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45 WEST 25TH STREET NEW YORK, NY 10010-2751
(866) 598-8449 (212) 206-8990 FAX (212) 206-1425
INFO@SAMUELFRENCH.COM

THE BALKAN WOMEN
Jules Tasca

Drama / 2nd, 3rd, 4th Acts / Simple set
This meditation on the horror of war set in 1996 brings the spirit of Euripides to a Serbian detention camp for Muslim women. Men and women are pitted against women, Christians against Muslims, and Croats against Serbs in a drama that bares the inner conflicts that result when society is governed by illogical ethnic hatreds. A hard boiled, devoutly Christian guard is torn by conflicting inner voices as he interrogates a prisoner and her mother about an explosion that killed sixteen of his soldiers. The arrival of a new, wounded camp commandant triggers a murder in an inevitable catastrophe reminiscent of ancient tragedy.

Winner of the 1997/98 Barrington Award for Best New Play
"Theatrically bold and politically moving... The dialogue has an odd and effective staidness, as though we're listening to a translation of an ancient work."
Forney

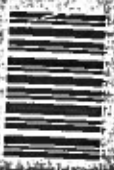
"While the play might have been merely an anti-war tract with a classical gloss, it's instead a profoundly human document in which guilt and innocence are inextricably intertwined."
The Philadelphia Inquirer

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011 44 20 7887 9372
FAX 011 44 20 7887 2161
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SF1 Item

The Balkan Women

by Jules Tasca

SAMUEL FRENCH

VLACO AND ALL WOMEN. Southern Bosnia
VLACO, and we call

VLACO AND ALL MEN. Greater Serbia.

VLACO. All wars begin with the changing of words and phrases.
VLACO AND EVERYONE. And this is war.

VLACO. They stand in the damp yard of our detention
camp where the chill reaches past their clothes and
skin-and-fingers their bones.

(VLACO steps out of the light and crosses to the male
chorus. AMINA and SAMIRA quicken. They rub their
arms to warm themselves.)

SAMIRA. What will they do to us?

AMINA. I don't think they'll do anything to us.

SAMIRA. How can you say that, mother?

JELA. You know what these

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. dirty dogs do to Muslim women.
AMINA. Quiet. Don't lose control of your wits.

(JELA KALJANAO, a girl somewhat older than Samira,
enters with a large bag. She sidles up to SAMIRA and
AMINA.)

JELA. God's great.

AMINA. God is great.

JELA. I'm Jela Kaljano (She offers them a roll from her bag.)
Take it then. Take it. I deliver the stale bread they give
us. Eat whatever they give you.

AMINA. (taking a roll) Thank you.

JELA. (as SAMIRA takes a roll) I counted 125 when they,
marched you women in. Hardly, any space in those
cages, and you...

SAMIRA. Me? What?

JELA. I'd mess up your hair and hunch over.

SAMIRA. Why?

JELA. Don't make yourself look attractive.

JELA. The guards are all men. They don't need much in-
centive to

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. spread your thighs like a wish-
bone—

AMINA. We'll be all right. We'll be all right, Samira.

JELA. I'm sorry you're in here, but it was glorious for who-
ever blew up the fuel depot.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. It was frightening—

JELA. You know anything about it?

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. What would we know?

AMINA. We don't know anything at all.

JELA. Hey, I'm one of you. If I knew who blew their depot,
I'd—

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. kiss her and praise her to Allah.

AMINA. We don't know anything.

SAMIRA. When will they let us go?

JELA. Who knows. I've been here for months. They ques-
tion us over and over. They don't rush anything.
Except when they decide to

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. shoot one of us.

JELA. Then... then they move with

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. fire flying from their asses.

JELA. You hear the

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. pop—

JELA. and one of us is gone—

SAMIRA. Who do they shoot?

JELA. You need names? They shoot us.

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Us. Muslims. How they hate us.
How the bastard Serbs hate us—

JELA. You think they hated you outside. In this place hate is
the ground you stand on. Hate is...

(as VLACO crosses into the scene)

Here comes Vlaco.

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Don't look him in the eye.

(JELA crosses away.)

VLACO. Identification.

(VLACO crosses back to the male chorus.)

JELA-Told you about them here. They need little cause to lash out.

AMINA-Are you all right, daughter. You're shaking, JELA. He would've punched you, you know.

AMINA. You can't talk back to them. Keep quiet and we'll come out of this, Samira. I know it.

SAMIRA. 16 soldiers were in the depot?

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. 16 less barbarians in the world
JELA. Who'll miss them

(Lights fade. Sound punctuates.)

VLACO (addressing the audience) So many times, I begged
VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. God

VLACO. to

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. forgive me for hating them.

VLACO. I knew how easily a man could turn cruel. I saw it
in me.

~~VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Dear Jesus,~~

~~VLACO. I prayed to him.~~

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Jesus, you understand

VLACO. I said... This is war and these are the fanatics who
deny you,

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. O Lord. Make me strong
enough to control my anger at those who deny you.

(Lights cross fade to AMINA and SAMIRA in their cell.)

AMINA. This endless waiting, waiting, waiting, what can we
sell them?... Samira, what's the matter?

SAMIRA. I didn't sleep at all last night. I can't sleep in this
cage.

AMINA. Don't worry. Don't be afraid.

SAMIRA. I'm not afraid. I spent the whole night thinking of
the soldiers in the depot. 16 boys burnt to nothing.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. God help us all

AMINA. I prayed myself asleep.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Why were soldiers in the
depot at that hour.

AMINA. Who knows. War doesn't have a time-clock. It was
their depot. Why're you surprised that they were
abused?

SAMIRA. I thought at that time it would be locked up,
closed down... that it would be...

AMINA. What? What is it?

(JELA enters.)

JELA. Sleep at all? It takes a while. Concrete for a mattress,
I mean. (She passes bread to them.)

AMINA. Oh, thank you.

(AMINA eats. SAMIRA does not.)

What're you doing in this place?

JELA. They told me it was a potential danger to their mili-
tary operation. That's what they told me when I asked.

AMINA. Why did they think that?

JELA. When they came through my village, they saw a
slogan painted on a wall.

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Serbs are shit. Watch were you
walk.

JELA. They had no one to blame so they took me and my
grandfather because the wall was on our street and my
grandfather smiled at their anger, when they saw the
slogan. I don't know where he is. Separated.

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Separated.

JELA. Everyone in the country is--

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. separated.

JELA. Everything in the world is

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. separated.

AMINA. And they don't say when you'll get out?

JELA. No. I've been punched, mauled, raped. And now

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I'm a slave

JELA. in this camp.

SAMIRA. I don't want to stay here like that.

SAMIRA. God is great, mother.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. God be with you.

(Lights fade on SAMIRA and AMINA.)

VLACO. *(addressing the audience)* Some of the guards here do rape these women. I know it's wrong. I know. But it's even encouraged here. Enemy women. It seems such a contradiction. A woman is a sister, a wife, a mother. A man's first drink of life is a woman's breast.

(A light comes up center as a soldier places a chair. AMINA sits.)

But enemy women, madonnas who want to cut your throat. What's a man to make of this contradiction? He uses these women, dying in their soft, moist pouches ~~rightly~~ to relieve himself. A perversion of women, of love, of life. *(VLACO crosses to AMINA.)*

...on Thursday evening, early, say between 6 and 6:30, what were you doing?

AMINA. I was home. Cooking. Rice and a few chicken thighs.

VLACO. On Thursday or the day before did you hear any one speak about the fuel depot in anyway, even in a joking way?

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. I want to know everything, woman.

AMINA. I never heard a word. All we women talk about is our families and water and food, and if the electric will come back. We did nothing.

VLACO. When the blast went off, where were you?

AMINA. We were eating, daughter and me. We were eating. The floor shook, the windows rattled. Smoke, foul smelling smoke seeped into the house, we were scared.

VLACO. You were scared?

AMINA. Yes. Scared, that is was a shelling

VLACO. 16 men.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. 16 men

VLACO. were part of that foul smell.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. 16 men

VLACO. rode on that smoke that crept inside your houses to haunt this whole village until

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Justice

VLACO. is done!

AMINA. The whole war... the whole war's an atrocity. What can I say. You think I gloat over

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. 16 men burnt alive?

AMINA. Well, I don't. Believe me, I don't.

AMINA. I have

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. family

AMINA. in this war.

VLACO. About your daughter.

AMINA. She's a child.

VLACO. She doesn't look like a child to me.

AMINA. She is. She's not even 20 years old yet. She... She was with me. We were eating.

VLACO. What time was that?

AMINA. ...7:30. I know. I know because we always eat at 7:30. My husband always insisted we eat at 7:30, and we kept that schedule even though he and my son...

VLACO. Are where?

AMINA. I'm hoping to hear from them. I want to go home. I want to take my daughter out of this place. She's getting sick. *(pause)*

FEMALE CHORUS. I want to

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. speak to the new commandant. I want to tell him my daughter's not well.

VLACO. Colonel Herak is not well himself. He's not seeing anyone.

AMINA. Colonel Herak?

FEMALE CHORUS. *(whisper)* Branislav Herak

AMINA. *(pause)* Branislav Herak. Who taught at the University before he was

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Branislav Herak...

VLACO. Forget Colonel Herak. I want to know about your

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I have no cause. (pause)

VLACO. Amina Jusic,

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Take off your dress.

AMINA. What?

VLACO. Your dress!

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Remove your dress!

AMINA. Will not.

VLACO. Some of the guards here would walk into this room and, without a word, punch hard your face on the cheek bone. Your face numbs up and stuns you. The rape after that is much easier, Amina Jusic.

AMINA. Don't... don't do this.

VLACO. Remove your dress, must I tear it off you?

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. How could you call yourself a Christian and do this? How?

VLACO. What does that have to do with it? What does

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Christ mean to someone like you?

VLACO. How dare you who don't worship him use him to defend your O. so-sacred-skin?

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Remove your dress!

AMINA. I'll report this to the commandant. Colonel Herak's not a man who'd allow this.

VLACO. You think Colonel Herak gives a damn about you?

AMINA. I can't believe such a man wouldn't care.

VLACO. Don't you know what Muslim men do to our women when they get their hands on them. I've seen the results, Amina Jusic.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. It's wrong! It's wrong!

AMINA. Whoever does this! All of it is wrong!

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Stop it!

VLACO. No one can stop it.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. How many has your husband raped?

VLACO. Or even your son?

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. None! None!

AMINA. They would never do this!

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Remove your dress!

VLACO. I could rip it from your body, but I want you to remove it.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. No.

AMINA. In the name of the

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. compassionate merciful God,

AMINA. please, don't.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Please.

AMINA. I can't do such a thing.

VLACO. You can't. You can't. So you can't. Well, maybe your

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. teen-aged daughter

VLACO. will be more

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. forthcoming.

AMINA. Lieutenant, she's my child.

VLACO. She's a child with

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. hips and breasts.

VLACO. a ripe child. Listen to me. I knew some of the men in that depot. Some were combat engineers, making repairs on the pipes. Some were guards. Young boys, and they could act silly too and talk about home and think about girls. Now they're dead. So don't tell me how loving and caring your people are.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Your child. Your child.

VLACO. I'll just go and

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. fetch your child.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. No!

AMINA. She's not well. She's... she's sick...

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Let me speak to the Colonel, please.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. I ask you one last time...

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I want to see the colonel.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Remove your dress or I'll remove hers!

HERAK (to VLACO) Bring her to my quarters at noon.

(as VLACO wheels the chair off)

VLACO. Yes, Sir.

AMINA. Thank you. Thank you, Colonel Samira, he'll help us.
SAMIRA. He's a Serb Colonel. Herak. Herak. He's one of the worse butchers in the Serb army.

AMINA. I knew him when he was a boy. He and his friend couldn't stomach army food. Your grandfather sold them milk and cheese and eggs. So many years ago and he remembers. Oh, Samira!

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. He remembers. God—
AMINA. is great—

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. God!

AMINA. watches over us.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. God is answering my Prayers
Branislav Herak will help us.

SAMIRA. He's the enemy, mother. He's Vlaco with more brass on his uniform. I don't care how much milk he bought from grandfather. He's a Serb.

AMINA. But

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. he remembers...

AMINA. don't you understand?

(Lights fade. Sound punctuates Music.)

VLACO. (addressing the audience) Milk. He bought milk here years and years ago. For centuries cattle grazed the land where we now have this camp. Perhaps some of the cattle that fed here made the milk that resins in the bones of Branislav Herak. There was a small cabin on the spot. When we took this area and fenced in the camp, the cabin became the commandant's billet. It's more comfortable than any place in the camp.

(Lights come up on HERAK behind a table in his wheel chair and AMINA sitting in a chair.)

That day at noon I personally brought Amina Jusie to the Colonel.

AMINA. (as they quicken) ...and even before the fire was put out they dragged us from our houses. All the women in the area. Pulling us by our hair. Kicking us. Biting us without mercy with their rifles. My daughter and I know nothing. When can we go home?

HERAK. Until we find the women responsible for this, nobody can go anywhere.

AMINA. You're God here. You can do anything.

HERAK. Of course. I can. I could send you through the gate right now. But I won't. Of all the women taken, some one here must know something. Some one will talk soon, and the innocent will be released. Are you being mistreated here?

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. (as AMINA rises) Mistreated.

AMINA. We get stale bread. No chance to wash up.

AMINA. And I was

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. forced

AMINA. to take my clothes off.

HERAK. Who did that?

HERAK. I want to know. Which of the guards did this?

AMINA. I don't want to say. I'd like to even tell my daughter.

I just want you to know. This is not just a place to wait for questioning.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. It's a prison.

HERAK. I won't tolerate my soldiers doing this. Just give me his name.

AMINA. I won't. I won't, because I fear for my daughter. She's too young to be in a place like this. It's making her sick.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I'm afraid.

AMINA. I'm afraid. Colonel. What am I going to do?

HERAK. Where's your family? Your husband?

AMINA. (taking out her picture) This is my husband, Ekrem, and my sister, Nedra. Jusie is the family name. I don't know where they are. If they're being held some place... if you could find them for me...

AMINA. Thank you. Think you for seeing me. I do for VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. to take Samira Jusic. better now.

(VLACO escorts AMINA off. HERAK rises with a cup of coffee from the tray. VLACO re-enters.)

HERAK. Lieutenant.

VLACO. Yes, Sir.

HERAK. Can't you find some fruit for these women?

VLACO. We're trying. Sir. Since the depot explosion, we're over loaded with prisoners.

HERAK. (*fucking up an apple from the tray*) Where did this come from?

VLACO. Our mess.

HERAK. We're giving these women some. And showers. Let them use the showers.

VLACO. We're getting around to arranging a schedule. We don't have much in the way of facilities.

HERAK. So I noticed this morning. By the way, Lieutenant, who interrogated this Jusic woman?

VLACO. I did, Sir.

HERAK. Oh, and what did you find out?

VLACO. She won't say anything, but I have a notion that she's holding back. I can tell. Either she knows something or she knows her daughter knows something.

HERAK. I see. Then we'll eventually have to get around to the daughter, I suppose.

VLACO. Definitely, Colonel. Definitely.

(*Lights fade. Sound punctuates.*)

VLACO. (*addressing the audience*) The daughter. Samira. The daughter's skin was light brown and always looked moist. If it had just been rubbed with oil. Her eyes were big almond eyes, and her face gave an instant flush to men's desire. A priest would say the

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. devil had spoken to these men VLACO. (*re-enters*) Several of the guards had already heeded the devil and planned

(*Lights come up on AMINA and SAMIRA standing in their cell. JELA enters with the bread bag and on her shoulder and a small sack of apples. AMINA and SAMIRA quicken. JELA hands them bread and an apple each.*)

JELA. It's out.

AMINA. What's out?

JELA. It's out that you know Herak.

AMINA. When he was a boy years ago.

SAMIRA. A lot of good it does us

JELA. He was civil to her. He ordered the fruit, and you're going to get to use the shower.

AMINA. How'd you find that out?

JELA. The women sweeping outside his cabin. They heard him tell Vlaeo.

SAMIRA. So what, Jela? So we got an apple. We're still in this SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. damned cage.

JELA. It seems like nothing to you. But it could be to our advantage that he'll listen to her. It could be that...

(VLACO enters the scene. JELA looks at him. Then she scurries off. He crosses to the cell and opens it.)

AMINA. What is it now?

VLACO. You asked for showers, didn't you? The Colonel, said you should have showers... now...

(AMINA and SAMIRA start to exit the cell. VLACO stops SAMIRA.)

One at a time. There's only one shower pipe, you're not going to cuddle under it.

(AMINA hesitates.)

You bitched for showers.

SAMIRA. It's not a special favor to be decent. AMINA. Samira, be quiet.

SAMIRA. Go ahead, mother. You go first. You won't be that long.

(AMINA returns drying her hair with her scarf.)

HERAK And you were just gathering that information from her while you ~~hand-her-dress-~~

VLACO. I was trying to get her to talk, Sir.

AMINA What is it? ~~What's the matter?~~ Samira?

SAMIRA. I'm not hurt, mother. ~~Ernest~~ hurt.

AMINA (looking at VLACO) Because the Colonel came by.

HERAK Go about your duties, Lieutenant. ~~My lock this-er-~~

VLACO. Yes, Sir. (VLACO exits.)

AMINA Thank you, Colonel.

SAMIRA Thank you, Colonel? Why thank him? ~~It's only-~~

SAMIRA-AND-FEMALE-CHORUS-All of us-

SAMIRA You expect him to come by every time one of these

animals wants

SAMIRA-AND-FEMALE-CHORUS- to fight the war with him

AMINA Colonel, you see how it is?

HERAK Go take your shower now.

(AMINA hands SAMIRA the scarf. SAMIRA shakes her head and exits.)

HERAK (to AMINA) I'll speak to the Lieutenant and...

AMINA It won't matter who you speak to. My daughter's

right. This time... this time you came by. I'm afraid

now more than before

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I'm afraid.

HERAK Lieutenant Vlaco's convinced that you and your

daughter know something about the depot explosion.

AMINA Us? Nothing. No. We... we just get so scared when

he asks all those questions that we ~~stumble-and-he-~~

thinks we're holding back. ~~It's just fight.~~ That's why

I beg you to take Samira on as a housekeeper. If you

won't let us go home, do me this kindness.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Please.

AMINA You see how pretty she is. If you don't help, one of them will get to her. I see the way they look at her.

AMINA-AND-FEMALE-CHORUS-They'll get her one day alone

HERAK I've given the order that no woman in this camp who's obeying the regulations is to be mistreated.

AMINA. ~~A man who's out-to-rape-doesn't-care-about-orders.~~ And what woman is going to report the man or men, what would happen to her after that?

HERAK ~~This-is-not-an-easy-command-for-me.-In-a-~~ field office. But I promise I'll do my best to...

AMINA. Good intentions won't help. Some of those men are vicious... I can see to

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. save my daughter,

AMINA. I must tell you.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. Tell me what?

(AMINA kneels in front of his chair.)

AMINA I tell you about me only to

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. save my daughter.

AMINA. She would die before she'd let one of your men take her like that...

AMINA-AND-FEMALE-CHORUS-She would die,

AMINA. I tell you-

HERAK I understand, but...

AMINA You don't understand. Twenty... twenty years ago when you left this dot on the map of Yugoslavia you...

HERAK What? What is it?

AMINA You left me... AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Samira. HERAK (backing up his chair) What? AMINA. Yes. HERAK I left you... what... what possessed you to make up a story, like this? I've heard of people doing anything when desperate, but if you expect me to... AMINA. I tell you the

HERAK More than your nose nicked this morning, Lieutenant
VLACO I was merely trying to pressure her, Sir. I was trying
to scare her a bit.

HERAK Be that as it may, we will extract information from
these women by interrogation not by brutality. We
be methodical-but-professional, persistent-but-not
inhuman. Do I make myself clear?

VLACO Yes, Sir-I always thought of our men here as human
HERAK Well, perhaps, some of these detained women think
of us as inhuman when we remove their clothes.
Think of us as

HERAK AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS savages-
HERAK when we-

HERAK AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS rape them.
VLACO I won't deny it, goes on, Sir.

HERAK I can see it in these women's faces. I can see it go
on here. And I know all sides - The Greeks, the My
lims - and, yes, us, we all have these these lapses of
human decency, but... (He holds his stomach as if a pain
came to him.)

VLACO Are you all right, Sir?
HERAK I'm all right. It's my wound reminding me of the
war. The

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS pain of war's

HERAK Inside me now, Lieutenant. (He sits in his chair.) I
mend. I just wish it didn't take so damned long. Stuck
here while my guts mend. In a women's camp... what
was I saying?

VLACO Lapses. Lapses is human decency.

HERAK Yes. Yes. No more, Lieutenant. No more rape here.
HERAK AND MALE CHORUS None.

HERAK Do you hear me, Lieutenant?

VLACO I understand, Sir. I understand you're not used to this
HERAK Used to what? What is it you want to say? Speak up,
Lieutenant.

VLACO I just... I just want to point out to the Colonel that I

guard does twenty four hours a day. There's no work,
Sir, in the hearts of these men.

VLACO AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS Rage and vengeance are
human too?

VLACO They saw what was done to their own kind.

HERAK What own kind? These are

HERAK AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS helpless women.

HERAK Some of them are still

HERAK AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS children.

VLACO All I'm saying is that you can issue an order to

VLACO AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS hold back the sea,

VLACO Sir, but she set right wash right over you...

HERAK Lieutenant Vlaco..

VLACO Sir?

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS Hold back the sea
HERAK or it will wash over you.

VLACO I'll give the order, Sir, but...

HERAK But what? (Pause) Are you afraid to talk to me?
What is it?

VLACO Sir, some of these men served with you in the 9th
Regiment.

HERAK As well as you, Lieutenant.

VLACO Yes, Sir, as well as I. Some of them last night talked
about Sonja's Kon-Tiki.

HERAK The Kon-Tiki, the bar, yes. So?

VLACO So... well... it was also a brothel, Sir. In the back.
The front was a bar, but in the back... anyway, they
talked about how you visited Sonja's...

HERAK (frowning) Lieutenant...

VLACO Sir, I have to tell you what they're saying.

HERAK I hadn't... I hadn't seen my wife in months. I paid...
I paid, yes. Yes, I did... I paid.

VLACO As many of the officers of the 9th did. But those
women, Sir, were Great and Muslim girls.
HERAK AND 1/4 MALE CHORUS I paid those girls.

HERAK. I DON'T WANT TO

HERAK AND 1/2 MALE CHORUS. discuss it further.

HERAK AND ALL MALE CHORUS. See that she's here in the morning.

(HERAK turns his wheel chair and moves away from VIACO. VIACO stares at him a beat. Then VIACO exits.

HERAK drops his chin in his hands. Lights fade. Sound punctuates.)

VIACO. (Addressing the audience. As lights slowly come up a SAMIRA and AMINA in a freeze standing in the exercise yard

The rules of the camp were clear. The rules of the camp were strict. All the women here knew the rule of the camp. They all knew how dangerous it was to break the rules, but some did...

(A shot-tinges-out-and-quickens SAMIRA and AMINA.)

AMINA. Oh-my-God!

SAMIRA. What is it? (We hear a scream off.) It's Jela!

(JELA enters crying.)

AMINA. Jela...

SAMIRA. What happened? Can you speak?

AMINA. In the name of Allah, tell us.

JELA. Nadia... Nadia...

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. They killed her! Shoul her! Nadia!

SAMIRA. No...

JELA. One of the truck drivers... turned her in to the guard

AMINA. Turned her in for what? --

VIACO. (entering the scene) For trying to smuggle out into

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I want to pray over her

JELA. before those...

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. bastards

JELA. throw her in a

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. hole like a dead dog.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Let us all pray for her.

VIACO. Only one of you! Only one! This is not a state funeral!

JELA. Then let me go to her...

VIACO. You go ahead then.

(JELA exits. Pause. Then AMINA and SAMIRA turn away from VIACO.)

Don't go away. I have an assignment for your daughter.

SAMIRA. Me? An assignment.

AMINA. What is it now? You're not going to separate us? She's not well.

VIACO. The Colonel. He wants your daughter to... to work as his housekeeper.

(Pause. AMINA looks relieved, even smiles slightly.)

SAMIRA. Housekeeper?

VIACO. In the cabin. Yes. Housekeeper.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Housekeeper

SAMIRA. to him?

VIACO. A guard will come in the morning.

He'll give you a clean smock.

Belgrade I have three daughters. I understand. I won't never ~~be~~ ~~heart~~ ~~to~~ ~~say~~ you'll be safe here.

SAMIRA. How safe can I be with a

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Slaughterer like you?

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. I'm a soldier.

SAMIRA. That girl they shot—Nadia—was 19.

HERAK. In a camp like this...

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. A prison.

HERAK. In a

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. Prison

HERAK. Like this, it's a capital crime to give information

the enemy.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. Yes, it's a prison,

HERAK. Not a girl's school. That girl knew the chance she

took. The message she tried to smuggle out was the

fact that I'm here in this camp and which building it

is. She was a danger.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. There are terrorists out there

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Freedom fighters.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. Terrorists.

HERAK. Who'd like to have that information.

SAMIRA. And your conscience is not bothered that a teen

aged girl was shot through the skull?

HERAK. She was warned when she came here. You all were

The enemy comes in any gender, any age. In Goradaz

where I took shrapnel, high school boys fired the mortar

rounds. We returned fire. It's our duty. We're soldiers.

AMINA. There don't ever

AMINA. There don't ever

(SAMIRA exits. HERAK sits in his chair and stares at her as the lights fade. Music punctuates.)

(as lights slowly come up on AMINA and SAMIRA)

VLACO. (addressing the audience) Now you see Herak's riddle.

The dynamic of war is this: the enemy is not just another

human being; the enemy is flawed; the enemy is a

FLAWED-OR-A

FLAWED-OR-A

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Great Satan

FLAWED-OR-A

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Arab infidel;

VLACO. and if the enemy's flawed presence in this world

is an

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. absolute evil;

VLACO. and your presence here is an

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. absolute good;

VLACO. then you have no choice but to

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. kill him.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. a snake at a baby's throat

(AMINA and SAMIRA quicken.)

AMINA. And so you made coffee

HERAK. Yes. mother, yes. And he sat there and drank, the

whole pot. Why must you have every detail? For tench

I cooked him eggs. Then he went out with VLACO

where I took shrapnel, high school boys fired the mortar

rounds. We returned fire. It's our duty. We're soldiers.

AMINA. There don't ever

AMINA. There don't ever

HERAK I always tell them I don't have a favorite.

SAMIRA You don't have to lie to me,

HERAK I could never tell anyone in my family but...

SAMIRA But what?

HERAK Yes I was just going to say yes Irena is my favorite.

SAMIRA (taking his empty coffee cup) I'm sure the other know.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS The other's always know...

SAMIRA Belgrade...

(SAMIRA exits. HERAK sits on a riser. He smiles to himself. Lights fade. Sound punctuates.)

FEMALE CHORUS (chka) Belgrade...

SAMIRA Belgrade...

(as lights slowly come up on AMINA and SAMIRA in their self)

VLACO (addressing the audience) To perceive this as good and that as evil is a satisfying way to look at the world.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS Good

VLACO and

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS Evil

A single vision etched in clarity. A solid moral ruler measure human action, to order human thought.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS Good

VLACO and

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS Evil

VLACO That this measure is often too simple does diminish its appeal in our lives... when Samira just began to see past the hated uniform that Colonel Herak wore, it disturbed her greedily that she glimpsed a human being.

(SAMIRA and AMINA (gazes))

SAMIRA It was easier before... it was easier before I got to know him. It was easier when he was just the other side

AMINA And now what is he?

SAMIRA I don't know. He's someone's father. He's much like my own father, middle-aged, strong in his religious convictions, doing on his children and he eats as many fried eggs as my own father.

AMINA And toward you I mean after all this time does he does he like you?

SAMIRA Why should he like me? He knows I wish he loses this war, or even that he loses his life.

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS You do?

SAMIRA Don't you?

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS Don't we all?

SAMIRA I don't mean, he has a

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS Family

SAMIRA and it'd be unfortunate for them. For his SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS daughters. His eldest Irena, SAMIRA the one he's closest to. He told me all about her. She'd never get over it. But... but he's a soldier. And it's a

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS soldiers job to die isn't it?

AMINA The tone of your voice...

SAMIRA What?

AMINA The tone of your voice, when you speak of him lately is sad or something.

SAMIRA He's just not what I expected him to be. He's never mistreated me. I have to watch myself mother...

In a place like this, you become so starved for a crumb of humanity that when you get a crumb... it looks like a whole loaf.

AMINA But we're going to pull through this because of him.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS He's still the other side.

FEMALE CHORUS Branislav Herak...

SAMIRA. I remember the day...coming home from school... they were right in front of me...a man and his wife crossing, the street...a sniper's bullet struck him. The crowd ran...the man's blood splattered his wife...a whole cloudburst of blood...He fell...

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Shock froze me.

SAMIRA. I didn't hear the others shouting at me to get down. Someone grabbed at my collar and yanked me into a doorway, but I could still see the wife screaming and holding her hand over the wound, as if her little trembling white hand could stop the grant death that tore up her husband's heart...I never even told my mother I was so close to them when he was hit...

HERAK. I know the shock and numbness you speak of... Believe me. Believe me when I tell you, I pray, I pray the politicians go to the blessed peace table every day.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. Believe me, I pray for peace.

HERAK. Look...Samira...may we suspend the war for three minutes-so-I-can-give-you-this. (He hands her a white box.)

SAMIRA. What's this?

HERAK. I don't know. It's a...a birthday present.

SAMIRA. A birthday...in this place?.. a present? (She opens the box.)

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Sweetcakes?

SAMIRA. Sweetcakes.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. How'd you ever get sweet cakes?

HERAK. We have supply routes. No, I won't tell you which roads we use. Fat.

SAMIRA. (tasting the cakes) They're fresh. They're good... Thank you...

HERAK. You're welcome.

SAMIRA. You're leaving here soon. Aren't you?

HERAK. Well, I'm feeling better now and...

SAMIRA. And so you go again to fight...

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. the war... (She puts the cake down.)

SAMIRA. The sweet taste...

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. it almost made me forget.

HERAK (rising) Think what you will of me. But remember this. I don't relish war. My country talked on me and I answered. I was a teacher. Samira taught all the old wars as if they were all just a long ago history. Then when this business started in our country, I couldn't believe that the people wanted war. They all planned for it. They paid for it. They bought flags in wars' honor. Cheered for it. As if it were a national sporting event. And now we die for it. And children swallow their childhood before their time. I don't want you to think I'm in this to become a General or a hero. I gamble everything. I love in this fight.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. My home. My wife. My daughter.

SAMIRA. Why do you care what I think?

HERAK. A young girl...Samira...has got to know more than hate. I can see it's consuming you, destroying you.

(VLACO enters with mail.)

VLACO. Colonel...

HERAK. Yes, Lieutenant.

VLACO. Daily dispatches, Sir.

(HERAK takes the dispatches and signals SAMIRA to remove the food tray.)

HERAK. And Samira. you take these sweetcakes back with you tonight. They go stale fast.

SAMIRA. Yes...yes...thank you

(SAMIRA removes the food tray and exits. VLACO looks inside the box. HERAK sits and reads.)

VLACO. Sweetcakes.

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. Sweetcakes!

HERAK. What's the matter?

VLACO AND MALE CHORUS. She killed 16 soldiers.

VLACO. Sir.

(HERAK hands VLACO the dispatch he had been reading.)

HERAK And we ~~finally~~ killed her father and her brother!
VLACO. (looking at the dispatch) Shot. Shot trying to escape...

(SAMBIRA enters with Herak's coffee. They both turn to look at her. Lights fade. Music punctuates.)

(addressing the audience) I couldn't understand at the time why Herak cared if two enemy soldiers were shot escaping. It happened daily all over. I couldn't understand ~~at the time~~ why he didn't shoot this Samira himself now that we had proof against her...

(Lights come up slowly on AMINA in the camp yard. They comfort each other.)

What was wrong with him? Battle fatigue? Had he lost his nerve for what has to be done in war?

I was blind to what he thought. To me, Samira just was a saboteur for the Bosnian army. And so should she be to Herak...

(AMINA and SAMBIRA begin crying. After a beat, JELA enters and crosses to them.)

JELA. I heard... I'm sorry for you both... I'm sorry...

AMINA. He was a boy... Vedran was a boy, Jela... He drank milk from the carton... He threw his clothes on the floor... He kicked his soccer ball in the yard... He loved soccer as only a boy can...

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. They killed a boy. They killed a boy and his father!

JELA. The whole camp mourns with you. Your son and your husband are heroes.

AMINA. They're dead! Calling them heroes doesn't draw out the sting! They're dead!

(AMINA falls to her knees crying. JELA puts her arm around SAMBIRA and takes her aside. AMINA's sobs punctuate the exchange between JELA and SAMBIRA.)

JELA. Can you pull yourself together and listen to me? I don't have a lot of time. They saw me. They saw.

SAMBIRA. Who?

JELA. Listen. I have a message for you from the leader of your group. They know you work in Herak's place.

SAMBIRA. But I refuse to go back there.

JELA. You have to. You told us he'd be leaving, soon.

SAMBIRA. Who cares? Who cares about any of it now? Passing your information back and forth. Who cares?

SAMBIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. My family's been butchered!

JELA. Then maybe this is the best time to act.

SAMBIRA. Or what?

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. They don't want Herak to leave here.

JELA. They don't want him back in the war. They want him killed, Samira.

SAMBIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Killed?

AMINA. (to herself) Such a good father was he... such a good husband.

SAMBIRA. They want me...

JELA. (handing her a small vial) You take it. Take it. There's not much time. They saw me. Samira. They saw them pass this to me...

SAMBIRA. What... what is it?

JELA. In strong coffee. He won't taste it.

SAMBIRA. Jela... Jela... I... I can't do this... I never

SAMBIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. killed anyone.

JELA. You

JELA AND FEMALE CHORUS. killed 16.

FEMALE CHORUS. I can't.

SAMBIRA. I can't.

JELA. It's your group leader who orders this.

(She presses SAMBIRA's hand.)

It's from them.

SAMBIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I can't.

FEMALE CHORUS AND JELA. God is great! Soon. Soon I'll be dead, you bastards! God is great! Soon, I'll see God and I'll know why he sent you bastards here! Yes, I'll know. I'LL KNOW WHY HE SENT THIS WARI AND YOU'LL STILL BE IN THIS DARKNESS, THIS SUFFERING... THIS UNBEARABLE SUFFERING!!

VLACO. *(addressing the audience)* Jela now knows why God sent this war and we are still in darkness and suffering and the guilt that debilitates us like an illness...

(HERAK in his cabin. After a beat SAMIRA enters. HERAK sees her. Slowly, he rises.)

HERAK. I...I told them...I told them you didn't have to come back here if you didn't want to...It's all I right. Nothing will happen to you...Samira? Samira, you want some coffee? I made some...I'm...I'm sorry about your father and your brother...

SAMIRA. I always knew they were dead. You know that. It was mother who always had hope. It's Jela. We want to bury her.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. We want to bury her with prayers
SAMIRA. not only dirt.

HERAK. Yes. Look, I said before these women take their lives in their own hands when they go to the forbidden zones near the fences to smuggle contraband in here.

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. The woman knew that.
SAMIRA. Woman. She was not much older than I am. Not much older than your oldest daughter.

HERAK. My daughter wouldn't have...
SAMIRA. If the war were in her backyard, she'd do exactly what we do.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Look at us. We're all somebody's daughter!

SAMIRA. Your daughter would do exactly as we do and
SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. hate as savagely as we do.
HERAK. And what exactly did you do in this war?

SAMIRA. Only...only what I had to do. *(pause)*

Only what the war made me do. *(pause)*
Don't toy with me, please. I know you know about me. I know. Why? Why am I alive and Jela's dead? Why?
(pause)

Why have you shielded me? Jela only passed information in and out. But me...why?

HERAK. I...I confess, Samira, that getting to know you over the weeks, I've grown fond of you...And now I'm at odds within myself...

SAMIRA. So they'll attach their batteries to my breasts after you leave here.

HERAK. I'm

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. trying

HERAK. to think of a way of

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. saving you and your mother.

SAMIRA. 16 soldiers died in that fuel depot. Your soldiers. You must be really fond of me. If you're so fond of me,
SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. why didn't you just take me?
HERAK. Samira...

SAMIRA. I would've given myself to you to save Jela.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. I would not have resisted.

HERAK. Stop this.

SAMIRA. Did you know that?

SAMIRA. You looked surprised. You didn't think I'd be so quick to give. but to save her, I'd have let you help yourself.

HERAK. You don't know what you're saying!

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. You don't understand!

HERAK. I'm...I'm trying...I'm trying to help you because there have been so many

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. atrocities in this war

HERAK. that I...I...I just want to...to

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. help a mother and her daughter to...

SAMIRA that I could perform on this earth. Mother, I love you. Hold me tight.

AMINA. What have you done?! You poisoned Branislav Herak?

SAMIRA. I poisoned Herak the Serb, Mother.

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Herak the Satan, Christian jail keeper, Serb invader, killer, butcher...

AMINA. He's your father!

AMINA AND FEMALE CHORUS. (as she slaps SAMIRA) Branislav Herak is your father!

(AMINA starts to run off SAMIRA stops her.)

SAMIRA. Mother, what is this? Mother!

AMINA. He's your father! Yes!

SAMIRA. My...my...

AMINA. When he was stationed here many years ago...when we were young...He and I...He's your father...Let me go to him.

(She runs off.)

SAMIRA. My father...So that's why he...that's why...

(SAMIRA puts her hands to her mouth and cries out. Then she runs after AMINA. Black out. Music punctuates.)

VLACO. (Addressing the audience as lights slowly come up on HERAK bent over holding his stomach. His coffee cup lays on the floor.)

Amina Jusic bolted across the exercise yard. Samira followed. The other prisoners fell silent. All heads turned like a herd startled at an observed terror in one of their own. I drew my pistol and, at first, tried to stop them from entering...

(AMINA, SAMIRA and VLACO enter.)

Sir...Sir...The Jusic woman claims you're in danger...sir...sir, what is it, Colonel? Colonel!

(AMINA rushes to him. VLACO tries to stop her. HERAK waves his efforts off. AMINA crosses to him and takes his arm and sits him down.)

AMINA. Branislav...Branislav, she didn't know...

(SAMIRA falls to her knees weeping.)

Maybe a doctor...

HERAK. No doctor could stop this...

VLACO. Stop what? What is it, Sir?

SAMIRA. He's poisoned. I poisoned him.

VLACO. Poisoned?! Sir, let me get a medic and a...

HERAK. It won't do any good to get anyone...

AMINA. I thought God answered my prayers when he sent you here.

(VLACO crosses to SAMIRA with a drawn pistol.)

HERAK. No! Don't touch her! Vlaco...don't...

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. don't touch her!

VLACO. Why not? I'll shoot this filthy Muslim bitch!

AMINA. No!

SAMIRA AND FEMALE CHORUS. Shoot! Shoot me! Shoot the life out of me so I won't see any more death!

HERAK. No! Put the pistol down!

She's my daughter, Vlaco!

HERAK AND MALE CHORUS. She's my daughter!

VLACO. Your daughter?

(SAMIRA rises and crosses to HERAK, her body trembling.)

HERAK. My daughter...my daughter whom this war turned into a soldier...damned good soldier...

HERAK. Courage...it took courage...to...to...do this...

(SAMIRA kneels again and cries.)

VLACO. Your daughter...your daughter...

HERAK. That I'd never known until now...I grew...grew to love her...

Forbid you to...to touch her...Forbid you...

(HERAK dies and slumps to the floor. Lights dim but do not go down on this tableau. A stark light comes up downstage. VLACO drops his pistol and races downstage. He seems to choke with pain.)