

TREATMENT: "TATA" BY ELIAS STANKOVIĆ

LOGLINE

A daughter spends an endless night with her father, who passed away just hours ago, in the traditional Serbian wake. Confronted with the loss of the person she both cherished and feared her entire life, the quietest night becomes the loudest for her.

SYNOPSIS

A daughter carries out the Serbian wake with her father, who passed away just hours ago. She is silent and stiff. Almost mechanical. Every movement is drained of strength. Visitors from the village enter the small room to bid their final farewell to the father. One person enters the room in silence, says goodbye, and leaves. Shortly after, an old acquaintance arrives. She tells a touching story from the past. The daughter, determined to fulfill her duty, listens attentively. The woman's story brings back memories of the daughter's childhood. The past, which she had pushed into a dark corner of her mind, slowly resurfaces. After the older woman leaves, she realizes that the man she both feared and admired for years is now gone. Unspoken words remain unspoken—forever. She struggles with herself, unwilling to let go. She tries to suppress the emotions erupting inside her like a volcano, keeping them under control.

BACKGROUND & INTENTION

In Serbian tradition, the wake is typically carried out by men. At least one person stays in the room with the recently deceased. It is considered the transition between Earth and Heaven—a phase of letting go. This process of letting go is often unbearable for those keeping the wake, especially when the person they must part with was both a role model and a great burden.

The daughter learned of her father's diagnosis only a few months before his death. He flew from Serbia to Germany. She drove him to the hospital and stayed with him in the emergency room until late at night. Months later, he wanted to return to his homeland—a small village in Serbia.

Now, after weeks of exhaustion, the daughter sits in a small room. Hours of scratching his back, holding the bucket when he vomited, watching as her own father could no longer drink a glass of water. The strong hands, the loud voice, and the joy for life—none of it remained. Cancer consumed him—his body, his personality—day by day, piece by piece.

She wants to honor him one last time, giving him the respect he deserves, even though she knows that the wounds he caused will never heal. A farewell wrapped in complex emotions.

THE WAKE: WHAT IS IT?

The wake, rarely practiced worldwide today, remains a tradition in Serbia. Many countries once followed this ritual. In Serbia, it still takes place just hours after a person passes away. The deceased lies in a coffin in a room—sometimes in the house, sometimes in a separate space like a garden house or conservatory. A table filled with countless candies and sweets, such as Lokum (also known as Turkish Delight), is provided for guests who come to pay their last respects. Next to the sweets, there is usually a pot of sand or flour with candles placed inside.

Apart from the objects in the room, people are also present—constantly. They receive guests, ensure everything is in order, and make sure that the deceased's transition from Earth to Heaven goes smoothly. Someone stays with the deceased throughout the night. Traditionally, this role is taken on by the men of the household, while the women prepare the funeral meal. On the day of the burial, which usually follows the wake, mourners gather for a meal featuring traditional dishes.

But why a wake? The wake serves as the transition from Earth to Heaven. In traditional families, relatives believe that the soul separates from the body at death and must detach completely. This explains why a bowl of water is placed beneath the coffin—it is meant to catch the negative aspects and experiences of the soul.