

ODESSA

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FADE IN:

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY

We open on a colorful *matryoshka* (wooden nesting doll) -- a bride with a tear painted on her cheek.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
(in Ukrainian, with
subtitles)
The hearing's next Thursday at
two...

MICHAEL SORKIN, 30s/40s, has sad eyes and the perpetually exhausted look of a workaholic.

His office is small, with well-worn furniture and no view. The shelves are full of books on immigration law and knickknacks from Russia and Ukraine.

His diploma from Columbia Law School hangs alongside framed photos of happy clients becoming US citizens.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(in Ukrainian, with
subtitles)
Get there early -- there's always a
line.

His associate, EMILY, mid-20s, appears in the doorway and points urgently at her watch.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(in Ukrainian, with
subtitles)
I need to go. Call Emily if you
have any questions.

He hangs up.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(to Emily)
I know, I know.

His English has no trace of a Ukrainian accent.

Emily hands him a file. He stuffs it into his briefcase, grabs his suit jacket, and heads out.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

It's a bright September morning in New York.

Michael hurries toward 26 Federal Plaza -- the largest federal office building in the world.

A line of people stretches down the block, but Michael dodges around it and flashes his ID at the guard.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Michael enters the courtroom out of breath and spots his client, MRS. IBRAHIM -- a frightened 30-ish Somali woman.

Michael takes a seat next to her and gives her a reassuring look, just as the BAILIFF calls his case.

BAILIFF

U.S. versus Ibrahim, 13-40769.

Michael escorts his client to a table at the front of the room.

MICHAEL

Here, your honor. Michael Sorkin appearing pro bono for Mrs. Amal Ibrahim.

The JUDGE (60s) gives him a friendly nod.

JUDGE

You may proceed, counsel.

MICHAEL

Your honor, Mrs. Ibrahim was employed illegally after her visa expired. We don't deny that. But she was treated as a virtual slave -- forced to work 16 hour shifts, seven days a week.

The Judge looks sympathetically at Mrs. Ibrahim.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Every time she spoke up to her employer, she was threatened with deportation. May I approach the bench?

JUDGE

You may.

Michael hands her photos showing the aftermath of a massacre in an African village.

MICHAEL

Exhibit A shows the village where Mrs. Ibrahim's father and husband were tortured and killed by militants.

The judge grimaces when she looks at the grisly images.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She, her mother, and children barely escaped. The money she sends back home keeps her family alive.

He looks back at his client, who has tears in her eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

So we ask that she be granted refugee status, to continue to live and work in the United States, and eventually reunite her family.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Mrs. Ibrahim shakes hands with Michael, looking relieved.

MRS. IBRAHIM

(Somali accent)

Thank you so much.

MICHAEL

My pleasure.

MRS. IBRAHIM

This picture you have, of my village -- may I see it?

MICHAEL

Sure...

He takes out the file and shows her a copy of Exhibit A.

Mrs. Ibrahim studies the photo, confused.

MRS. IBRAHIM

But this is not my village...

Michael's taken aback.

MICHAEL

There must've been some mix-up at the office. I'll sort it out.

MRS. IBRAHIM
Thank you, again.

She smiles and heads off down the hallway.

Michael heads off in the opposite direction, his face grim.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Michael goes into Emily's office and hands her the file.

EMILY
So?

MICHAEL
We won.

Emily pumps her fist in victory.

EMILY
Yes!

MICHAEL
You did a good job with the case
history...

EMILY
Thanks.

MICHAEL
Except for one thing...

He flips open the file folder and takes out the photo.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
This isn't her village.

Emily looks abashed.

EMILY
I know...

MICHAEL
You KNOW?

EMILY
It's nearby, and it's the same
militants that killed her husband.
So what does it matter if -- ?

MICHAEL
I just lied to a Federal Court
judge.

Emily looks guilty and defensive.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You can draft the letter explaining the mistake. But I'm the one who has to sign it. I just hope this doesn't jeopardize the client's status.

EMILY

I'm sorry... I didn't think...

Michael softens a little.

MICHAEL

Live and learn, right?

He gives her a tight smile, leaves and goes into his own

OFFICE

He plops down in his desk chair and sighs at the sight of the heaps of papers.

His intercom BUZZES.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

(on intercom)

A Dov Cohen here to see you. He doesn't have an appointment...

MICHAEL

It's OK. Send him in.

DOV COHEN enters and sizes up the place, unimpressed. He's in his late 20's, with an athletic build.

Michael gets up and offers his hand. Dov shakes it.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How can I help you, Mr. Cohen?

Dov sits, then taps his phone and shows Michael a surveillance-type photo of YULIA (late 20s) on the screen.

DOV COHEN

(Israeli accent)

You know this woman?

Michael looks, and his face freezes.

MICHAEL

Yes.

DOV COHEN
Yulia Belenko?

Michael nods.

Dov taps and shows Michael another photo -- an adorable 7-year-old boy: PAVLO.

DOV COHEN (CONT'D)
And this?

MICHAEL
Pavlo. Her son.

He looks up at Dov.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
What is this about?

Dov takes out an ID and flashes it at Michael. The card has Hebrew lettering, a star of David -- and "Mossad" in English.

Michael's eyes widen.

DOV COHEN
You meet her in Ukraine?

MICHAEL
Yes.

DOV COHEN
You get her fiancee visa?

MICHAEL
How do you -- ?

DOV COHEN
Just answer question, please.

MICHAEL
Yes, I got her a fiancee visa. And
you already knew that or you
wouldn't have asked.

DOV COHEN
Is she your fiancee?

MICHAEL
She was.

DOV COHEN
And now she is not your wife?

MICHAEL

No.

DOV COHEN

So why you break up?

MICHAEL

I don't see how that's any of your business.

DOV COHEN

You still in contact with her?

MICHAEL

No. Not for almost six months.

Dov looks disappointed.

DOV COHEN

You know she is with this company?

He taps his phone screen and shows Michael the web site for "Ukrainian Hearts" -- a "premium international dating" service offering "thousands of beautiful women."

MICHAEL

Mail order brides?!

Dov taps again and shows Michael the page for Yulia:

She's wearing a low-cut dress, too much makeup, and a sexy pout.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(re: the photo)

Crap.

DOV COHEN

So you have feelings for her?

MICHAEL

Who are you? The Mossad family therapist?

Dov cracks a thin smile.

DOV COHEN

You would care if she is in danger?

MICHAEL

Is she?

His face shows that he does care.

Dov calls up another photo: an ugly no-neck thug in a Ukrainian Army officer's uniform: IGOR (40s).

DOV COHEN
Igor Platko. He runs Ukrainian
Hearts.

Michael looks confused.

MICHAEL
Why does Mossad care that a
Ukrainian officer's running a
dating service on the side?

DOV COHEN
Because he also is involved with
this --

He shows Michael another picture on his phone:

Men in brown shirts march with swastika-like armbands and
flags.

DOV COHEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
"Krov i chest" -- "Blood and
honor."

He indicates the picture on the phone.

DOV COHEN (CONT'D)
You know of them?

MICHAEL
Bigots and thugs. Got a bunch of
seats in the last election.

DOV COHEN
Very anti-Semitic. We keep eye on
them for years.

MICHAEL
OK, so this Igor's into fascism and
dating. So what?

DOV COHEN
We think there is financial
connection.

Michael looks skeptical.

MICHAEL
They're using the dating service as
a fund-raiser?

DOV COHEN
Could be.

MICHAEL
So why is that your problem?

DOV COHEN
Before, "Krov i chest" is just
speeches, marching with flags...
Now they talk about "direct
action."

MICHAEL
Which means?

DOV COHEN
Killing Jews.

Michael takes this in.

DOV COHEN (CONT'D)
You are Jewish?

MICHAEL
You already know that.

Dov smiles.

DOV COHEN
Your father is Jacob Sorkin of
Odessa. Just a kid in '41. But he
survives.

MICHAEL
Yeah...

DOV COHEN
Comes to America, gets a job in a
bank, gets rich...

He looks around at the modest office.

DOV COHEN (CONT'D)
So why you work in such a crappy
office?

MICHAEL
That's what my father keeps asking
me. But I don't think you came
here to diss my office.

Again, Dov gives him a thin smile.

DOV COHEN
We need your help.

Michael looks dubious.

DOV COHEN (CONT'D)
We want that you go to Odessa, see Yulia. Find out what she knows about Ukrainian Hearts and "Krov i Chest."

MICHAEL
And what if she doesn't know anything? What if there's nothing to know?

DOV COHEN
Then you recruit her.

Michael scoffs.

MICHAEL
To spy for you? And why would she do that?

DOV COHEN
To get out of Ukraine. Away from Igor.

Dov shows him another photo of Yulia -- this one with her face badly bruised.

MICHAEL
Son-of-a-bitch. He beats her?

He studies the picture.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Why doesn't she go to the police?

DOV COHEN
In Ukraine, police and army are like this --

He hooks his two index fingers together.

DOV COHEN (CONT'D)
You complain, it is worse.

Michael thinks about this and hands back the phone.

MICHAEL
Look... I feel bad for Yulia,
but...
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm an immigration lawyer, not some kind of secret agent... I'm sure you can find a better person for the job.

DOV COHEN

You know her. She will trust you. And you have fiancee visa.

MICHAEL

That's about to expire. Assuming she'd even go with me. We didn't exactly part on the best of terms...

DOV COHEN

Ukrainian Hearts has tour leaving New York in three days.

Michael thinks about this, looking very doubtful.

MICHAEL

Look....

He shakes his head.

Dov stares at Michael with disdain, then puts away his phone and hands him his card.

DOV COHEN

You decide to get balls, you call me.

He leaves.

Michael stares at the card, troubled.

INT. STEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

The restaurant's the kind of oak-panelled sanctuary where the princes of Wall Street have been dining for 100 years.

Michael enters and spots his father, JACOB, early 80s, at one of the tables, with a martini.

Jacob wears an expensive suit, but it's slightly too big for him, and he has the pinched look of someone in pain.

MICHAEL

Hey, Papa...

He gives him a quick kiss on the top of the head, then sits.

His father studies him.

JACOB
You look tired... You always look tired.

MICHAEL
I have a lot of work.

JACOB
So cut back. Take a vacation. Quit. God knows you can afford it.

MICHAEL
I like to work. And my clients need me.

JACOB
If they need you so much how come they don't pay you?

Michael smiles.

MICHAEL
Some of them do. For the rest... I'm glad I can afford to work pro bono. Thanks to you.

He raises his water glass in a toast.

JACOB
You'll work yourself to death. Life's too short. I oughta know.

MICHAEL
How are you feeling?

JACOB
Like crap, most days. Today, not so bad. This helps.

He indicates the martini.

MICHAEL
Should you be drinking that?

JACOB
Not according to my doctor. He doesn't let have anything but organic goat milk.

Michael chuckles.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Told him I'd rather give up a year
of my life.

MICHAEL
Don't say that.

JACOB
So what've I got to live for? You
got any grandkids for me yet?

MICHAEL
Papa... I don't think that's going
to happen.

JACOB
What's the matter with you? You
want to be alone the next 50 years?

Michael sighs and signals for the waiter.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Michael's apartment has the ultimate New York luxury --
plenty of space. But it's decorated for comfort rather than
for show.

A rhythmic THUDDING noise comes from another room.

HOME GYM

Michael's running on a treadmill, shirt off, working up a
sweat.

He stares out the window, which has a fine view of the sun
rising over the East River.

The treadmill slows. The display says "WORKOUT COMPLETE --
BEGIN COOL-DOWN."

Michael hits the red "stop" button and hops off.

He moves over to a punching bag, and attacks it like he's
beating someone up.

LIVING ROOM

Michael enters, freshly showered and wearing business attire.

He stares at something across the room, sighs and looks away,
then leaves.

We see what he saw on the mantelpiece:

A framed photo of a laughing young woman -- with a memorial (yahrzeit) candle burning in front of it.