved. Nina lets him do as he pleases. A little tipsy, she's swept up in something she doesn't want to stop.

Nina turns away from him, leans forward and guides him into her. She is wholly successful in ensuring that he doesn't notice the way she is differently formed.

CUT TO:

75 EXT. VARNA. STREET. NIGHT

The road that runs along the port is completely deserted. A full moon lights up the sky. Nina staggers drunkenly along the pavement. Her face is a tableau of emotions. Not only has she lost her virginity, she has just got her own back on the world. With mussed up hair and disillusionment in her eyes, she suddenly looks considerably more grown up.

CUT TO:

76 INT. SAMAC FLAT. NIGHT

Nina slips out of her shoes to avoid making any noise. She shuts the door. Adele is sleeping soundly in her bed.

CUT TO:

Nina's clothes are dropped into the laundry basket. The shower rains down on Nina's body, washing the day away.

FADE TO BLACK

77 EXT. SOFIA. STREET. HOSPITAL. DAY

An unremarkable middle-aged man dressed in grey is walking along the pavement.

Behind him is the entrance to the hospital where Nina Samac is hospitalized. The man crosses the road and steps towards a parked saloon. In the rearview mirror we see the man lean in towards the window. Inside the car are two other men.

MAN

Intensive care, first floor. One man on guard. Basement and service stairs both unguarded.

The man walks off without another word. The car merges into the traffic, passing the man as it drives off.

CUT TO:

77B SOFIA. POLICE PATROL CAMERA CAR. DAY

The car carrying the policeman and his uniformed driver does a U-turn and pulls up alongside the crooks' car. The policeman turns slightly. Something catches his eye.

CUT TO:

78 INT. VARNA. TONY BAR. NIGHT

We return to the flashback.

Tony is standing behind his bar, laughing like a lunatic. He's drunk as usual. A number of his regulars sit at the counter. They're all shitfaced, and they're all laughing in a vulgar manner.

TONY

Crap, the whole story! I got to know her very well, if you know what I mean. She's a woman from the tip of her toes to the top of her crown... And everything in between. Just jealous bar talk if you ask me...

CUSTOMER

If you ask me, you only gave us half the story... And then she pulled out her todger. I'm not surprised you said it was an unforgettable night!

Sniggers and out-of-control laughter.

TONY

You can only dream of a piece of
ass like her! I thank my lucky
stars for the real life
experience...

CUSTOMER 2

You can thank your lucky stars for
turning you on to a whole new
experience!

Another tidal wave of laughter.

TONY

All right, that's it you dickhead!
Get the hell out of here, the lot
of you. If you want to see a freak
go look at your wives, not my baby
doll...

The customers haul themselves out of the bar, still
doubled over with laughter. Tony drains his glass. His
gaze is lost in the distance. There is bitterness in his
face.

CUT TO:

79 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. DAY

Hands scoop up paper money. Adele and Nina are counting
out their savings, the money they'll need to travel and
to pay for Nina's operations.

ADELE

(Changing register)
We'll have to get it changed up
before we leave...

NINA

This is crazy. We'll get in big
trouble if we're caught. Going back
to Moscow again...

ADELE

Not this time we're not. We're
having nothing to do with that lot!
They got the diagnosis wrong,
remember! This time we're doing
things as I say... Get your stuff
ready.

FADE TO BLACK

80 EXT. FRENCH BORDER. CAMERA CAR. NIGHT

The French border crossing on the autoroute. The group of Eastern European immigrants on the minibus includes Adele and Nina, visibly weary from the long journey. The minibus driver pulls up to the customs post. He gets out and hands all of the passports and visas papers to a French gendarme. The customs official comes over to the minibus. He trains his torch over the passengers' faces. The driver follows the officer into his little booth. Whatever they're doing, it keeps them busy a while. Some of the illegal immigrants in the minibus are unflustered; others are petrified, including Nina and Adele.

CUT TO:

81 EXT. MARSEILLE. CAMERA CAR. DAWN

Early morning light illuminates Marseille. The city slips rapidly past the minibus window. The minibus stops outside the railway station in the centre of town. The driver gets out and opens the sliding door. Adele and Nina are the first to hop out. Suitcases and large, shapeless bags are hauled out of the luggage compartment.

Nina's face is etched with tiredness, fear and uncertainty.

CUT TO:

82 INT. MARSEILLE. HOSPITAL. ULTRASOUND ROOM. DAY

The room is very modern and very clean, as you would expect of a prestigious French clinic. A female doctor is performing an ultrasound. The images appear on screen. Nina has other examinations as part of a thorough checkup.

CUT TO:

The surgery ward corridor looks like a long, immaculately white tunnel. Nina is laid out on a hospital bed pushed by two male nurses. Sound and image distort as the anaesthetic takes effect.

CUT TO:

The French surgeon's face almost completely concealed behind a mask, plastic hair cap and a giant pair of glasses.

DOCTOR GERMANE

(In French)

Nothing to worry about, Nina, we'll
sort everything out, I promise.

The effect of the anaesthetic blurs the POV shot. The
operating theatre lights fade the screen to white.

CUT TO:

83 INSERT/INT. STUDIO MONTAGE. DAY

An unconscious slow motion sequence from Nina's life: A
group of boys undresses Nina as a little girl and teases
her. Teenagers beat up and spit on Mirko. Nina as a girl,
naked before a team of leering doctors. Lastly, an image
of a strikingly handsome, shadowy man who strokes little
Nina's hair before walking up the steps to a ship. Total
silence reigns throughout this insert.

END OF STUDIO MONTAGE

84 INT. MARSEILLE. HOSPITAL. ROOM. DAY

Nina resurfaces after the anaesthetic. Close-ups of
Doctor Germane and Adele gradually resolve into focus.

DOCTOR GERMANE

How are you feeling?

Nina barely manages to motion with her hand.

DOCTOR GERMANE (CONT.'D)

It all went perfectly. You'll feel
discomfort when you urinate, but
within a couple of months
everything will be back to normal.
You may need to take some pills.
We'll have to wait for the results
of the analysis, though from the
looks of it you hardly suffer from
a lack of oestrogen. You won't be
able to have children, but you knew
that already knew...

Nina's eyes head for the heavens, as if in thanks for an
end to her troubles. Adele manages a sorrowful half-
smile.

ADELE

Thank you...

FADE TO BLACK

85 EXT. MARSEILLE. RESTAURANT. NIGHT

Nina and Adele are sitting opposite one another at a table on the terrace of a small restaurant, looking out over the sea. Glasses clink, and each of them takes a long drink. In the background, the Port of Marseille.

ADELE

Now that everything's finally sorted out, we should start thinking about the future. Life's pretty tough back home. We're on our own... For years we've only really thought about...

NINA

Mum, what's eating you?

ADELE

I'm not sure how much more I'll be able to help you... It may be best for you to go someplace for university, then one day emigrate to a country like this. Somewhere that has opportunities...

NINA

Mum, there's plenty of time to think all that stuff over...

Adele lets it drop.

CUT TO:

86 INT./EXT. MARSEILLE. MOTORWAY SERVICE STATION.
TOILETS. NIGHT

Adele and Nina are in the service station toilets. After washing her hands and face, Adele briefly examines her face in the mirror. Nina emerges from the toilet cubicle in some pain.

ADELE

Is it sore?

NINA

Yes. It burns.

ADELE

Come on, we'd better get a move on.

CUT TO:

Adele and Nina are the last to get into the minibus, which is waiting for them, engine running. The minibus drives off.

CUT TO:

87 EXT. FRENCH BORDER. CAMERA CAR. DAWN

The road flashes past at high speed. The French border and customs post appears some way ahead.

The minibus halts at the checkpoint. A gendarme waves the driver through. Nina lets out a sigh.

ADELE

No need to worry, getting back out
is always easier.

Rural views drift by outside the window. Mountains are weakly silhouetted against the dawn sky.

CUT TO:

88 INT. VARNA. SAMAC FLAT. DAY

Vigorous rubbing with a cloth on the floor to shift a stubborn stain from the old tiles. Adele finishes cleaning the floor and stands up. Gingerly, she stretches her aching back. She picks up a number of objects and puts them in their rightful place. Other items - old clothes and a smattering of items from her past - are flung into the rubbish bin. When everything looks spic and span, Adele walks into the bathroom.

CUT TO:

The bath tap opening and beginning to fill the tub with water. An out-of-focus Adele starts to undress. She rubs a soapy sponge over her legs, over her still snowy-white neck. Her hand halts at her chest, as if she feels a twinge of pain. She tries to grab the wall but her strength has vanished. She sinks back. In the background, the sound of a slamming door.

Nina looks in. Her face turns white as a sheet. Her mother is lying unconscious in the water, her face beneath the surface. Nina hauls her mother's body out of the bath and desperately tries to revive her.

CUT TO:

89 EXT. VARNA. CEMETERY. DAY

Tears dripping on marble, flowers on a grave... Nina is sitting by her mother's headstone. Nina's eyes are red and moist; she is all cried out. Danka places one hand on Nina's shoulder, and with her other offers her an envelope.

DANKA

She left this with me to give to you... She even planned for this.

Nina takes the envelope. All it contains is money.

CUT TO:

90 EXT. SOFIA. CENTRAL STATION. DAY

We pan around the central station. A sign reads: SOFIA. A train pulls in to platform two. A few passengers alight, including Nina, who is dragging cases behind her.

CUT TO:

91 EXT. SOFIA. CAMERA CAR TAXI. DAY

Bulgaria's capital files past through the window. The town is only a little more chaotic than Varna is. Nina is impassive as she sizes up this new world.

CUT TO:

92 INT. SOFIA. NINA'S FLAT. DAY

Nina's young hand places money into a woman's wrinkled hand. The woman counts through the money.

LADY

I'm over there, in the building opposite. Don't hesitate to call me if you need anything.

NINA

Thanks.

The woman leaves and closes the door behind her. Nina's new flat isn't bad. The small, respectable apartment is partially furnished with a bed, and has a view out over Sofia. Nina puts her things away. It doesn't take long. On her bedside table she places a framed photo of Adele and a book.

Her clothes go in the wardrobe. Now that's out of the way, Nina counts through her nest egg, slightly diminished after these outgoings.

CUT TO:

93 EXT./INT. SOFIA. UNIVERSITY. DAY

The prestigious Sofia State University's buildings are austere and solemn. Dressed in sober, good-girl clothes, Nina walks timidly up to the entrance.

CUT TO:

A mature but still very attractive woman sits at her desk in the University. Nina hesitates as she approaches.

FEMALE CLERICAL WORKER

Are you looking for someone?

NINA

I wanted to find out about university courses.

FEMALE CLERICAL WORKER

Enrolment's finished for this year. What faculty were you interested in?

NINA

Medicine...

FEMALE CLERICAL WORKER

Come back in February. Bring along your school leaving certificate, birth certificate, proof of residence and a piece of ID. Administration is open to the public on Monday mornings...

Disappointment scuds like a cloud over Nina's face.

NINA

All right. Thank you.

The lady watches Nina walks off.

CUT TO:

Carefree students chatting away outside the university building.

CUT TO:

94 INT. SOFIA. HOTEL HR OFFICE. DAY

An old man hands Nina an apron.

OLD MAN

Maria, take her to the changing room. She'll be working with you today and we'll give her her own floor tomorrow.

The tiny middle-aged cleaner grimaces as if this was the last thing she needed. Nina demurely follows her co-worker.

CUT TO:

95 INT. SOFIA. HOTEL. DAY

Bed sheets being put onto a bed. The older cleaner, Maria, emerges from the hotel bathroom with dirty towels in her hands.

MARIA THE CLEANER

Flooded the bathroom, the last lot. Grab the bucket and give us a hand.

Nina finishes making the bed. Maria barges in.

MARIA THE CLEANER (CONT.'D)

Let me show you how...! Pull the sheets tighter... And double back the bedspread under the pillow.

The woman shows how it's done. A young woman dressed in a receptionist's uniform pokes her head into the room.

SUPERVISOR

Who did 132?

MARIA THE CLEANER

Something wrong with it?

SUPERVISOR

The windows need cleaning and there's an inch of dust on top of that wardrobe...

MARIA THE CLEANER

How'm I supposed to get up there without a stepladder? I mentioned it to Lala, he said there's no stepladders around!

SUPERVISOR

Get her to do it. She's tall enough
to reach from a chair!

The Supervisor exits without waiting for a reply.

MARIA THE CLEANER

Go to 132, I'll finish here. Get a
move on, we're behind schedule as
it is.

CUT TO:

96 INT. SOFIA. HOTEL. STAFF CANTEEN. DAY

The staff canteen, located in the basement, could pass for a prison canteen. It's in a large, squalid room a world away from the sober elegance of the hotel. Carrying her tray, Nina sits down with some of the other cleaners.

MARIA THE CLEANER

Don't be put off. It's knacker-ing
when you start, but you'll soon get
used to it... I brought up two kids
on the proceeds of this job...

CLEANER 2

Don't listen to a word she says!
You're young and beautiful, you're
wasted in a place like this.

MARIA THE CLEANER

What are you blathering on about?
People are happy to have any kind
of job these days...

CLEANER 2

(Munching away)
Yeah, right...

Maria the cleaner gobbles up her food as if she were on borrowed time. Nina barely picks at hers. She looks around. Almost all of the male employees are balding and grey. The young supervisor we saw earlier comes over to the table with some sheets of paper.

SUPERVISOR

Next week's shifts. Don't lose
them.

She walks off again.

MARIA THE CLEANER

Don't take her personally. She may be a bit of a sourpuss but her heart's in the right place. Just don't contradict her. She's a bit of a smart cookie, that one. Started working here six months ago, slept with the manager and now she's got a plum job. No bad thing, she's a widow and has kids to feed...

Nina stares at Maria.

MARIA THE CLEANER (CONT.'D)

You should eat something.

Nina says nothing.

CUT TO:

97 INT. SOFIA. HOTEL. ROOM. DAY

Rubbish bins are emptied into a large trash can. Nina swaps dirty ashtrays for clean ones. That's it, the room's done. The supervisor suddenly appears.

SUPERVISOR

There's no soap in 150!

NINA

There's none left. The storekeeper said he'll be getting some more in tomorrow.

SUPERVISOR

I wasn't talking to you.

(To Maria the cleaner)

Send her to upstairs and see if they have someone to send down to you.

The supervisor flounces out.

MARIA THE CLEANER

I told you not to contradict her! Now you'd better do as you're told and go upstairs.

CUT TO:

Nina walking along the corridor, pulling off her gloves and her apron.

She flings them to the floor. At this precise moment the supervisor walks out of a room. Her expression is instantly aggressive.

SUPERVISOR

What do you think you are doing,
you fool?

Nina slaps her round the face. The supervisor flops dramatically to the floor.

CUT TO:

98 INT. SOFIA. STATE-RUN FACTORY. DAY

Like her mother before her, Nina is now working on an assembly line at one of the country's few large factories. The architecture of the place is not dissimilar to the architecture we saw in the opening scenes. Nina is doing her best, but she's having a tough time keeping up. The bell goes for lunch break. Exhausted, Nina heads off with the other workers towards one of the corridors.

In the background, the grating metallic noise of a bus's engine.

CUT TO:

99 EXT. SOFIA. BUS. EVENING

The city moves past languidly. Signs, lampposts, people coming and going, the centre of the capital is all a-bustle. Nina is standing near the doors. She is surrounded by other faces of all types: pretty, ugly, young and old... The bus stops. Nina gets off.

CUT TO:

100 INT. SOFIA. PUB. EVENING

The pub is packed out with a predominantly young clientele. It is incredibly smoky. There's a heavy background swell of music and buzzing voices. Nina finds a place at the bar. She pulls a banknote out of her wallet - she's down to her last few.

BARMAN

What'll it be?

NINA

A beer.

The barman goes over to the draught taps and fills a glass. Nina lights a cigarette and takes a look around. A number of punters check her out, including a striking looking young woman. Like Nina, Anna has an intelligent gleam in her eye.

ANNA

Another beer, Alex.

The barman passes Nina her glass. The two young women are now very close. They exchange an unflinching, clear-eyed look. The barman puts a glass of beer down for Anna. She picks it up and heads back to her friends.

ANNA'S FRIEND

Hey, do you know that girl?

ANNA

Never seen her before in my life...

Nina picks up her change and makes for the exit. Anna, her curiosity piqued, watches as she leaves.

CUT TO:

101 INT. SOFIA. STATE-RUN FACTORY. DAY

The presses are running flat out. The noise is unbearable. Hard as she tries, Nina just can't keep pace with the assembly line. A co-worker comes over to her.

CO-WORKER

What's wrong, Nina? You're giving me the wrong pieces...

NINA

Sorry, I didn't realize.

CO-WORKER

Look, it's quicker if you pick up two pins at once in your left hand, then stick the head on with your right hand... Get that?

NINA

Yes, thank you.

The co-worker leaves. Nina returns to her work and follows the suggestion. It's much, much quicker this way.

CUT TO:

Workers changing in the dressing room: women with muscled backs and unmade-up faces. Rough hands do up solid bras. Thick legs, tired feet. The pay packet contains some banknotes and a few coins. Nina slips it into her handbag.

WORKER

Hear the rumour that they're cutting 50 jobs...? Anybody knows anything more, now's the time to spit it out!

Nobody says a word. An old woman comes over, worry etched onto her face.

OLDER WORKER

Where did you hear that?

WORKER

As if it matters!
We should be setting up a collective so they can't just do what they want. Who wants to be out on their arse one day to the next? Some of us have two or three kids and a jobless husband...

On her bench, Nina looks crestfallen. She may not be talking but she's listening intently.

WORKER (CONT.'D)

We should initiate talks!

WORKER 2

What are you going to say to them?

WORKER

We can say they should cut the number of hours in our shifts and share the work around...

WORKER 2

The exact opposite of what they want to do.

A bitter silence falls.

CUT TO:

102 INT. SOFIA. HOSPITAL. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT. NIGHT

The present day.

Officer Stanko is standing guard outside the unit, along with his plainclothes colleague, Boris, an alert and athletic young man.

BORIS

I'm off to take a looksee.

OFFICER STANKO

Right. When you get back we'll swap.

An aging nurse comes over with a coffee.

NURSE

Here, take this.

Officer Stanko gratefully accepts the small plastic cup of coffee.

OFFICER STANKO

Thanks, I could really do with it.

NURSE

I wanted to ask you something...

The woman is acting a little nervous. The officer glances up as he sips his coffee.

NURSE (CONT.'D)

That woman... Nina Samac.... I've worked here as a nurse for a few months... I didn't recognize her at first, all messed up like that, but her name rings a bell. My family's from Belgrade originally, the last name's Lazarevic... but I was born here.

The officer motions for her to go on.

CUT TO:

103 INT. SOFIA. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

The flashback resumes.

Stock TV footage of the attack on the twin towers, 11 September 2001. The medical staff on night shift apprehensively watch the tragic events unfold. Nina is also there, a few years older, and with a different look. A hospital manager in a suit peers into her room.

HOSPITAL MANAGER

Nina, can you pop into the office
for a second?

Nina follows the manager. Nobody notices, they're all
glued to the TV.

CUT TO:

The lights along the corridor are dimmed. The man strolls
purposefully. Nina follows. In the background, all we
hear is the sound of footsteps and an occasional cough
from a patient somewhere. The staircase at the end of the
ward leads to the health managers' offices, which are
closed at this time of day. The manager pulls out a bunch
of keys and opens a door.

CUT TO:

The man walking into the room and turning on a light. He
gestures for Nina to come in, and then closes the door
behind them. Nina realizes that something is amiss, but
it's too late, the man is already upon her. He makes a
clumsy, lecherous lunge and starts trying to rip her
clothes off. Nina reacts with violence: she knees him in
the balls and then smashes her fist down onto the bridge
of his nose.

HOSPITAL MANAGER (CONT.'D)

(Trying to staunch the blood
from his nose)
Look what you've done, you...
you!

CUT TO:

104 INT. SOFIA. DISCO BAR. NIGHT

We're in one of those weird nightspots where not many
people go but it's fashionable all the same. Nina is
still stunningly beautiful, although her intense,
transparent gaze has hardened. Heavy make-up conceals her
true self. She gyrates on a lap dance podium, not really
bothering to look at any of the punters. Alongside her is
Anna, the girl we met in the pub. The habitués are
generally shady individuals. One of them is Lazar, the
owner, who like a vicious dog is best not looked in the
eye.

CUT TO:

Dressing room. Nina is removing her make up in the
mirror. Anna, next to her, is doing the same.

Balls of cotton wool moistened with cream are dirtied with foundation and make up as their mask comes off.

Nina turns to Anna and throws her a look of disappointment.

ANNA (CONT.'D)

Don't judge me. I am what I am. I'm just trying to help you... I want to get out of here too, don't you worry.

Nina finishes removing her make up. Her face looks softer now, fragile even.

CUT TO:

105 EXT. SOFIA. DISCO BAR EXIT. STREET. NIGHT

We're deep into the night. Very few cars drive past at this time. Nina leaves the disco bar, her shift now over. A pair of bouncers are smoking outside the entrance. Two drunken punters follow Nina out.

PUNTER

How about a lift, Nina?

NINA

No thanks.

Nina moves off. The punter looks angry he's been rebuffed.

PUNTER'S PAL

Let her go, she's not with the plan yet.

(Laughter)

Taken a vote of chastity, that one... Hey, if you're really interested in her, I can talk with Lazar...

PUNTER

Fuck off! I don't need to pay...

CUT TO:

106 INT. SOFIA. NINA'S BEDSIT. DAWN

The same bedsit as before. The framed photo of Adele is still on the bedside table. In the background, the sound of the front door closing shut, followed by the noise of a window being closed. Nina pauses to look out at the city. It all looks calm down there, no different from any other capital city.

A hand opens the bedside table drawer, which is full of small denomination banknotes and coins. Nina flings the evening's tips in with the rest.

CUT TO:

Tired feet soaking in water. A cigarette alight between tapered fingers. Nina is sitting on the side of the bath tub, her skirt hiked above her knees.

CUT TO:

107 INT. SOFIA. INTERNATIONAL HOTEL. NIGHT

The present day.

The policeman and a very distinguished looking woman are in a hotel bar, sitting on a small couch off to one side. The woman glances at the photo of Nina without recognition.

PROSTITUTE

Never seen her before. She's not on the game.

The policeman shows the photos of the two men found dead at Nina Samac's place.

POLICEMAN

How about these two. Ever seen them?

The prostitute reacts slightly.

PROSTITUTE

No.

POLICEMAN

They were found dead at the woman's place.

The prostitute remains impassive. She doesn't look like she wants to cooperate.

POLICEMAN (CONT.'D)

Come on, help me out here.

The woman pulls a business card from her handbag and hand it to the cop. She gets up and leaves.

Close-up of business card: DISCO BAR SOFIA

CUT TO:

108 INT. SOFIA. DISCO BAR. NIGHT

The policeman strides into the disco bar and seats himself at a table. The bouncers throw him sidelong glances. The place looks very much as it did in the earlier scenes, except the lighting now has a purple cast to it. Girls dancing on podiums, late night punters at tables or along the counter. A girl approaches the policeman's table.

POLICEMAN

Does Nina still work here?

The girl flinches, but she seems to have been schooled not to blurt anything out.

WAITRESS

I don't know any Nina. She a dancer or something?

POLICEMAN

Yeah.

The waitress leaves the table and walks over to one of the bouncers. They speak briefly. While pretending to be taking in the show, the policeman takes a furtive glance around. A POV shot shows the bouncer disappearing into a back room and the waitress placing the policeman's order for a vodka with the barman. The girls gyrate on their podiums. The waitress returns with a shot glass of vodka on a tray.

WAITRESS

(Placing the drink on the table)

I asked about your friend. They said she hasn't worked here for a long time... Used to dance here sometimes, once in a while...

The policeman hands the girl a banknote.

WAITRESS

Thanks!

The waitress sashays off. The policeman takes a couple of sips of his vodka. The bouncer returns from the back room, followed by Lazar, the owner. The policeman and Lazar lock eyes.

CUT TO:

109 INT. SOFIA. DISCO BAR. STOREROOM. NIGHT

We return to the flashback.

Lazar lights a cigarette. He is with three men. A girl brings a frozen bottle of vodka and four shot glasses to their table. Lazar fills the glasses. A close-up sequence of all four hoodlums, dull-eyed, their faces blank and scarred.

CUT TO:

110 EXT. SOFIA. COUNTRY ROAD. DAWN

The sky is grey and glowering with low, dark clouds. A small van and a car are parked on the wet tarmac. Behind them, a desolate valley. Nina and Anna are on the back seat of the car. Their pale, resigned faces bear the signs of a beating. Two men are in the front. One of them cradles a pistol on his knee.

CUT TO:

Two young men checking the contents of the crates inside the van. One man jumps down and gestures to the car that everything's ok. The exchange of weapons for humans is completed.

The car's engine starts and it speeds off along the deserted road. The small van heads off in the opposite direction.

CUT TO:

CAMERA CAR

The car with the crooks and the girls shoots down the road. It picks up even more speed as it heads downhill. Nina is the only one holding on to one of grab straps. The young driver makes it look like he knows what he's doing at such reckless speeds. They round a corner and hammer towards a truck parked on the right-hand side of the road, partially in the roadway. The impact is inevitable. There's a almighty bang. The car crumples up, glass explodes all over the place, and smoke starts hissing out of the radiator.

The driver's chest is wrapped sickeningly around the steering wheel. His accomplice's body is draped over the bonnet, half outside the vehicle. Anna is slumped forwards, curled up like a sleeping puppy. Miraculously, Nina is relatively unscathed. She's dazed and freaked out, but it doesn't look like the violent impact did her any major damage. She tries to open the car door but she can't, it's jammed. She desperately tries to haul Anna upright but her pal isn't showing much sign of life. Nina is the only one to survive this tragedy. To extract herself from this hell she has to push her way past the dead bodies.

Close-up: the hoodlum's pistol by the gear lever. Nina's trembling, bleeding hand picking it up.

Nina drags herself out of the car through the broken windscreen. An insistent drizzle beats down on the site of the accident. Nina yanks open the door on Anna's side of the car. She's about to start pulling her out when she realizes that her friend's body is trapped. Dazed, she looks around for help.

CUT TO:

111 EXT. SOFIA. CAMERA CAR. STREET IN THE CENTRE OF TOWN. NIGHT

The present day.

A broken white line in the middle of the road. Some cars driving past on the opposite side of the road. Neon signs along the shopfronts. Neon reflections illuminate and colour the policeman's pensive face as the neon lights blink on and off. He's looking for something.

POLICEMAN

There he is. Pull over.

The driver brakes and comes to a halt at a bus stop. The informer from earlier is waiting. The car window rolls down and the man comes over.

INFORMER (V.O.)

The two men you wanted to know about did some business here in Sofia a few days ago... Guns for girls, for the prostitution trade... Something went wrong...

POLICEMAN

Who was the deal with?

A long silence, as if the informer is unsure whether or not to tell the whole tale.

INFORMER (V.O.)

Zhivkov. Lazar Zhivkov.

The informer walks off along the street. The car drives away.

CUT TO:

112 EXT. SOFIA. NINA'S STREET. SUNSET

The flashback resumes.

It's still raining, but now a ray of sunlight filters through the cloud. A car pulls up to the pavement. Nina gets out, effusive with thanks to the stranger for giving her a lift. Her face is still wet. She is still evidently dazed.

Nina walks along the road, every now and then glancing nervously over her shoulder. The stranger who gave her a lift waits a little before taking off.

CUT TO:

113 INT. SOFIA. NINA'S HOME. NIGHT

Sequence: the open wardrobe emptied of its contents; two cases full of clothes on the bed; clothes over the back of a chair; Nina's soaked and muddy shoes on the floor. In the background, the sound of water running.

CUT TO:

A toilet bag in the sink. On the edge of the sink, a tube of toothpaste and a worn toothbrush. Obscured by steam, Nina's face over the tub full of hot water. She passes her hands over her face briefly, as if calling for divine assistance. A few drops of water drip out of the closed tap. Her hands slide back down from her face. She keeps her eyes closed.

In the background, a metallic noise... Somebody is using a pick to try and jimmy open the front door. Nina hears the noise but doesn't open her eyes straight away. She knows that somebody is trying to break into her house. She is paralyzed by fear. The noise gains in intensity. Nina finds the strength to slowly pull herself up and out of the water. Her trembling fingers find the light switch and kill the lights. The only illumination in the bathroom now is the blue-tinged light of dawn that filters through the window.

We see Nina, in silhouette, go over to the sink. In the background, we hear the lock click open. The door opens and shuts, followed by the sound of muffled footsteps in the dark.

CUT TO:

Two men inching forward in the half-light. Three shots ring out, felling the crooks as if in a video game. Suddenly, the light comes on. Blood begins to pool alongside the two men's dead bodies.

The pistol, still warm, lies on the floor. Nina looks at the scene with fearful detachment.

CUT TO:

The dawn light strengthens, reflecting off the bath full of water. The surface of the water is as calm as a lake on a windless day. In the background, we hear the sound of hands rummaging through the bathroom cabinet. A woman's naked body slips into the water. Almost immediately, red drops begin to expand into the water. Nina's face is still beautiful, even if battered. Her eyes are as transparent as the sea. They are lost in infinity.

Closing credits.