

THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD

een film van Joshua Marston



Release 5.1.2012

Law 598. An offense to honor is not paid for with property, but by the spilling of blood or by a magnanimous pardon (from the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, book eight: honor)

THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD SYNOPSIS

Nik is een energieke, 17-jarige jongen in het laatste jaar van zijn middelbare school in Noord-Albanië. Hij is verliefd op een meisje uit zijn klas en hij heeft plannen om later een internet café te openen in het dorp. Zijn zusje, Rudina, is een intelligent en volwassen meisje van 15, met de ambitie om verder te studeren aan de universiteit. Wanneer een conflict over een stuk land er toe leidt dat hun vader Mark beschuldigd wordt van moord, raken de familieleden betrokken bij bloedwraak. De regels van de Kanun, een eeuwenoud Albanees wetboek, verplichten Nik, zijn broertje en de andere mannelijke gezinsleden tot een huisarrest. Hierdoor is Rudina genoodzaakt te stoppen met school en het werk van haar vader over te nemen om zo voor het gezin te kunnen zorgen. Terwijl Rudina floreert in haar nieuwe verantwoordelijkheden, drijven Niks woede en frustratie over zijn afzondering hem zover dat hij de vete wil proberen te eindigen. Ook al zou dit zijn leven kunnen kosten...

THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD van Joshua Marston (MARIA FULL OF GRACE, NEW YORK I LOVE YOU, SIX FEET UNDER) werd genomineerd voor een Gouden Beer op het Film Festival van Berlijn 2011 en won de Zilveren Beer op hetzelfde festival.

The Forgiveness of Blood/108 minuten/35mm/Verenigde Staten, Albanië, Denemarken, Italië, 2010/ Albanees gesproken



THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD wordt in Nederland gedistribueerd door ABC Cinemien

Beeldmateriaal kan gedownload worden vanaf www.cinemien.nl/pers of vanaf www.filmdepot.nl

Voor meer informatie: ABC - Cinemien, Gideon Querido van Frank, gideon@cinemien.nl

THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD CAST & CREW

Nik	Tristan Halilaj
Rudina	Sindi Laçe
Mark	Refet Abazi
Drita	Ilire Vinca Çelaj
Ded	Çun Lajçi
Director	Johua Marston
Writer	Joshua Marston & Andamion Murataj
Producer	Paul Mezey
Executive Producer	Janine Gold
Director of Photography	Rob Hardy Bsc
Production Designer	Tommaso Ortino
Editor	Malcolm Jamieson
Music by	Leonardo Heiblum & Jacobo Lieberman



THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD JOSHUA MARSTON

Joshua Marston is de schrijver en regisseur van de veelgeprezen film MARIA FULL OF GRACE, die onder andere de Publieksprijs op het Sundance Festival van 2004 won, Beste Debuutfilm op het Film Festival van Berlijn in 2004 en een Oscar nominatie kreeg voor Beste Actrice. Marston is ook een van de regisseurs die meewerkte aan NEW YORK, I LOVE YOU uit 2009. Naast films regisseerde hij ook afleveringen van wereldwijde geliefde televisieseries als SIX FEET UNDER, IN TREATMENT en LAW&ORDER. Voordat hij films maakte, studeerde hij politicologie en film, waar hij in beiden een master behaalde. Recentelijk heeft het Museum of Modern Art Marstons films opgenomen in zijn permanente collectie.



THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD TRISTAN HALILAJ

Tristan Halilaj (Nik), geboren in 1992 in Albanië, zat nog op de middelbare school toen hij werd gecast voor THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD. Hoewel hij nooit eerder had geacteerd, maakten zijn natuurlijke aanleg voor het vertellen van verhalen, zijn levendige persoonlijkheid en zijn vermogen om dichtbij zijn emoties te komen de castingkeuze voor hem erg makkelijk. Halilaj is nu eerstejaars student aan de Toneelacademie in Macedonië en kijkt uit naar een carrière als professioneel acteur in theater en film.



THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD SINDI LAÇEJ

Net als Tristan zat Sindi Laçeja (Rudina), geboren in 1996 in Albanië, op de middelbare school toen zij gecast werd voor THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD. Met haar charisma en zelfvertrouwen viel zij gelijk op tussen duizenden meisjes, hoewel ook zij geen eerdere acteervaring heeft. Als zij haar middelbare school heeft afgerond, is ze van plan om aan de universiteit acteren te studeren.



THE FORGIVENESS OF BLOOD DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



The dominant mythology of blood feuds (in Albania or elsewhere) is that they are inexorable, archaic traditions practiced by violent, backward people. My intention was to turn this view on its head, to humanize the portrayal by telling an everyday story of one particular family through the points of view of sympathetic, ordinary individuals. The film is a complicated examination of people grappling with the pull of a deeply rooted tradition versus the need and desire to modernize and become a part of the world from which they had been cut off for over forty years, and specifically what it means for young people to grow up feeling connected to their family yet alien from their parents' generation.





The Forgiveness of Blood

By [Peter Debruge](#)

Director Joshua Marston once again casts his attention beyond conventional First World subjects in "The Forgiveness of Blood," the remarkably relatable tale of an Albanian teen who finds his otherwise modern life derailed by the six-centuries-old tradition of problem solving via blood feud. As in "Maria Full of Grace," Marston applies his accessible indie style to an exotically set story, shot on location and featuring impressive perfs from non-pro actors working in their native language. Though "Blood" lacks much of "Maria's" momentum, mostly because its hero spends the film under house arrest, it should still travel international arthouses with ease.

Nik (Tristan Halilaj) is just like any other teenager, more interested in motorcycles and girls than in carrying on the cash-strapped family business. Given the chance, he'd like to open an Internet cafe in town, though his plans are cut short by a dispute between his father, Mark (Refet Abazi), and hot-headed Sokol (Veton Osmani), who inherited land that had been in Nik's family for generations and now taunts the previous owners by refusing to let them pass.

The grown men's disagreement seems little more evolved than a simple schoolyard squabble, and yet, in a confrontation the film allows to unfold offscreen, it easily escalates to violence, with Mark and his brother (Luan Jaha) stabbing Sokol to death. Though the Albanian police swiftly arrive to arrest Nik's uncle, Mark manages to escape into hiding, leaving the rest of his family as targets for revenge.

The sins of the father are quite literally visited upon the sons in Albania, where a 15th-century legal code called the Kanun, still observed today, allows for the injured party to seek retribution by killing a male from the murderer's family or seek outside mediation. A unique loophole protects the offending clan, however, so long as they remain respectfully out of sight at home -- a situation that effectively cuts short all of Nik's plans involving school, friends and romance, if only he can stay inside, which won't be easy since he has his eye on a lovely classmate (Zana Hasaj).

The odd thing about this story -- apart from the fact that Marston traveled halfway around the world to tell it -- is that even without the Kanun, it could have been told in South Los Angeles, the Bronx or even contempo Tel Aviv (as in "Ajami," which boasts a similar premise and a far flashier style). But Marston almost certainly saw "Blood" as a chance to explore the far bigger issue of how a country like Albania copes with the tug-of-war between its past (from the recently fallen communist regime all the way back to the rigid code of rules established by prince Leke Dukagjini half a millennium earlier) and future.

Intent on getting the details right, Marston enlisted Albanian helmer Andamion Murataj to co-write, co-produce and help cast the film, and together they craft a story that feels resolutely focused on its young characters. While Nik shows all the narcissism of youth, thinking of the feud solely in terms of how it impacts his life, his resourceful 15-year-old sister, Rudina (Sindi Lacey), emerges as the most respectable family member.

In her father's absence, Rudina takes over his daily delivery route and even manages to expand the business in the process. Metaphorically speaking, she is the poster girl for Albanian progress, while Nik is too busy resenting his equally self-centered father for putting him in this position to see anything but escape as a way out.

Considering the premise, a certain stagnancy can't be avoided, as Nik and his younger brother, Dren (Elsajed Tallali), start to go stir-crazy in the house -- which is practically a concrete prison unto itself -- though there's suspense in the fact that Sokol's family is bloodthirsty enough, they can't be relied upon to follow the Kanun to the letter. Still, Nik knows full well he's risking his life every time he sneaks out. In the end, the tragedy of "Blood" is the fact that it forces Rudina, who shows the potential to go on to college and succeed on her own wits, to become the man of the house.

As in "Maria," Marston mixes naturalistic handheld camerawork with artfully framed compositions in which shallow focus and white-hot sunlight bring us inside the characters' heads. He also collaborates once more with

composers Leonardo Heiblum and Jacobo Lieberman, whose score feels entirely appropriate to the locale, supplemented by a number of Albanian songs.

Camera (Technicolor), Rob Hardy; editor, Malcolm Jamieson; music, Jacobo Lieberman, Leonardo Heiblum; production designer, Tommaso Ortino; set decorator, Oriana Kamberi; costume designer, Emir Turkeshi; sound (Dolby Digital), Judy Karp; re-recording mixer, Tom Efinger; visual effects, Jessica Elvin, Jay Tilin; associate producer, Andrew Goldman; assistant director, Joshua Newport; casting, Murataj. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (competing), Feb. 18, 2011. Running time: 109 MIN.

The Forgiveness Of Blood

18 February, 2011 | By Mike Goodridge

Seven years after his superb directorial debut feature *Maria Full Of Grace*, Joshua Marston returns with another riveting drama, this time focusing on an Albanian family caught up in a blood feud. *The Forgiveness Of Blood* is a richly textured portrait of a society in 2011 still bound by a centuries-old code of law. As in *Maria*, Marston's second feature is shot in the local language and marked by knockout performances from non-actors. The final film playing in the Berlinale competition this week, it is also one of its strongest.

Marston knows how to hook the audience by drawing his characters and their milieu with a strong sense of authenticity. His scene-setting is exactly precise enough to give us a sense of who they are and why we should care about them before the drama kicks in. And Marston's foreign nationality helps to bring a valuable external perspective to the material, however immersive his process in the society he is covering. A local film-maker might be less able to step away from the subject matter with such clarity of vision.

If the film lags somewhat in the central stretch, it is only because the theme – house arrest – demands it. Of course, this is a foreign-language film and buyers will approach it with caution. But it is a story unusual enough and certainly well-told enough to become an arthouse favourite.

Set in a small town in northern Albania, the film revolves around a 17 year-old called Nik (Halilaj) who has plans to open an internet café when he leaves high school. He has a crush on a girl from school called Bardha, larks around on motorbikes with his best friend Tom and has a close relationship with his smart 15 year-old sister Rudina.

But Nik's world is thrown into turmoil when his father Mark and uncle get into an altercation with a neighbour over land which has been disputed for generations. The neighbour ends up dead, the uncle is taken into police custody and Mark goes into hiding. And according to the Kanun, a 15th century code of law, the aggrieved family has the right to kill Nik or any male family member in retribution. Nik and his little brother are henceforth forbidden to leave the house as a mark of respect.

While Rudina takes over the family's bread-delivery rounds and develops an appetite for business, Nik finds himself increasingly distraught as the weeks pass. In his isolation, he realises he will lose Bardha as well as any chance he had of a normal existence, if he is to have an existence at all. He begins a weight-building regime to keep fit but his frustration only increases. When attempts to bring in a blood feud mediator fail, he pits himself against his father who could end the feud if he turned himself in.

Marston only shows us what the two teens see, so we are unsure what actually happened to leave the neighbour dead, where Mark is hiding in his exile from the town or what is going on with the feuding family. As we know from *Maria Full Of Grace*, the director is skilled at building tension and in this film, there is a menace lurking in each scene, a threat that Nik will be felled by a bullet at any moment.

Halilaj and Lacej, neither who has acted before, fully realise their characters of young people whose futures are compromised by an age-old practice of which they feel they have no part. Veteran film and stage actor Abazi is formidable as their father whose convictions about family honour feels out of sync with their fast life of SMS texting, iPhone video messages and video games.