

IT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT

A film by Jafar Panahi



A car on an almost deserted road overlooking the city whose lights can be seen in the distance. At the wheel, a MAN, in the passenger seat, his pregnant WIFE, and in the back, their daughter NILOUFAR. A lively song by Sadegh Boughi plays on the car radio and Niloufar sings along at the top of her voice. A car appears in the distance and the man turns the music down.

NILOUFAR

No, Dad, please... don't turn it down!

MAN

Come on, daughter, it's too loud... it will bother people!

NILOUFAR

What people? There's no one here. Mom, tell him to turn it up!

WOMAN

Turn it up... for once!

Despite his misgivings, the man turns the music up.

NILOUFAR

Dance with me. Believe me, it's great... Sing with me! Here we go... Now!

Her mother, happy, and her father, reluctant, sing the chorus with Niloufar.

NILOUFAR

Your hands... Like this... Eo... Eo... Eo... Eo.

Niloufar dances, making hand movements. Her parents do likewise. The music becomes more intense. Each time a car passes, the man watches it attentively, afraid that someone might catch them like this. Niloufar seems very happy to see her parents join in. She is over the moon, shouting for joy, laughing. All of a sudden, at the height of this little show, the car hits something. The man brakes sharply. Niloufar and her mother have trouble keeping their balance. The car stops. The music continues to play, contrasting with the ambient silence. The man turns the music off.

WOMAN

What was that?

MAN

I don't know...

The man gets out of the car. He walks with a limp. The distinctive sound of his artificial leg is clearly audible in the silent night. He reaches the back of the car and looks down. He immediately glances away, as if he couldn't bear the sight of what he sees. We briefly make out the whimpering of an animal. The man reluctantly bends down to the animal and pushes its body to the side of the road. In the distance, thunder rumbles. Rain begins to fall. The man straightens up and steps around the car, but he freezes just before opening the door. He leans against the car, takes a deep breath, and finally gets in. After a few fruitless attempts, the car starts up again and drives off. The man doesn't say a word. Heavy silence settles in the car. No one speaks for a long moment. The woman looks at her husband, then at Niloufar. The latter is frozen in shock. She holds her soft toy tightly to her chest and huddles up. The woman tries to break the silence.

WOMAN

Thank God nothing happened to us... Are you alright, Niloufar, sweetie? Niloufar...

Without saying a word, Niloufar stares at her soft toy and pushes her mother's hand away when she tries to reach out to her. The woman looks at the man. He is in the same state as his daughter. The woman turns the music back on.

NILOUFAR

Turn it off...

The woman turns the music off. A moment's silence.

NILOUFAR

You killed it!

The man and the woman look at each other. She signals to him to respond.

MAN

It ran out in front of the car! I didn't even see it...

WOMAN

It wasn't his fault... It was an accident! What is destined to happen happens! If God placed it on our path, there has to be a reason.

NILOUFAR

He killed an animal! What's that got to do with God?

WOMAN

It wasn't deliberate. But if he'd done it on purpose, you'd be right to ask that.

Outside, the rain grows heavier. The car starts to make a strange noise. The man, worried, checks the dashboard controls but doesn't notice anything unusual. The car suddenly stops and the man cannot start it again.

WOMAN

Another problem now!
(turning to the man)
Have you run out of fuel?

MAN

The tank is half-full! I think the spark plugs must be damp...

The man pulls the lever to open the hood. The woman hands him a plastic bag.

WOMAN

Here, cover your head with this...

The man puts the plastic bag on his head and gets out of the car. He examines the engine but cannot see anything wrong.

MAN

Try to start it up...

The woman turns the key in the ignition several times, but the car won't start. The man looks around. Lights in buildings on the other side of the road flicker through the rain. The man comes over to his wife.

MAN

I'll go get help. Lock the doors...

The woman locks the doors as the man crosses the road. He goes over to a shed, knocks on the door and waits. After a while, a voice rings out inside.

OMID (O.C.)

Who's there?

MAN

Open the door, please. Just for a minute...

The door opens. A young man aged 22, Omid, wearing overalls, stands in the doorway.

MAN

Hello... Sorry to bother you... My car has broken down. It won't start. Do you know of a mechanic anywhere near here?

OMID

Yes, there's one not far away. At the crossroads, turn left. And after a mile or so, you'll find a garage that's open 24 hours.

MAN

The car won't go that far... If it could, I'd have gone home... I have my family with me... Do you have the garage's number so I can ask them to come?

OMID

No... I don't have it.

MAN

Alright... Thank you.

The man turns to go, but Omid, thinking of the family in the car, stops him.

OMID

Wait a minute, I'll get some tools, maybe I'll be able to help.

The man smiles and shelters beneath an awning as he waits for him. Omid goes back inside. The room is cramped, with a mezzanine floor at the far end - the workshop office accessed via some metal stairs. Omid climbs the stairs and enters the office.

We discover Vahid, a man in his forties, also in overalls, caught up in a phone conversation. He seems a little agitated.

Omid searches in a cupboard and gathers spanners and screwdrivers. Vahid watches him out of the corner of his eye.

VAHID

(into the phone)

Listen, I told you to come back! It's not worth our time!... No, no, it'll be fine!... I need the van... My sister's waiting, I have to fetch the baby's things... Rahim, can't you understand? Come back...

(to Omid)

Who is it?

OMID

A guy whose car broke down... with his family in it... I think he lives nearby, at the edge of the desert. I'll see if I can fix it so he can get home.

Omid leaves the office with the tools. As he continues his phone conversation, Vahid goes over to the window.

VAHID

(still into the phone)

No, Rahim... I'm the one responsible! I report to the boss... Who is it you actually work for?... So why are you wasting time? Get back here, I'm waiting... I'm in a hurry, I'll see you shortly...
Hurry up!

Vahid hangs up. As he continues to look outside, he calls someone else on his phone.

We hear his voice as he watches Omid and the man walk over to the car. The man sits behind the wheel and tries to start the car while Omid gets to work. The woman and the girl get out of the car and ask Omid something. He gestures to the workshop. They hurry over to use the bathroom.

Vahid, phone in hand, notices the woman is pregnant and watches her as she goes over to the bathroom.

VAHID

Hello, Mom?... Please, I said I'd be there soon... What can I do, the job took longer than planned... Yes, I know... Have you eaten? Why not?... I already told you not to wait for me!... Alright, eat now and I'll come to get the baby's things after I pick up the van!... Please, you know it's the only vehicle we have and it belongs to the workshop!... What?... Ah, yes, yes... I bought it... I'll bring it... It's the same brand, imported!... Okay... See you later...
Bye.

Vahid hangs up and lights a cigarette.

In the meantime, the woman comes out of the bathroom. Vahid looks at her through the gap in the door. The woman sits down, apparently overcome by stomach pains. Niloufar helps her.

We hear the workshop door open. Vahid goes to the far end of the room but the sound of the man's artificial leg on the concrete floor makes him freeze, as if this unusual noise seemed familiar. He pricks up his ears. Vahid tries to spot the man, but he can't. He discreetly steps over to the door again.

He sees the man come into the workshop, then go over to his wife and daughter. Vahid looks devastated. He quickly steps back and presses against the cupboard so as not to be seen. He takes a deep breath and tries to pull himself together. All of a sudden, the man calls out to him.

MAN

Vahid... Vahid...

Vahid doesn't reply.

MAN

Mister Vahid...

Vahid is cornered. He coughs and then answers, but without showing himself. He alters his voice to reply.

VAHID

Yes?!

MAN

Mister Omid needs the old toolbox.

Vahid heaves a sigh of relief.

VAHID

It's next to the big machine!

Vahid doesn't move. He pricks up his ears again. We hear the man's steps. Vahid peers at him through a crack in the door. The man goes over to the machine and takes the toolbox. He leaves the workshop.

Vahid thinks for a second. He peers out of the window. The man gives the toolbox to Omid who takes a tool from it and goes back to work.

The man finally manages to start the car. He shakes Omid's hand and tries to give him a little money, but Omid refuses. Omid comes back over to the workshop to tell the woman and girl that they can go back to the car. They leave the workshop.

In the meantime, Vahid quickly changes. He removes his overalls and puts on everyday clothes. Before Omid can close the workshop door, Vahid hurries down the stairs.

VAHID

Everything okay?

OMID

I did what I could... I think he'll be able to get home... But he'll need it repaired!

VAHID

Give me the motorbike key...

OMID

Mister Vahid, weren't we supposed to take the van to fetch the baby things for your sister?

VAHID

I know, but we'll see about that later... I don't feel up to it this evening... Call me when Rahim gets back, I'll tell him where to take the van.

OMID

Alright...

VAHID

And turn off the outside lights too so people won't think we're open.

Omid hands the motorbike key to Vahid who quickly leaves the workshop.

2

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

2

Vahid, on his motorbike, follows the man's Peugeot. He keeps a certain distance so as not to be spotted. The falling rain strikes his face and makes driving difficult. After passing along several streets and alleys, the car finally arrives at an isolated house. Vahid parks the motorbike and hides in a spot where no one will see him. He takes out his phone and makes a call.

3

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - DAY

3

Still in front of the house, but now at the wheel of a van, Vahid has fallen asleep. He is woken by the ringing of his phone. On waking, he feels a pain in his side. A look of panic comes into his eyes. He looks at the man's house. He takes out his phone, turns on the speaker and puts the phone on the passenger seat. In the meantime, he looks for his pills in the glove compartment.

4

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - DAY

4

At the wheel of the van, Vahid follows the taxi that stops on a narrow street. The man gets out. He walks along the deserted, one-way street. Vahid follows.

The man advances a few steps and is about to cross the street when Vahid accelerates all of a sudden and hits the man who falls to the ground. Vahid quickly gets out of the van and opens the back door.

5

EXT. DESERT OUTSIDE THE CITY - DAY

5

Vahid digs a hole with a shovel. To one side, a dried-up tree; on the other, the van parked a few yards from the hole. All around, as far as the eye can see, arid land. Vahid goes over to the van, pulls the man out and throws him to the ground. He drags him over to the hole. The man, who is conscious now, tries to speak. We can see that he is in pain. All he can do is make unintelligible noises. Vahid pushes the man into the hole and starts to cover him with soil. The man thrashes about, but Vahid pays no attention. After taking a long breath, he steps down into the hole and removes the tape from the man's mouth. The man twists in pain. Vahid then removes the sock from his mouth. The man makes the most of this to breathe and speak.

MAN

Sir, what are you doing? Please, wait a minute... I'm dying... What did I do?... I have a wife and children... My wife is pregnant...

Vahid ignores the man's words and continues to throw soil in his face.

MAN

No, stop, stop... Is it because of that dog yesterday evening? I swear I felt bad about it all night... We didn't sleep... I made a mistake... I'm sorry... But you don't kill someone for running over a dog! Believe me, it's not my fault... The dog ran out in front of the car all of a sudden. I couldn't see clearly enough... Okay?... I admit it... But I didn't kill anyone! I beg you, let me go... I'm sick... I have a child waiting for me at home!

Vahid looks calmly at the man. Then he takes the ID card out of his pocket and reads it.

VAHID

Rashid Shamsavari... So that's your real name?

MAN

Yes... My bank card is in the wallet too!
There's money on the account... The PIN is
1392. Withdraw whatever you want... For the
dog!

VAHID

Eghbal is a better name... It's shorter and
snappier.

The man freezes all of a sudden. He recognizes this name.
There's a moment's silence. Eghbal quickly collects his
wits.

EGHBAL

Who's Eghbal?

VAHID

Shut up, you son of a bitch... You used to
call me that. You'd say, "If your mother
hadn't been a whore, she'd never have
given birth to a shit like you." And now,
you pathetic jerk, you say you don't know
who Eghbal is...

EGHBAL

You're wrong... I swear I've never heard
that name before...

VAHID

Don't play the innocent... Do you think
we're stupid? You thought blindfolding us
was enough to make you invisible? You
didn't think we'd recognize you from the
sound your leg makes? Our eyes were
closed, but we haven't forgotten. We knew
that one day, thanks to that sound, we'd
find you. The sound that haunted my
nights and my days for five years...

EGHBAL

Five years? What do you mean, five years?
I had this accident barely a year ago,
while I was driving... I have all the
medical records. I can show them to you...
I swear, I don't know who this Eghbal is...
It's a misunderstanding!

VAHID

You lie so well... You're all bastards! You
make up these lies to save your skin. But
this is the end, Mister Eghbal!

Vahid picks up the shovel and keeps filling the hole. Eghbal starts to struggle again.

EGHBAL

You don't believe me? Look for yourself...
Look at the wound... Is it a wound from
five years ago? I have an appointment to
get the dressing changed later today...

Vahid pauses. Eghbal's final words seem to have marked him. Vahid paces up and down, stops and looks at Eghbal again. He starts pacing again, agitated, then suddenly hops down into the hole and tries to pull off the artificial leg. Eghbal screams.

EGHBAL

It's an artificial limb! Pull my pant leg
up and look...

Vahid tries to pull up his pant leg. He cannot manage it. In frustration, he takes out a box cutter and tears Eghbal's pants. The artificial limb comes loose and a little blood trickles from the wound.

EGHBAL

Sir, I don't know what happened to you...
An unpaid debt? Honor? But, please, don't
sacrifice me! I don't know anything about
it! You have the wrong man...

Vahid looks at him for a moment, then climbs out of the hole. He goes over to the van and leans against it. He thinks for a second, takes out a cigarette, lights it and drags on it. He looks at the hole. He takes another drag on the cigarette, as if he had just thought of something. He stands, opens the van door, takes his phone from the dash and makes a call.

6 EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

6

A long road across the desert. The van arrives in the city.

7 EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - DAY

7

Vahid looks for a parking space on a busy street. He parks, quickly gets out of the van, turns the alarm on and goes over to a bookstore on the other side of the street.

8

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

8

Vahid comes into the bookstore, looks around and ends up spotting SALAR who sits with his back to him. He goes over to him.

VAHID

Hello, Salar!

Salar turns and, on seeing Vahid, beams in delight. He stands to embrace him.

SALAR

Ah, Vahid! What a joy to see you. Are you keeping well? You're back here...

VAHID

Thank you... I'm very busy... I'm digging a hole in the desert with a shovel...

Vahid sits down at his friend's invitation.

VAHID

Salar, you no longer answer a poor man's calls... I know you're here on Tuesdays, so I decided to come to see you in person.

SALAR

I was busy... I forgot to call you back.

VAHID

It's an urgent matter.

SALAR

Forget work. Did you go to see a doctor? How many appointments have I made for you... Go to see a doctor... Before, Jughead was just a nickname, but now, with you holding your back all the time, you really do look like a jug.

Vahid shows Eghbal's identity card to Salar.

SALAR

Who is this?

VAHID

It's him!

Salar freezes all of a sudden. He pauses, then asks in a low voice.

SALAR

What have you done?

VAHID

I've caught him at last... I hit him with the van... And now he's tied up in the back.

SALAR

Is he still alive?

Vahid nods.

VAHID

I just need you to take a look and confirm it's him or not...

Salar stares at him in disbelief, then looks around.

SALAR

Come on.

Vahid follows Salar. They go down the stairs to the storeroom.

SALAR

What have you done?! Have you thought about the consequences?

VAHID

I recognized him, I couldn't let him go again. All these years, that bastard has haunted every second of my life. I still can't sleep because of him. He took my life, my youth, my woman... I'm only human, how much longer could I have held back? I took him into the desert... I even dug his grave... But he struggled and told me he wasn't Eghbal... That's why I need you to come and check, to tell me if it's him or not... Then I'll know what to do if it is him.

SALAR

I'd never have imagined you falling into a trap like this... Listen, my friend, we're not killers and we won't inflict on him what they did to us... We don't need to dig his grave... He'll dig it himself... But for now he's the one who has dug your grave... because he has destroyed the humanity within you and left only the urge to destroy and kill!

VAHID

Salar, I don't really have time to listen to all that... It's too late now... I'm not asking you to do anything... Just come and see... Tell me if it's him or not.

SALAR

Even if it is him... It's best to let him go. Otherwise, there'll be no end to it.

Vahid looks at Salar for a moment. He seems to have understood that his efforts will get him nowhere. He takes Salar's hand and hugs him tightly.

VAHID

You helped me during the worst times, I'll never forget that. If you don't help me now, I won't hold it against you. But I've started this now... and I'll finish it myself!

Vahid kisses Salar on the shoulder and leaves. As he goes out, he hears Salar's voice and, without turning, he gives a brief wave.

SALAR (O.S.)

Think of yourself! Have you seen the state you're in?

9

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BOOKSTORE - DAY

9

Vahid comes out of the bookstore, crosses the street and walks over to the van. Salar catches up with him before he opens the van door. He has a piece of paper in his hand. He gives it to Vahid.

SALAR

Take this... contact this person and go to see her... Listen to what she tells you.

Salar walks off without saying goodbye. Vahid looks at the piece of paper. A phone number and the name of a woman, Shiva, are written on it. Vahid quickly takes out his phone and calls the number, but there's no answer. Thinking he has made a mistake, he punches out the number again. Still no answer.

10

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - DAY

10

Vahid drives the van through the city, clearly frustrated. Each time he calls the number, there's no answer.

He throws his phone onto the passenger seat in annoyance. He drives for a moment, lost in his thoughts. That's when his phone rings. He brakes sharply and we hear the other cars screech to a halt behind him. Vahid frantically looks for his phone, manages to find it and answers as he gets out of the van.

11

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT - DAY

11

Shiva photographs the bride and groom. They strike a pose in a flowery setting for the occasion. Her phone starts ringing.

SHIVA

Excuse me, just a moment.

GOLROKH

Beware of my train.

SHIVA

I have to answer.

GOLROKH

No problem.

SHIVA

Hello? Hello Maryam? How are you? Yes, the whole series is ready. I'll send it to you tonight.

Shiva walks away from the couple and heads towards a garden in the villa. Vahid is there and wants to talk to her.

SHIVA

I'm sorry... I told you on the phone that I was busy today, but since Salar sent you... What's the problem?

VAHID

Are you the Mrs Biglari who was arrested?

SHIVA

Yes, but what's the problem?

VAHID

Come outside for a minute and I'll explain.

SHIVA

Why can't you tell me here?

VAHID

Well, it's a little complicated.

SHIVA

You can see I'm busy today. Alright, wait for me and I'll come to see you when I take a break.

Shiva goes back over to the bride and groom.

VAHID

I've found Eghbal.

Shiva freezes, then turns to Vahid.

SHIVA

Who are you?

VAHID

Two or three weeks after your arrest... I too was arrested, on the same charges as everyone else: collusion, conspiracy and propaganda against the regime. I read your reports and those by Golrokh just before I was arrested... Just come and take a look at him and I'll leave you alone!

SHIVA

He's here?

Vahid nods. Shiva is rooted to the spot with a look of fear on her face.

VAHID

Don't worry, he can't see or move.

SHIVA

Have you killed him?

VAHID

The bastard is still alive. I've put him in a chest.

Shiva wants to go, but Vahid stops her.

VAHID

Listen, I'm not asking you to do anything... When I came here, I didn't know who you were... But as soon as I saw you, I recognized you...

SHIVA

If you know what he did to us, why are you still here? Go away...

VAHID

Alright, I'm going... My friends call me Jughead. Because of all the kicks I received, I'm always holding my sides now. I'm not asking you to do anything... Salar told me that you alone could help me... All you need to do is see him once and tell me if it's him or not.

SHIVA

Listen... I respect Salar, but he made a mistake giving you my number... It's none of my business if you're a jug now or I don't know what... I don't want to see you or that bastard... I don't want to hear another word... Go on, go now...

Shiva is resolute. She waits for Vahid to leave. Shiva starts to get angry and steps toward Vahid, speaking to him in a louder voice.

SHIVA

I told you to leave, you bastard... and take him with you! Go! I was just beginning to rid myself of those memories... Go!

Without waiting for Vahid to react, Shiva goes back over to the bride and groom. Vahid calls after her a couple of times, but Shiva ignores him. He follows her. Shiva reaches the swimming pool, gets ready and begins to take photos. Her movements are rapid and edgy. Her behavior intrigues the others, but no one says anything. She takes a couple of photos, pauses, then looks at Vahid. She tries to ignore him, takes another photo, then looks at him again. She pulls out her phone and makes a call. As the camera holds on Vahid, we do not hear her voice and we do not know to whom she is speaking. During her phone conversation, she walks over to Vahid. We hear the last few words.

SHIVA

Alright, Salar... I understand... Goodbye.

Shiva hangs up and puts her phone in her pocket.

SHIVA

You're dumping me in the shit... My hands are shaking... God damn you, let's go see him.

She joins Vahid and they leave the garden.

They reach the van. Vahid grabs Shiva's hand, she turns to him.

VAHID

Don't say anything inside... Wait until we're back out...

SHIVA

Why?

VAHID

It's wiser! He mustn't hear your voice.

Vahid calmly opens the van door and climbs in. Shiva follows him. He opens the chest and lifts the blanket. Shiva, her eyes staring, watches Vahid. Eghbal is lying under the blanket. He has a rag stuffed in his mouth and a blindfold covering his eyes. Shiva is petrified. Eghbal squirms and tries to cry out, but all we hear is a muffled sound. Shiva observes his desperate movements. Vahid shows Eghbal's plastic leg to Shiva. She looks at Eghbal, then at Vahid before quickly climbing back out of the van. Vahid puts the blanket back over Eghbal, closes the chest and climbs out of the van in turn.

SHIVA

Are you sure it's him?

VAHID

No, I'm not! That's why I came... So you could tell me.

SHIVA

Then what?

VAHID

What do you mean?

SHIVA

If it is him... What are you going to do?

VAHID

Let me handle that. I don't want to cause you any trouble... I started this and I'm going to finish it, one way or another...

SHIVA

You dragged me into this craziness and now you say you don't want to cause me any trouble?

VAHID

Forget that... Is it really him?

SHIVA

I can't say for certain... I never saw the bastard, I was blindfolded the whole time...

The bride and groom come out of the garden and walk over to Shiva. On spotting them, she becomes edgy.

GOLROKH

Shiva dear... Who is this man?... He isn't here for...

Shiva goes over to Golrokh and the groom who are at the garden gate. Golrokh tries to find out who this stranger is. She thinks that Vahid is a government agent who is there to threaten them. Shiva wants to take the couple back into the garden, but Golrokh resists. The groom, perplexed, steps away from the two women and comes over to Vahid. He greets him and shakes his hand.

GROOM

Brother, we're getting married... We came to my fiancée's house to do a few photos... It's our wedding tomorrow evening... You understand what I mean... Everything is booked...

The groom searches in his pockets for some money, but Shiva calls him back over. Shiva starts to speak. The camera holds on Vahid and the others' voices are incomprehensible. Shiva gestures frequently toward Vahid and it is clear that she is explaining everything to the couple. Golrokh slumps to the ground. The groom takes her in his arms, asking for water. A few seconds later, a young man brings a glass of water. The groom tells Golrokh to drink. He splashes her face too. Shiva tells the young man to go back into the garden. Golrokh, who seems to have recovered a little, then rushes over to the van. Vahid is a little confused. Without paying any attention to him, Golrokh tries to open the door. Vahid stops her. Shiva and the groom come over to them. Before they climb into the van, Shiva makes a gesture to tell them to keep quiet. The two women and the groom get into the van and close the door. The camera holds on Vahid, outside. Worried, he glances around and lights a cigarette. After a few seconds, Golrokh, Shiva and the groom get back out. Golrokh seems exhausted. Vahid quickly closes the door of the van.

GOLROKH

(to Vahid)

Where did you find him?

Vahid looks at Shiva and doesn't reply. All of a sudden, the groom grabs Vahid by his collar.

GROOM

Listen, I don't know who you are or what your game is. I just know this is too much for Golrokh... If anything happens to her, you'll have to deal with me.

Shiva parts the two men.

SHIVA

Ali, go back inside. I'll sort this out.

Ali stares furiously at Vahid.
Shiva raises her voice.

SHIVA

I told you to go...

The groom, seeing that Shiva is serious, takes Golrokh by the arm and starts to walk away. But Golrokh refuses to go back to the garden.

SHIVA

(to Vahid)

Sir. Go now... We can't help you... Do what you want, but leave us alone.

GOLROKH

That bastard ruined my life, I'm not just going to let him leave...

She throws her tiny bouquet to the ground.

GOLROKH

Until I know if it's him or not... I'm not going to give up.

Golrokh's gestures and words plunge everyone into complete silence. They look at each other. Shiva steps over to Vahid.

SHIVA

I told you to leave and you didn't... Now look at the mess you've gotten us into!... It should never have come to this... Right, let me see him one more time!

Vahid opens the door of the van and Shiva climbs in with him. Vahid opens the chest again. Eghbal starts to thrash about. His left leg (the artificial one) is visible because of his torn pants. Shiva bends down to lift the other pant leg in order to see something. But she cannot manage it. She is nervous and her hands shake. Vahid, seeing how edgy she is, takes a box cutter out of his pocket and quickly cuts open the right pant leg. Eghbal's other leg is now exposed, revealing a long scar on it. It seems to be quite old as the flesh has puckered along the scar. On seeing this wound, Shiva is petrified. She quickly climbs out of the van. Vahid closes the chest and gets out in turn. Golrokh and Ali come over to them.

SHIVA

If it's up to me, I say it's him alright...
Hamid told me his right leg was covered
with scars... But...

GOLROKH

But what?

SHIVA

Only Hamid will be able to say for sure
if it's him or not.

ALI

Shiva, what are you going to do? I've
never met Hamid, but I've heard bad
things about him... You want to bring him
here?

SHIVA

No, I'm not bringing that madman here...
We'll go find him!

Ali leads Shiva off to one side.

ALI

Listen, Shiva, you know how it is...
Golrokh has only just recovered... If
anything happens, we won't be able to do
a thing for her.

SHIVA

Something has already happened... There's
nothing we can do about it... If only you'd
stayed in the garden... I know Golrokh
won't drop it now... We'd better find Hamid
as soon as possible...

VAHID

Who's Hamid?

Shiva says nothing for a second or two.

SHIVA

He had the most contact with him. He was under his guard for eleven months! He's the only one who'll be able to recognize him.

GOLROKH

So what are we waiting for? Let's go.

Golrokh, determined, wants to get into the van. Ali, annoyed, steps over to her.

ALI

Golrokh, wait a minute! We're expected back at the house.

Golrokh takes out her phone and makes a call.

GOLROKH

Hi, Mom... How's it going? Mom, Ali and I are going with Shiva to take a few photos... Yes... For the wedding... I wanted to let you know... We'll be back late... Love you...

Golrokh hangs up and looks at Ali.

GOLROKH

There, feel better now? Let's go...

Before they get into the van, Vahid addresses them all.

VAHID

Please turn off your phones and give them to me.

The other three look at each other, then take out their phones, turn them off and give them to Vahid. He opens the door and gets into the van. The others climb in after him. He puts the phones on the dashboard and takes the wheel. The van drives off.

13

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS DAY

13

Golrokh and Ali are sitting in the back of the van.

ALI

What a photo shoot.

GOLROKH

Come on, we've made a lot.

ALI

What a mess.

GOLROKH

You're always complaining. Enough is enough.

Ali approaches Shiva and Vahid, who are sitting at the front of the van. He starts talking to them, but Shiva reminds him that he mustn't be heard. Shiva and Vahid got out of the van silently and headed towards the pharmacy.

14 INT. PHARMACY - DAY

14

Shiva is talking to the doctor behind the counter. They seem to be good friends and the doctor looks happy to see her. Vahid sits on a bench next to some customers, waiting. Shiva occasionally gestures toward Vahid and speaks to him, but we do not hear what they say. Shiva has convinced the doctor who goes into the small room behind the counter. Shiva smiles at Vahid. The doctor comes back after a few seconds with a box. He explains to Shiva what he is giving to her, but we still cannot hear anything.

15 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE PHARMACY - DAY

15

Shiva and Vahid come out of the pharmacy. Shiva carries a bag. She gives what she has bought to Vahid.

SHIVA

Take these and put them in his ears...
Earplugs... When Hamid is here, we won't be
able to stop him talking... He'll mess
things up.

(handing the box of
medication to Vahid)

And we have to put him to sleep too.

VAHID

Are you sure?

SHIVA

I learned certain things with Hamid... And
the doctor showed me what to do too.

VAHID

Isn't this likely to kill him right away?

Shiva stops in the middle of the street and looks insistently at Vahid. He looks away and then notices that a small crowd has gathered around the van. He runs over. Cars screech to a halt. He reaches the van and sees that a street musician and a few other people are singing a festive song just in front of the van. He opens the door and finds Ali searching in the glove compartment. Ali notices Vahid.

ALI

Hey, don't you have any cash in here to give them so they'll leave us in peace? We're really getting ourselves noticed here...

Vahid searches his pockets and finds a bill that he gives to him. Ali hands it to the musician. Shiva and Vahid get into the van and they set off again.

16

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - DAY

16

The city is full of life. As they drive, Shiva tells Vahid which streets to take.

SHIVA

Take that street...

Vahid stops the van. Shiva points to Hamid who is talking to a group of people on the other side of the street.

Shiva gets out of the van and walks towards the man on the other side of the road. From inside the van, all three watch the scene unfold. Shiva makes her way through the traffic. She speaks to the man before he loses his temper with her. They argue, but we cannot hear what they are saying. He pushes her and she falls to the ground. She quickly gets up and forces him to follow her, grabbing his hand to cross the road again, towards the van.

HAMID

Okay, I'm sitting down! What is it?

GOLROKH

Let's go somewhere quiet to talk...

HAMID

What for? I'm already here... Tell me what you want...

ALI

Hamid, this is serious!

HAMID

Don't you give me that!

SHIVA

Hamid, stop being do childish... Shut up for a minute and tell us where we can find a quiet spot!

In the face of Shiva's commanding tone, Hamid falls silent. He takes a deep breath and turns to Vahid.

HAMID

Go to the corner of the street and turn right...

Vahid starts the van up.

17

EXT. CARPARK - DAY

17

The van enters a multi-story carpark and stops on the quiet top level. Ali and Shiva are keeping a close eye on Hamid who seems ready to run. Vahid opens the chest. Eghbal is unconscious.

Hamid looks attentively at Eghbal. Everyone awaits his reaction. He first examines Eghbal's left leg and artificial limb, then he closes his eyes and touches his right leg. Hamid opens his eyes, then moves his hand up the torn pant leg to look at the older scars on the right leg. The others hold their breath. Hamid freezes, then suddenly removes the blindfold from Eghbal's eyes and, cursing, attacks the unconscious man. The others try to hold him back, but Hamid strikes Eghbal several times. Vahid quickly closes the chest. The other three try to control Hamid who goes wild. Ali finally manages to neutralize him at the back of the van. Hamid is breathing heavily. He seems to have reached a decision.

HAMID

I'm gonna chop him to bits... Let go of me, you scumbag... Let go of me! I'm not gonna leave that bastard alive... Let go of my hand... I'm gonna kill him... Let go of me...

SHIVA

(shouting)

Hamid! Stop! I swear, if you don't calm down, I'll throw you out!

HAMID

Shiva, he's a total asshole... He always told me he took it out on guys like us because he lost his leg in Syria... It's him, the fucking bastard... I've been running my hand over that leg of his in my nightmares for years. It's him, the filthy bastard! Let go of me!

SHIVA

Sit down! First, we have to be sure, then...

HAMID

Sure of what?... I'm telling you it's him.. Have you spoken to him?

VAHID

I spoke to him. Before we put him out.

HAMID

You're an idiot. What were you expecting? A confession? If we give him the chance, he'll send us all to the gallows! I know bastards like him. They just have to open their mouths and, using no end of tricks, they dump us in the shit...

GOLROKH

He has to talk. Until he talks, I won't let anyone touch him.

HAMID

I know how to make him talk.

Hamid moves toward Eghbal, but Vahid grabs his arm.

VAHID

Stay back... Until he confesses, no one has the right to touch him!

HAMID

Ah... What an idiot... How many people have one artificial leg and the other covered with scars like that?

SHIVA

Don't talk to him like that! He's a friend of Salar's... Salar Sarang!

HAMID

Why's he hesitating then? His friends are like him! They hesitated...

Hamid pounces on the chest and, before the others can stop him, he starts yelling. The others look around, concerned by the racket that Hamid is making. They grab hold of him and push him out of the van. Hamid tries to get closer to the chest by every means possible, but Ali, Vahid and Shiva push him out of the van again. Ali and Vahid get out too. Hamid struggles with them. Shiva and Golrokh stay in the van and lock the door. Vahid and Ali grab Hamid and drag him into a corner of the carpark. They squat down between the cars. All of a sudden, TWO CARPARK SECURITY GUARDS, middle-aged men with walkie-talkies in hand, come over and look at them, both surprised and calm. Silence falls. Vahid and Ali let go of Hamid and stand. Hamid, panting, stares at the security guards. The silence lingers for a few more seconds.

SECURITY GUARD #1

Were you searching him?

Vahid is the first to collect his wits. He brushes the dust from his clothes.

VAHID

No, we're just joking around!

ALI

Do we look like we were searching him?

Ali holds his hand out to Hamid.

ALI

Get up...

Hamid reluctantly takes Ali's hand and stands, brushing down his clothes. Shiva gets out of the van with her camera, accompanied by Golrokh, and comes over to them.

SHIVA

Hello... What's going on? Is there a problem?

SECURITY GUARD #1

(pointing to Golrokh's
wedding dress)

Is this another joke?

SHIVA

What joke? We're working!

SECURITY GUARD #2

So that's your job, searching people?

SHIVA

No, sir... I'm a photographer. I do wedding photos. We brought this couple up here to take photos. For the view...

SECURITY GUARD #1

What view?

SHIVA

Come and see... You have the whole city at your feet up here! It's as if you could take in the whole of Teheran in one look!

Shiva leads the two security guards over to the edge of the roof and shows them the city below.

SHIVA

Beautiful, isn't it?

They don't seem to find the view particularly beautiful.

SECURITY GUARD #2

You can't see the city... All you can see is dust!

SHIVA

Yes, but I can put whatever I want in the background with the computer...

SECURITY GUARD #1

Such as?

SHIVA

Such as Tehran without dust... or the mountains... plains... forests... Anything the happy couple wants!

SECURITY GUARD #1

So you lie to people?

SHIVA

The bride and groom are real... But the backgrounds are often fake!

Shiva steps over to Golrokh and Ali.

SHIVA

Come on! Let's get started!

Shiva gets Golrokh and Ali to pose as she takes photos. Vahid and Hamid look on. The security guards also look at Golrokh with undisguised pleasure. Golrokh feels uneasy beneath their gaze.

SHIVA

There... That's it... We can go...

Golrokh, Ali, Shiva, Vahid and Hamid get into the van in silence. The security guards continue to look at them calmly. One of them steps over to Shiva, sitting in the front passenger seat, and signals to her to lower her window.

SECURITY GUARD #1

Before, newlyweds were more respectful!

SHIVA

Meaning?

SECURITY GUARD #2

(to his colleague)

For my wedding, I gave away enough money to buy a house, I swear.

Hamid leans toward the window from the back seat. He hasn't heard the conversation.

HAMID

Gentlemen, what's the problem? What is it you want?

SECURITY GUARD #1

Your friend seems very edgy! That's not good on a wedding day!

SHIVA

He's a bit sick. He doesn't feel well...
(turning to the others)
Guys, do you have any cash on you?

VAHID

I gave all mine to that musician.

Hamid and Ali don't have any cash either.

SHIVA

I'm sorry, I'll pay you for your trouble next time...

SECURITY GUARD #1

Do you have a bank card?

SHIVA

Yes...

The security guard suddenly takes an EPT out of his pocket.

SECURITY GUARD #1

If I may...

He enters a sum and holds the terminal out to Shiva.

SECURITY GUARD #1

There you go...

Shiva looks at the terminal's display.

SHIVA

Don't you think that's too much?

SECURITY GUARD #1

Your joke was too much as well... It really looked like you were searching him.

SECURITY GUARD #2

It's the same every time... When it's for us, it's always too much!

SHIVA

Alright then, fine...

Shiva enters her PIN.

SHIVA

(to Vahid)

Let's go, it's getting late!

18

EXT. TEHRAN - BUSY STREET - DAY

18

They park. Vahid quickly gets out and opens the van's door.

VAHID

Everyone get out now, come on, please...

They all look at each other in surprise.

HAMID

Huh?

VAHID

I'm sorry to have taken up your time... But I don't need you anymore. Please... I'll take care of the rest... I don't want to bother you with my problem anymore.

HAMID

So it's your problem now?

VAHID

Let me finish this... I'm not moving from here until you go... It's up to you.

HAMID

I won't give up until I see his corpse! And, if you want, you can bring beds and sleep here, be my guests!

Ali stands and gets out.

GOLROKH

Where are you going?

ALI

He's right! We have other things to do.

GOLROKH

Ali, do you realize what you're saying?

ALI

He's right...

(pointing to Vahid)

He found him, he captured him... He has the right to decide his fate...

GOLROKH

You really want to go?... Fine, go then!

ALI

I'm not going without you. Are you feeling okay, Goli?

GOLROKH

Of course I'm not feeling okay!

ALI

Imagine it is him! What do you plan to do with him?

Golrokh looks away without answering.

ALI

It's a trap, Golrokh! Let it go... The further you take this, the deeper into it you'll get. In the end, you'll all drown! Please, Golrokh... Come on, let's leave. Let's pretend that everything today never happened!

Ali holds his hand out to Golrokh.

GOLROKH

It all happened years ago. It has to end one day! And it was written that day is today! This is very important for me, it's personal... If you want to go, just go.

ALI

We're getting married. We mustn't have personal problems anymore.

GOLROKH

So it's nothing more than a personal problem now?... Let me tell you this... If this scumbag doesn't talk, you'll see my corpse at my wedding tomorrow.

Golrokh sits down on the chest where Eghbal is hidden. Silence falls. Everyone waits for Vahid's reaction. Ali sits down next to Golrokh and takes her in his arms. Vahid, who is still outside the van, lights a cigarette and leans against the door. He thinks, as if he were at a dead end. Shiva gets out of the van and comes over to Vahid.

SHIVA

Can you spare a cigarette?

Vahid holds his pack out to her. Shiva takes one, slips it between her lips and Vahid lights it for her. Shiva pats Vahid's hand gently to thank him and signals to him to close the door. Vahid understands and closes it. After a couple of drags on the cigarette, Shiva looks at him again.

SHIVA

So, what do you plan to do now?

VAHID

Quite frankly, I'm not sure.

SHIVA

Do you always do this? Act before you think?

VAHID

What do you mean?

SHIVA

Nothing, it's just that you get carried away... you make hasty decisions... But the good thing is you then calm down and turn logical... You know, Vahid, I didn't intend to come with you.

The van heads along the streets. Golrokh and Ali are still sitting on the chest, Shiva in the front passenger seat. Vahid drives. Hamid is huddled up in the back of the van. He moves toward Shiva and stands between the driver and passenger seats. He talks to Shiva, this time without shouting.

HAMID

I thought you'd quit smoking... But, with all this, I guess you can't resist a cigarette...

Shiva and Vahid exchange a meaningful look. Shiva makes a move to stand and change seats, but Hamid stops her.

HAMID

Stay there, I have something to say to you... Listen, Shiva. Is it a problem for you he hasn't confessed? Let's find somewhere out of the way and I'll get you a confession in next to no time, it'll put all your minds at rest.

SHIVA

Using your usual method for obtaining a confession, I presume?

HAMID

If you want, I can even buy him a meal! And offer him a warm shower so he feels better!... I mean, come on!... They hanged me by my feet! I didn't see the sun for three months... I could no longer tell day from night... And now you feel sorry for them?

SHIVA

So there's no difference between you and them? He tortured you, so you have to torture him too, is that it? It's one hellish, unstoppable chain of events?

HAMID

Why are you pretending not to understand? You kidnapped someone... you tied him up... you knocked him out!

VAHID

I should never have gotten you involved... but I had no other option... I didn't know what else to do.

HAMID

Now, you have to act! If this guy walks away from this, we're all concerned!

SHIVA

He didn't see us! He was blindfolded all the time.

VAHID

I think he saw me. He knows where I work too.

Silence falls and lingers for a moment.

SHIVA

Thanks a lot! When you took our phones... I thought you knew what you were doing.

VAHID

I couldn't know things would go this far!

All of a sudden, the van stops. Vahid tries to start it again several times, in vain. They all look at each other.

HAMID

Your van seems to be in a bad way too.

20 EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - DAY 20

Vahid, Hamid, Golrokh and Ali push the van along the streets, beneath the mocking gaze of passersby.

21 EXT. GAS STATION - DAY 21

The van is on the gas station forecourt and Vahid is filling the tank. A PUMP ATTENDANT takes the nozzle from him.

PUMP ATTENDANT

Are you the groom? You can't do this on your wedding day... Give me that.

VAHID

No, I'm not the groom.

PUMP ATTENDANT

Never mind! You're all guests! Congratulations...

All of a sudden, the door of the van opens and Golrokh leans out to throw up. Vahid rushes to her.

VAHID

Are you okay?

GOLROKH

It's nothing...

Vahid peers into the van. The others are all holding their noses as yellow liquid trickles over the floor of the van from the chest where Eghbal is hidden. Vahid turns to the pump attendant who has finished.

PUMP ATTENDANT

Don't forget the tip... I hope the two of them will be very happy. Is it your sister's wedding?

VAHID

No!

PUMP ATTENDANT

Ah, you're the groom's brother then!

Vahid hesitates for a second and then, to bring the discussion to an end...

VAHID

Yes.

PUMP ATTENDANT

It'll cost a little more then!

VAHID

I don't have any cash on me.

PUMP ATTENDANT

If I may...

The pump attendant holds an EPT out to him as Vahid turns to the others who are still holding their noses and making the best of a bad situation.

22

EXT. QUIET SPOT UNDER A BRIDGE - DAY

22

The van has stopped on a waste lot. The chest is empty. Ali is cleaning the inside of the van while Hamid, Shiva and Golrokh wait a short distance away. Hamid drags on his cigarette and steps over to Shiva.

HAMID

(gesturing to Vahid a short distance away)

How long have you known him?

SHIVA
I met him today!

HAMID
Tell me the truth! Who is this guy?

SHIVA
...

HAMID
Why did you all trust him so easily?

GOLROKH
He said he was a friend of Salar's!

SHIVA
Salar gave him my number!

HAMID
So as soon as someone turns up saying
he's a friend of Salar's, you believe
every word he says?

SHIVA
We haven't all done a course in paranoia
like you!

HAMID
No need for a course! He's clearly one of
them!

GOLROKH
Oh, come on...

HAMID
Why is he so quiet? Look at the way he
acts! He knows a lot about us now and
he'll bring us down!

SHIVA
What do you mean?

HAMID
He's worming information out of us!

GOLROKH
So where does Eghbal fit in?

HAMID
He's part of the whole scheme!

Shiva and Golrokh look at Hamid as if they were having doubts. Ali finishes cleaning the van.

Vahid comes back, carrying the unconscious Eghbal on his back and carefully lays him in the chest. He takes the dirty rags, steps out of the van and walks off to throw them away. All of a sudden, Vahid falls to the ground. The other four rush over to him. Vahid presses his hand to the small of his back, he is in pain.

ALI

What's wrong?

VAHID

My kidneys... Give me some water.

Hamid stands and runs back to the van. The others help Vahid to his feet. Ali and Shiva take Vahid's arms and support him. All of a sudden, we hear the van start up. Everyone turns. Ali and Shiva run toward the van that begins to pull away, and Ali manages to jump in at the last second. Shiva remains standing there, watching the van that circles the dusty plot of waste land while Ali fights with Hamid behind the wheel. In the end, the van collides with a mound of earth and stops. Vahid falls to the ground, twisting in pain.

23

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

23

We are in the same desert as in scene 6. Everyone is sitting some distance away from the hole. Vahid is on the van's step smoking a cigarette. Hamid stands and steps over to the grave, looking into the empty hole.

HAMID

Maybe the dose was too strong and it killed him.

SHIVA

No, I checked... we just have to wait.

HAMID

How much longer?

SHIVA

Until he comes round.

HAMID

What difference does it make?

ALI

He has the right to know why we captured him!

HAMID

Ah, Mister Silent Majority speaks at last... You didn't say anything until seeing which way the wind was blowing so you could go along with it, of course... People like you think they're the Gandhis and Mandelas, and they see us as the Hitlers and Mussolinis... You don't get it... if this guy survives, he won't spare us... Don't you realize that?!

He turns to Vahid and addresses him directly.

HAMID

You idiot, this guy heard your voice... He'll find you in a split second, whatever hole you hide in, and he'll tear you apart...

He looks at Shiva as he gestures to Vahid.

HAMID

You think this guy will never give in... that he'll never give your names... but he'll betray you all the first chance he gets!

He turns to Ali again.

HAMID

You think you're right...

GOLROKH

(interrupting him)

Why do you say none of us understands? Everyone has the right to their opinion!

HAMID

Ah, here we go, you always have to be right... Mrs Golrokh, its high time you realized... You think I don't know anything... But I found out all there is to know about your dear father-in-law... Do you know how your rich boy husband's father climbed so high overnight?

GOLROKH

How long are you going to keep thinking like a child?... Why do you continually find ways to sully people? Aren't you ever going to grow up?

SHIVA

Golrokh... calm down! Don't let him get to you.

GOLROKH

I don't see why I should calm down... remain calm, to be depressed day and night and zombify myself with meds... no, enough... Mister Vahid, I don't know who you are or who you aren't... what I do know is that you want to know why I'm here... I'm here because, after prison... this bastard spread the rumor that I had collaborated with them... When Shiva told me that Eghbal was in the car, I decided to come along to make him confess that I never betrayed anyone, that I never caved in... I decided to come so that before saying "I do", Ali would hear everything I went through. Ali, in jail, I was blindfolded when they took me out of the cell. They took me to the gallows... I heard a woman ask, "Do I let her fall?" Then I heard a broken voice answer her, "Yes, let her fall. But she's young, make sure her neck breaks right away so she doesn't suffer too much..." I waited for hours for them to lower the lever and put me out of my misery... until I heard that voice again, "Take her down, she needs to be married first before we cast her into hell"... They thought an executed virgin would go straight to heaven, and they didn't want to do me that honor... After I got out, they kept harassing me with phone calls and threats... I was waiting for the right moment to tell you all that, Ali, so that if ever anyone threatens you in any way whatsoever... or calls you, you'll know the truth... you'll be aware of everything... Hamid, do you really want to hang me here, now, when they didn't even do it?

HAMID

Such fine compliments from a bride... you turn me into a supporter of the regime now.

GOLROKH

No, I know you'll never collaborate with them... but you'll gain nothing if you carry on like this.

HAMID

I'll manage to prove who's behind all this...

Ali cries out all of a sudden.

ALI

Stop, Hamid! That's enough...

HAMID

Shut up, you! You've never been locked up in a room, blindfolded, with that bastard!

ALI

Listen... I've respected you all this time... but I have to react to that.

HAMID

I got my answer long ago. When they were dragging me from one cell to another, your daddy was receiving foreign currency and selling it on the black market to secure a prosperous future for his little boy! But you'll see, one day all those people will have to explain themselves!

SHIVA

You can pray for that day to come!... But, believe me, your justice isn't the right one either.

HAMID

Don't talk to me about justice, you'll make me puke! You dumped me when I had nothing left. What became of all your fine promises... "Together forever..."

SHIVA

I didn't leave you because you had no money left. You never had money anyway. I left you because you couldn't rid yourself of your rancor and hate... I left you because you could no longer tell the difference between friends and enemies, and you still can't...

HAMID

Stop. You want me to tell you all what your problem is? You're scared... scared of consequences, scared they'll come back to haunt you! So let me deal with it... it'll be for the best, even for you... you'll get your revenge!

(MORE)

HAMID (CONT'D)

(speaking to them all)

And you'll avoid any violence.

SHIVA

It's not violence I have a problem with,
but crime.

HAMID

How come you still don't understand?... I'm
telling you, this is war, it's kill or be
killed...

(turning to Ali)

Ali, Mister Silent Majority, try to
understand... Come on, let's throw him in
his grave!

ALI

Look, you've said what you had to say.
Out of respect for Golrokh, I haven't
said anything. But this silent majority
you talk about... it remembers history
well... The religious leaders arrived
brandishing the slogan of paradise, now
they start their morning prayer with
executions... And you tell us we have to
kill and bury him?

HAMID

Listen to me, I'm not promoting violence
here... I'm preventing barbarity... The only
language they understand is that of the
strongest... But you're acting as if you
still hoped you could change them...

SHIVA

Who said they were going to change? If
they could, they would have already... I'm
saying there has to be a fair trial,
that's all.

HAMID

What fair trial?!... Where?... When?... Now
that the courts are in their hands... They
pass death sentences in the courtrooms
every minute... Do you think they'll ever
judge their own one day? You must be
dreaming!... A fair trial, that will come
once we're victorious, not for now...

SHIVA

If you carry on acting like this, you'll
only make things worse.

Silence falls.

Ali gently takes Golrokh by the arm and leads her off to one side. We do not hear their conversation, but it looks as if Ali is trying to comfort her.

Shiva walks over to the dried-up tree, sits and leans against it.

Hamid goes over to the van and looks at Vahid who has remained silent all this time, sitting on the step, smoking a cigarette and observing the scene. Vahid's serious expression discourages Hamid from coming any closer. He gazes at him for a second, looks away and stares at Shiva. He walks over to her and lights a cigarette.

HAMID

(to Shiva)

Looking at you there, in that position, against this tree, it reminds me of that play *Waiting for Godot* that you took me to see. Why won't you listen to me? You've never listened to a word I say... but listen to me now at least... I'm telling you again, this is a trap! That guy is with state security!

SHIVA

It doesn't matter now, the damage has been done.

HAMID

Why is he refusing to let me check if Eghbal is alive or dead?

SHIVA

That's obvious... No one here trusts you!

HAMID

Thanks a lot!

SHIVA

You really want to kill him? You're obsessed by revenge, that's the problem... Eghbal "killed" you so you then try to kill him!

HAMID

Yes, he "killed" me... He and people like him killed off the five best years of my life... And those of hundreds of others too. How many years in all? In fact, killing this man just once is too little... the others like him should be punished too and, if there are any left afterwards, they'll know what's what.

SHIVA

I have no problem with punishment... but at the right time... Hamid, killing won't solve anything! The problem isn't these people themselves, the problem is the system that gives them unlimited power... In a system like that, if you kill him, don't you think they'll simply put another man in his place?... No, Hamid, even if they put an angel of justice in his place... it would still be the same problem!

HAMID

The same old speeches all over again... What system are you talking about? They created that system, you know.

SHIVA

Those people would behave differently in another system. The problem isn't people... it's the system... You confuse the system with a few submissive people...

HAMID

Submissive?... Remember, this guy wanted to marry Golrokh off before hanging her. Why turn a blind eye to that? The guy believed body and soul in the hell where he wanted to send Golrokh...

All of a sudden, Hamid stands and raises his voice to speak to everyone.

HAMID

All you do is talk, nothing but talk... It's been going on for almost half a century... Aren't you fed up of talking? It's easy for you to label me. You find excuses for yourselves. But you never do anything because you're scared of the consequences. Why can't you understand that this guy is a filthy, worthless rag... however often you wash him, he'll never be clean.

Shiva stands and walks over to Hamid with fire in her eyes.

SHIVA

You really want to kill him? That's exactly what he wants, someone to put an end to his cursed life... so that the next regime will be based on murder... the same endless cycle... Is that really what you want for the future of your country and your people?!... Come on then, let's go kill him together... Come on!

Shiva grabs Hamid's hand and leads him over to the van. Vahid stands. He stares at Shiva. Golrokh and Ali come over too. They stay at the door and watch what happens inside the van.

Shiva is still holding Hamid's hand. She climbs into the van, goes to the back of it, searches for a few seconds and finds a crowbar. She uses it to break open the chest. Eghbal lies inside, still unconscious. Shiva hands the crowbar to Hamid.

SHIVA

Come on... You can kill him with this.

Hamid, hesitant, takes the crowbar and stares at Shiva.

SHIVA

If you really think that killing guys like him is the answer... If you don't do it, I will.

She lays her hand on the crowbar. They are both touching it now. Total silence reigns. The other three look at Hamid and Shiva in disbelief. The atmosphere is heavy with astonishment and wariness. All of a sudden, a phone rings. The ringing sounds even louder in this silence. Vahid is the first to react. He goes to the front of the van and opens the glove compartment, but the ringing doesn't seem to be coming from one of the phone stored there.

ALI

It's coming from the chest...

Vahid goes to the chest. He searches Eghbal's pockets. But he doesn't find anything. The phone keeps ringing. He finally finds it under a blanket. It's an old Nokia. Vahid stares incredulously at the phone.

VAHID

I didn't know he had this one too... His other phone is in the glove compartment.

Vahid looks at the others and is about to answer the phone.

SHIVA

Don't answer it!

They wait and, after a few seconds, the ringing ends. But then the phone starts ringing again.

VAHID

Forget it, it's best to answer...

Vahid alters his voice as he answers the phone.

VAHID

Yes... Hello...

Vahid listens. We make out the confused voice of a little girl who seems to be crying and pleading. Vahid listens for a moment, then hangs up.

SHIVA

Who was it?

VAHID

His daughter! His wife is pregnant... She said her water broke... and that she fainted in the kitchen!

HAMID

I said it before and I'll say it again... It's a trap!

ALI

What?!

HAMID

They know their colleague has been kidnapped and they're setting a trap for us!

VAHID

I don't think it's a trap... A child couldn't lie that well! I'm going. You can all do what you want.

Vahid gets in behind the wheel. The others look at him.

SHIVA

(to the others)

What about you?

GOLROKH

I think he's telling the truth... I'm going with him...

The van arrives at Eghbal's house. Everyone looks attentively at the place and its surroundings, but they don't spot anything suspicious. They drive slowly past the house. The van turns onto a street a little further along and stops.

Total silence reigns.

ALI

If it were a trap, they'd already have stopped us.

The phone rings again.

SHIVA

Put it on speaker...

Vahid answers the phone and turns the speaker on. The little girl's voice, crying and pleading, echoes around the van.

NILOUFAR (O.S.)

Daddy, where are you? Mommy won't wake up... Please, hurry... Mommy's dying... Daddy, hurry... Daddy... Daddy, why aren't you saying anything? Mommy's dying... Daddy... Please, say something...

Vahid can't stand the sound of this voice any longer and hangs up. He does a U-turn in the van and drives up to the house. He parks in the same spot as at the start of the film and hurriedly gets out.

SHIVA

Hold on... I'm coming with you...

Vahid turns to the others.

VAHID

If we take too long or if you see anything suspicious, leave right away... Don't wait for us.

Vahid and Shiva hurry over to the house. They reach the door. After hesitating for a second, they ring the bell. Shortly after, Niloufar's tearful and choked voice is heard over the intercom.

NILOUFAR (O.S.)

Yes?

VAHID

Hello, sweetie... I'm a friend of your daddy's. I've come to help... He told me that your Mommy wasn't well... Can you let me in?

NILOUFAR (O.S.)

But where's my daddy?

VAHID

He had to work... He couldn't come. That's why he sent me... It's late... Open the door, sweetie.

25

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS - NIGHT

25

The woman is lying in the van on the chest where Eghbal is hidden. Hamid, Ali and Golrokh, worried, stare at her. Vahid drives. Shiva is in the passenger seat. She turns and looks at the back of the van. Golrokh has Niloufar in her arms and comforts her. Shiva looks at Vahid and speaks to him in a whisper.

SHIVA

We need to think about what we do when we reach the hospital.

VAHID

No need to go in! We drop her at the ER and leave.

SHIVA

Are you making fun of me or do you really take everything so lightly?... Someone has to go with her... Hospitals will never accept her without someone to accompany her...

VAHID

Accompanying her isn't the problem... I can accompany her... The problem is, there are loads of cameras there... We have to be sure that no one but me will be seen. And you have to talk to Niloufar... We don't have all the information we need to fill out the forms...

Shiva gets out of the passenger seat and goes to sit next to Niloufar. Vahid watches them in the rearview mirror. Just then, the van runs over a pot-hole.

NILOUFAR

Sir, please, slow down...

Vahid looks away from the rearview mirror to focus on the road.
The street is calm in the Tehran night.

26

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

26

Niloufar and Vahid are at the hospital reception desk, with the little girl's pregnant mother on a stretcher next to them. A HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST fills out a file on the other side of the counter.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

What's the patient's name?

NILOUFAR

Azam... Azam Pourniyaz!

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

And her platelet count was 39?

NILOUFAR

Yes...

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

Your father doesn't say much.

NILOUFAR

He's not my father, he's my uncle.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

So where's your father?

NILOUFAR

He's at work... He couldn't come. He sent my uncle.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

That's not right, sweetie. Your father has to sign the consent form.

NILOUFAR

Well, I can sign it.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

You have a signature?

NILOUFAR

No... Can my uncle sign?

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

No, sweetie... Call your father and tell him to come here.

NILOUFAR

He can't!

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

Sweetie, there's nothing more urgent than this. He has to come and sign it.

NILOUFAR

Give me the form then, I'll sign it.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

You don't have a signature...

NILOUFAR

Then my uncle can sign, can't he?

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

No, sweetie... Call your father and tell him to come.

The woman on the stretcher seems to be suffering. Vahid keeps an eye on her.

VAHID

Madam, excuse me... This woman is dying... Are you waiting for her husband to come here to collect her corpse?

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

Sir, it's the law! If anything goes wrong during the operation, who will take responsibility?

VAHID

I will! Just let me sign...

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

You don't even have any ID with you!

VAHID

What if I'd found this woman on the street and brought her here... Would you have waited for her to die before admitting her?

As Vahid begins to raise his voice, a DOCTOR, a file in his hand, comes over to him.

DOCTOR

What's going on here, sir?

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

The patient's accompanying adult doesn't have any ID papers! I can't admit them!

VAHID

She's in a critical condition... Look at her! I didn't have time to fetch any papers.

DOCTOR

What's your relationship to the patient?

VAHID

I...

NILOUFAR

He's my uncle!

The doctor rapidly examines the pregnant woman and then turns to the receptionist.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Soltani, admit her right now... They can bring us the ID papers later.

(to his staff)

Get this patient to the surgical unit immediately. It's urgent!

VAHID

Thank you.

DOCTOR

You're welcome. Is it her second child?

NILOUFAR

Yes...

DOCTOR

What a bright little girl...

(to Vahid)

How old is she?

NILOUFAR

My mommy is forty!

DOCTOR

Not the ideal age to give birth.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

Young lady... Tell me your father's full name...

NILOUFAR

Rashid Shamsavari...

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

And how old is your father?

NILOUFAR

Fifty. He's ten years older than Mommy!

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

Such precision! Sir, please sign here...
Hey, angry uncle... I'm talking to you...
Sign here... And pay this bill too... As soon
as that's done, we'll take her to the
delivery room...

Vahid is still in shock. He signs the document. He takes the bill. Vahid tells Niloufar to stay there and walks over to the cashier's counter in the hallway. He stands there. He looks at the bill, then takes out his bank card. He hesitates for a second.

27

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

27

Vahid and Niloufar are sitting outside the surgical unit. Niloufar eats a sandwich and drinks soda.

NILOUFAR

You're not eating?

VAHID

I already ate. I'm full. Go on, eat...

A little time passes...

VAHID

Niloufar, can I ask you something? Will you tell me the truth?

NILOUFAR

Yes.

VAHID

Don't you have an uncle, an aunt, a grandmother or any family? Why didn't you call someone to help you?

NILOUFAR

Daddy doesn't want that! He gets angry! Daddy says that whatever happens, he's the only one I should call. And Mommy's family and friends live in the provinces.

A NURSE comes over to them.

NURSE

Congratulations... The baby's born. He's beautiful and healthy...

NILOUFAR

Is Mommy okay?

NURSE

Yes, sweetie. She's fine too...

NILOUFAR

Can I see her?

NURSE

You can't see her just like that. You have to pay. Is he your uncle?

NILOUFAR

Yes...

NURSE

Is he generous?

NILOUFAR

What?

NURSE

It's a tradition. You shouldn't have come empty-handed...

VAHID

(to Niloufar)

Stay here, I'll be right back.

Vahid goes out.

28

EXT. STREET NEAR THE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

28

Vahid reaches the van. He opens the door and hands the pastries to the others.

VAHID

The baby's born. It's a boy... His mother's doing well...

HAMID

Good news...

(ironic)

Mission accomplished.

VAHID

Does anyone have cash?

SHIVA, ALI & GOLROKH

Not me...

SHIVA

Why do you need cash?

HAMID

Maybe for the nurse's tip...

SHIVA

Forget it... Let's go... You did what you had to do.

VAHID

I have to go back to the little girl.

SHIVA

Then what?

VAHID

Do you have your bank cards on you?

They all answer yes, except for Hamid.

VAHID

There's an ATM over there... But two hundred tomans is the most you can withdraw. If we take out two hundred each, that should be enough...

They all look at each other.

VAHID

We'll have all this sorted in a couple of minutes and then we can go.

HAMID

I don't have a bank card or cash... I'll stay right here... As for you lot, go ahead and do your good deeds!

They all look at each other. It's obvious that no one trusts Hamid to stay alone with Eghbal.

VAHID

I have to lock the van...

HAMID

Ah, so that's how it is!
(to Shiva, Golrokh and Ali)
You don't trust me either...

SHIVA

Locking the van will reassure us.

HAMID

(with a bitter smile)

Even when they're not around, they manage to destroy trust and friendship! Their corpse is rotting humanity!

GOLROKH

Come with us then...

HAMID

To celebrate that kid's birth?

SHIVA

Hamid... It's just a baby! Why are you reacting like this?

HAMID

Because I'm sure he'll become a criminal like his father. Think of the children of all those women forced to miscarry in Evin! They were babies too! But why bother... just let things happen all over again.

Hamid gets out of the van. He turns to look at the others.

HAMID

You'll be kicking yourselves a day or two from now.

(gesturing to Eghbal)

He'll say he did his duty... After all, in every war, there's collateral damage... That's what we were, collateral damage. But, this time, you can only blame yourselves for your negligence! So go ahead, play Gandhi, write slogans for human rights and we'll see what happens! I'm out of here.

Hamid walks away from the van without another word, beneath the annoyed gaze of the other four.

29

EXT. NEAR THE ATM - NIGHT

29

Vahid, Shiva, Golrokh and Ali have gathered around the ATM. Apart from Shiva, they all have money in their hands. Shiva takes some bills from the ATM and gives them to Vahid. He counts the money.

SHIVA

Is that enough?

VAHID

Yes! Thank you very much.
 (opening the box of pastries
 and offering it to them)
 Enjoy one of these at least.

They take a pastry each, a little reluctantly.

VAHID

Go now. I think I'm going to stay here a
 while, it could take some time.

SHIVA

What are you going to do?

VAHID

I don't know... I'm really sorry I spoiled
 the day for all of you. I hope I'll make
 up for it some day. Goodbye.

Vahid starts to walk away, then turns and calls out to
 Shiva.

VAHID

Shiva...

Shiva goes over to Vahid.

VAHID

If anything happens, don't worry. Tell
 the others I'll die without denouncing
 anyone. Goodbye.

Vahid goes into the hospital with the box of pastries and
 the money in his hand while the others watch him go.

30 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY 30

Vahid enters the maternity unit. He looks around and
 spots Niloufar asleep on a chair.

31 EXT. STREET NEAR THE HOSPITAL - NIGHT 31

Vahid arrives back at the van and sees Shiva leaning
 against it.

VAHID

You didn't leave?

SHIVA

I wasn't going to abandon you halfway.

VAHID

Maybe you stayed because you don't trust me...

SHIVA

I don't know... Maybe it's because of the promise I made Salar too.

Vahid opens the van door. Shiva climbs in first, then Vahid follows, taking his place behind the wheel.

32

EXT. TEHRAN - STREETS OUT OF THE CITY - NIGHT

32

Vahid drives the van through Tehran. Shiva sits at his side, staring at the road ahead. From time to time, she looks at Vahid. He occasionally glances at her too. All of a sudden, Eghbal's groans are heard from the chest. Shiva turns to the back of the van. Vahid looks in the rearview mirror. A cell phone starts ringing. They look at each other. Shiva realizes that it's her phone. She looks at the screen, then turns to Vahid.

Vahid goes to the back of the van and opens the chest. He lifts Eghbal out. As he pulls the other man out of the van, he is overcome by pain again. He fights it. He gets out of the van and Eghbal pounces on him. They both fall to the ground, Eghbal on top of Vahid. Vahid tries to break free, but Eghbal holds him down on the ground and hits him. Vahid seems unable to breathe. Eghbal hits him again. All of a sudden, something flashes out of the darkness and strikes Eghbal's head. He freezes and collapses. Vahid collects his wits. He turns and sees Shiva, furious, still holding the shovel that she just used to hit Eghbal.

VAHID

What are you doing?! Don't hit him...
You'll kill him...

Shiva seems to come to her senses all of a sudden. She first looks around, then stares at the shovel in her hand. She seems shocked by what she has done. She tosses the shovel aside and helps Vahid who has trouble standing. With some difficulty, they drag Eghbal over to the side of the road.

VAHID

I think he's still alive.

Shiva leans down over Eghbal. Blood trickles from the spot where she hit him.

VAHID

Is he alive?

Shiva nods and comes back over to Vahid. They sit down for a second to recover.

VAHID

I'd never have thought you'd do that...

SHIVA

Why not?

VAHID

You always say violence is bad, and now you hit him with a shovel.

SHIVA

Doing all you can to avoid violence and being a coward are different. If I hadn't hit him, he'd have killed you...

Vahid looks at her for a moment. He stands and goes back over to Eghbal. He tries to drag him over to the road. Shiva tries to help. Vahid signals to Shiva not to touch Eghbal. He moves the other man to a more suitable spot. Vahid comes back over to the van, takes a bottle of water and pours a little on Eghbal's face. He removes Eghbal's earplugs and gives him a little water to drink. Eghbal drinks and catches his breath. After a few groans, he begins to speak.

EGHBAL

Why are you doing this to me... For God's sake, I have a wife and children... Tell me! Why?

Shiva steps forward to attack Eghbal, but Vahid stops her and signals to her to keep quiet. Shiva is forced to speak in a whisper.

SHIVA

It's him... That voice, it's that bastard's voice...

Vahid gestures to her to be quiet, then turns to Eghbal.

VAHID

Even the way you talk hasn't changed... Do you remember how you'd hit me and then swear on Seyed al-Shuhada how sorry you were? Look what you did to me, you bastard. What had I done?

(MORE)

VAHID (CONT'D)

With a few workers worse off than me, we simply asked for what was owed to us, our pay for our work. We told you we didn't even have bread. What did we say to make you destroy us? I used to slave away from dawn to dusk in the heat of the date factory, struggling to bring home a bit of bread, and you turned me into a guy who really wants to kill someone. I hit you on purpose, then I dug a grave for you. You filthy piece of shit.

EGHBAL

What's all that to do with me?

VAHID

Stop, you idiot. Lying won't help you. If I hadn't had my doubts earlier, you'd be under a ton of earth. But now I'm sure you're that bastard.

EGHBAL

I can tell you're not a killer... This morning, your voice reeked of death... Now, it's no longer the sound of death I hear. If I was who you claim I am, you'd already be dead... untie me...

VAHID

I've been dead since you put the noose around my neck and knocked the chair over... When I pissed my pants and fell to the floor, you split your sides laughing... The guy standing in front of you has been one of the living dead for a long time now. Remember when you opened the cell door laughing and told me my fiancée was dead and that I'd need to find another? You heartless bastard, I died right then on hearing she killed herself because of you, you damn savage. Now it's time to make your last requests.

EGHBAL

I don't have any idea what you're talking about... I have a wife and children, why should I do what you say?

Really? When you made the wives and children of prisoners weep and beg at the prison to force them into making false confessions, did you know what a wife and children meant then? It's up to you.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

If you don't want to send a last message to your family, to your daughter and your son, fine, don't do it.

EGHBAL

My son? I told you you were wrong. I only have a daughter. You've been dragging me around all day for nothing... Just to spout this nonsense to me.

VAHID

Your son was born today.

EGHBAL

My son?!... How do you know that? Maybe...

VAHID

I drove your wife to the hospital myself.

EGHBAL

What did you do to her? I swear to God, if you hurt her...

VAHID

Shut up. Your daughter Niloufar called your phone to say that her mother wasn't well and that she had fainted in the kitchen. I drove them to the hospital. She was lying on that chest where you were hidden. They're both fine.

EGHBAL

Did you see my son?

VAHID

I saw him.

Silence falls. Vahid looks at Shiva. Until Eghbal starts speaking.

EGHBAL

Let me reassure you. You're not a killer... If you were, you'd never have taken my wife and daughter to the hospital... Now, I know you're not sure if I'm Eghbal or not... because you've fallen prey to guilt... You want to hear it from my mouth... So listen carefully... I'm not saying this because I'm scared of dying... But because you helped my wife... I'm saying it to pay my debt to you, so I owe you nothing anymore... I'm Eghbal... The real Eghbal... Everything I did was a religious obligation.

(MORE)

EGHBAL (CONT'D)

I did it all to preserve religion and the system... I'll sacrifice everything I have to preserve the system... Just as I sacrificed my leg in Syria for the goals of the regime. Because the imam said that preserving the regime is a greater obligation than the life of the Supreme Guide. Now, you want the children you smack to write the al-Baqarah surah for you? For a few coins of your pittance that was delayed a few days, they should ruin everything and offer the country to the enemy to endanger the security of the regime? I don't know who you are, or what you're saying... But I have nothing to do with the law or the government... For me, the Master and the regime are all that matter. If you claim I did those things, then they were necessary. There's no red line when it comes to preserving the regime. If it was your right, fine, if not God Himself will reward you.

VAHID

What a surprise. You talk just like ISIS. They kill innocents too and say that if they were guilty, fine, if not, they'll be martyrs in heaven.

EGHBAL

Think what you like... Do whatever you want. If I return home alive and you haven't hurt my wife and children and, as you claim, you helped them, I'll forgive you. I'll forget about today. And if I die, I'll reach my goal of becoming a martyr. That's all... I won't say another word.

Shiva, who has been calm until now, suddenly throws herself at Eghbal.

SHIVA

Fine, I'll help you reach that goal. I'll make you a martyr right now.

Shiva hits Eghbal several times. She grabs him and drags him over the ground with his arms tied behind his back.

SHIVA

Bring the spade. We're going to make that hole a little bigger.

Vahid freezes for a second and stares at Shiva in surprise. At a signal from Shiva, he helps her to drag Eghbal along.

EGHBAL

Who are you? How many of you are there?

SHIVA

Shut up. You said you wouldn't utter another word... Isn't it your goal to become a martyr? Well, I'm the angel of death, here to make your dream come true. You ISIS bastard, you think we're going to let you go so you can make fun of us and make hundreds of others as unhappy as we are?

Eghbal tries to speak several times, but he falls silent under Shiva's onslaught. She and Vahid pretend to dig the hole. They throw several spadefuls of earth over Eghbal. He keeps asking what they are doing. But there's no reply, only the sound of digging. Eghbal is terrified. He wants to speak, but Shiva comes over to him and grips his chin firmly.

SHIVA

Your mouth should only open to express your regrets. If I hear anything but regrets, I'll hit you with this shovel. I don't want your mouth bleeding when I cover you with soil, so the earth doesn't get dirty. Understand?

EGHBAL

But...

SHIVA

Nothing but regrets. DON't say anything else. One dead scumbag is the same as the next.

When Eghbal tries to speak, Shiva strikes his mouth with the back of her hand.

SHIVA

Carry on...

The sound of digging continues.

SHIVA

This bastard keeps talking about what he did. He thinks he's still at the interrogator's desk.

(MORE)

SHIVA (CONT'D)

Yes, you're for Islam and the regime, unbound wealth is leaving this country and its our fault again... You think the country belongs to you? You piece of shit. You have a finger in every pie. Remember when you looked at my private photos and you asked me how many dollars I'd been paid to remove my veil? Remember when you took money out of my pocket saying, "Here's the money. Take your clothes off too"? And you want to die a martyr?

EGHBAL

In the name of God, I...

Shiva strikes Eghbal in the face with the shovel and he starts sobbing in pain.

SHIVA

If the voice of this martyr hadn't sensed death approaching, you'd understand that my voice is full of revenge...

EGHBAL

(in a gentle tone)

Alright... alright, I'm sorry. Just let me see my son once.

SHIVA

If you don't see your son and you die a martyr... your reward will be even greater.

EGHBAL

Didn't you say I was supposed to express regret? Well, I did.

SHIVA

No, you have to say it out loud. Remember how you used to say you needed to speak in such a way that your voice would mark the prison walls? Now, you have to speak loud enough for your voice to mark the sky and the earth.

As Shiva pretends to be about to throw him into the hole, he speaks out loud and his sobbing becomes more intense.

EGHBAL

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. By Syed al-Shuhada, I'm sorry, that's enough now... Who do you think I am?... I'm like you.

(MORE)

EGHBAL (CONT'D)

I was just trying to make a living too...
 They imposed that task on me like a
 religious duty... At first, I really
 suffered when I hurt you... but, little by
 little, it became normal for me. When you
 refused to confess, I thought you were
 making fun of me. Like when I was little,
 others made fun of me and hit me... People
 always told me how useless I was... or
 they'd say, "Are you that stupid?" That's
 when I began to hate myself... I started to
 hurt myself physically... You can find the
 traces on my body... Now, after what I've
 done... I don't even recognize who I am
 anymore... I lost my soul in that room and
 the things that I did still haunt me...
 They appear before my eyes all the time...
 For the love of God, leave me alone...
 Don't remind me of anything... I'm sorry...
 I'm sorry.

Shiva throws the shovel to the ground next to him. She
 walks over to the van. She takes out a cigarette, lights
 it and drags on it. She seems unable to smoke. She tosses
 the cigarette aside, gets into the van and slams the door
 shut. Silence falls. Vahid moves a little, seems to be
 about to say something, but realizes that it's no use. He
 takes the box cutter and Eghbal's papers out of his
 pocket. He looks at them for a long moment. He leaves
 them near Eghbal.

VAHID

Your papers and a box cutter are to your
 right... so you can free yourself... It'll
 take you fifteen minutes to walk to the
 main road and find a car there...

He takes the shovel, walks over to the van and climbs in.
 The van vanishes into the night.

33

I/E. STREETS AND VAHID'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

33

A number of children and adults carry baby things to the
 van. Vahid is outside his mother's house, loading the
 things into the van. Omid helps him. They carry the
 cradle together and put it in the van. It's the final
 item.

VAHID

Omid, lock everything up now. I'll just
 check we haven't forgotten anything.

HAMID

Sure, Mister Vahid.

Vahid goes over to the house. The camera follows from behind. As he starts to climb the stairs, a squeal of brakes is heard, followed by shouts and Omid's protests. Vahid freezes without turning around, without even looking back. After a few seconds, the sound of Eghbal's limping, artificial step, which we heard at the start of the film, comes closer and closer until reaching a peak of intensity.