

A surreal night scene featuring a dense forest of palm trees in the foreground. In the background, several tall, dark buildings are visible, some of which are engulfed in flames. The sky is dark blue with falling white particles, resembling snow or ash. The overall atmosphere is one of a dystopian or post-apocalyptic world.

STELLA

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EXT. CITY LONG SHOT (R) - NIGHT

We see a quiet city. Suddenly a drone flies from overhead and disappears into the darkness. There is something foreboding in its presence. [Film titles sequence].

INT. HOME STELLA ROOM (R) - NIGHT

SETAREH, (an 18-year old girl) is in her bedroom listening to contemporary pop music. She has donned a bright blue dress and is painting her nails and dancing.

INT. HOME DINING ROOM (R) - NIGHT

Her 45-year old MOTHER is in the kitchen cooking while watching television. There is troubling news of a war playing. Behind her, she hears her daughter's loud music. She shouts:

MOTHER
Turn that music off. I told you,
it's sinful.

She leaves the room.

INT. HOME STELLA'S ROOM (R) - NIGHT

SETAREH, hearing her MOTHER approach tries to lock the door to her room ... but it is too late. Her mother bursts in and looks aghast at her daughter's painted nails and bright dress.

MOTHER
I told you!? No more of this
rubbish!

SETAREH
Leave me alone.

The mother grabs Setareh's music player and angrily throws the device against the wall.

Suddenly the power cuts and all of the lights go out. There is the sound of explosions and the women run into the dining room. We hear the Mother's scream.

INT. HOME DINING ROOM (R) - NIGHT

Through the large window we can see explosions and hear bombing and gunfire.

There are people's voices shouting, urging evacuation. SETAREH and her MOTHER run towards an exit door but her mother pauses.

SETAREH
Mum hurry up!
What are you doing?

The woman frantically searches for her scarf. The explosions and sounds of panic get louder as her mother dons a long, conservative grey manteau and scarf. She rummages through clothes and salvages a scarf for her daughter.

MOTHER
Put this on!

Setareh is frustrated but there is no time for thinking, so while running she ties the scarf around her head.

Suddenly a blast hits the house and rubble falls on Setareh. She collapses on the floor. Her mother struggles to help her up.

EXT. CITY (R) - NIGHT

There are aerial shots of the people running through dark streets. We see and hear explosions getting closer. People flee towards the beach where we see an accumulation of small boats.

EXT. HOME (R) - NIGHT

The MOTHER and SETAREH stumble out into the street.

EXT. CITY (R) - NIGHT

The streets are deserted and the sounds of war and explosions grow increasingly close. Bullet trails and shelling create a living hell. The MOTHER and SETAREH run in a frantic effort to escape. We see that Setareh is injured because she is limping.

EXT. DEPARTURE BEACH (R) - NIGHT

A scatter of boats has left the beach and appear as retreating dots on the horizon. SETAREH and her MOTHER shout out, calling for help, but the boats have gone. They look around. There are two small fishing boats left on the shore, but they are dilapidated.

Frantically Setareh pushes the better of the two out into the water and helps her mother to clamber on board. The women paddle anxiously in an effort to escape. There is an explosion in the water and as she reacts, the MOTHER'S scarf pulls back and falls into the water. The woman panics and jumps into the water to retrieve the garment but explosions spatter the water around them. The scene is chaotic.

SETAREH
Mum! No! Come back!

Desperately SETAREH jumps out of the boat. Clinging with one hand to the edge of the vehicle she grabs her MOTHER. The woman retrieves her scarf and they struggle back into the fishing boat ... and resume paddling.

EXT. SEA (R) - NIGHT

In three brief cuts we see SETAREH and her MOTHER alone on the ocean. The war zone that was their home fades into the distance.

Well out to sea they are now exhausted and the wind is cutting up. The ocean has become very rough. The small boat is clearly not seaworthy and it overturns in the churning water.

Setareh clearly can't swim and is drowning. Her mother in a panic, ties the girl to her with her scarf and clinging to the residue of the overturned boat, they begin swimming towards a distant shore where we see the faint glow of a light.

EXT. DESTINATION BEACH (R) - NIGHT

SETAREH and her MOTHER reach the beach. They are exhausted. Somewhere in the struggle, Setareh has lost her scarf. The weather is stormy. High up on the sand dunes her mother sees a glowing old building that appears to be an abandoned church.

EXT. OLD BUILDING (R) - NIGHT

Seeking shelter, SETAREH and her MOTHER approach the structure but find it locked. It has begun to rain and the mother frantically knocks on the door.

There is no response.

MOTHER
Hello! Hello! Help! Please.

Eventually Setareh breaks a window and the two women scramble inside.

EXT. OLD BUILDING (R) - NIGHT

Everything is dilapidated and covered with dust. The roof is broken and leaking. The women are in a wretched condition.

MOTHER

At least its dry. We'll find some
help tomorrow.

SETAREH is tired and doesn't respond. Using some straw and old sacking stored in the room, the MOTHER prepares a corner for them to sleep. The two women lie down, ready to retire.

SETAREH

I'm thirsty.

From some debris in the corner of room, the mother locates an old pitcher and basin. Wiping them with her dress she places the containers under a leak in the ceiling and sits down to watch as they slowly fill with water. Eventually she dozes off. In the corner Setareh is already asleep. We hear the sound of heavy rain on the roof.

INT. WHITE ROOM (R) - BRIGHT

SETAREH opens her eyes and sees that the entire room has sealed itself up and become white. Her MOTHER is still sleeping in a sitting position with her hand on the pitcher and basin. The girl wakes her.

SETAREH

Mum! Something's happened!

Anxiously, the women look around and touch the walls, trying each corner to find a way out. Eventually, in frustration, the mother bangs on the wall and shouts.

MOTHER

Hello! Hello!
Is there anybody there?!
Help us!

But there is no response. After persistent attempts to find a way out, the mother becomes despondent and sits in a corner. However, Setareh continues to test the parameters of the room. She notices that intermittently colourful stains appear on the walls, floor and ceiling ... and then disappear. The room appears to be living.

SETAREH

(Looking at her hand on which some colour has dislodged) Mum? Look!

Her mother doesn't answer. She is shivering with the cold and murmuring prayers to herself. Gradually, the stains accumulate on one of the walls. The pigments are black, brown and turquoise. They coalesce into the vague depiction of a door. Setareh's mother walks cautiously towards the image, but when she touches the painting, sounds of war explode into the room from the other side. The wall vibrates and she steps back in alarm. The painting dissolves and the room becomes completely white again. Eventually colour stains begin moving on the adjacent walls but no clear image is formed. Setareh is not prepared to give up.

SETAREH (CONT'D)

If the wall is leaking, there has to be a way out.

She tries to push away the colours on the wall to find an escape and the colours begin to spread over her hands and arms. She looks at her mother in shock.

MOTHER

Grabbing the pitcher) Wash it off!

But Setareh is curious. Slowly she pushes her hand against the surface and discovers that she can pass the painted parts of her body through the wall. Her mother is terrified.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

No!

The girl ignores her and tentatively paints her face. She pushes her head against the wall and it passes through. Her mother tries to wrench her back.

The woman is angry.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

The mother frantically attempts to wash SETAREH's hands and face.

SETAREH

(While resisting being washed) Mum there's a way out! There's another room through there. It has blankets.

Setareh looks back at the wall but the colour stains have gone.

She walks back to the same spot but with her hands washed, she cannot penetrate the wall. The room becomes colder and colder and the women feel it. They eagerly wait for another patch of running colour. When one appears on the far wall Setareh rushes over to it.

SETAREH (CONT'D)

We have to get out of here. You'll freeze. If you put on the colour...

MOTHER

No!

Setareh frowns and says nothing. The mother looks at the wall resentfully and watches the running colours.

SETAREH

Mum! We have no choice. We'll die here!

Desperate and cold the girl paints herself, tests the wall, then paints her mother. While they do this, the colours appear to move with greater life, as if offering themselves. Eventually, holding her mother's hand, Setareh passes through the wall and the painted women leave the room.

INT. DARK ROOM (P) - DARK

The new room is drably coloured but there are no more sounds of war in the distance. Upon entering the space, the colours on the women's bodies begin to gradually resemble the colours of the room. The space is dark and forbidding and still cold ... but they find some worn blankets and a mattress on the floor. Shivering, the MOTHER cautiously wraps herself in a blanket.

MOTHER

I'm hungry.

In a corner of the room there is a large, forbidding wardrobe. From beneath it, small rivulets of muted colour have seeped out and flow into the middle of the floor. SETAREH cautiously opens the door and screams. Inside there is the body of a HANGED WOMAN. The mother pulls Setareh away, but while doing so, the corner of her scarf becomes caught on the sharp corner of the wardrobe and is torn. The woman retrieves most of the garment but a patch remains on the door. The muted colours dripping from the corpse onto the floor have left the top part of the hanged woman's body colourless. However, moving through the lifeless colours we can discern a bright thread of beautiful lime green pigment that increasingly branches into an array of colours as it flows outwards.

Attempting to escape, the mother pulls Setareh to the place on the wall through which they entered. But the surface is solid now, without any colours running across it. She waits in front of the wall and prays ... Beseeching the wall (God). Slowly, almost as if in response to her prayers, we see the same palette of muted colours emerge reluctantly out of the whiteness on the wall. Setareh and her mother paint themselves with the dull colours and pass through the wall. However, they find themselves back in the room they just left. It is now freezing cold. They appear to be trapped in an orborous.

Mother (CONT'D)
This is hell. It's the same room!
We are trapped!

SETAREH
No! (Looking at the floor). Try the
brighter colours!

Setareh touches the bright green pigment and traces her finger against the surface of the facing wall. Her finger passes through.

SETAREH (CONT'D)
Mum! Use the new colours!

MOTHER
This is wrong! I want to go back!

Setareh quickly paints her face with the vibrant green stream of colours.

SETAREH
We have to find something to eat.
We can't stay here. It's getting
colder!

Setareh kneels and looks intently at her mother. She is gentle and she begins to tenderly apply the brighter pigments to the woman's hand.

SETAREH (CONT'D)
[Gently] It's okay.

INT. BRIGHT ROOM (P) - BRIGHT

The third room they enter is relatively empty and old but brighter and warmer. It is moderately simple with subdued pastel colours on the walls and furniture. There is a small fire flickering in a hearth, but when they try to warm themselves it dies out. The table in the middle of the room is covered with dishes laid out in an orderly fashion.

However, when SETAREH lifts the platter covers there is no food underneath, and when her mother opens the drawers they are empty. The world here is like an empty theatre set. Setareh and her MOTHER look tired and hungry.

MOTHER
(Despondently) Now what?

SETAREH
(Breaks down in tears) You can see
this is a better room. We need to
keep moving; I ... I ... don't know
maybe by painting ourselves again
or ...

She looks around and then disappointedly hugs her mother and cries.

SETAREH (CONT'D)
I don't want to die.

Holding her daughter, the mother looks up and watches as vibrant colours gather into a pattern on the wall. It gently spreads out across the side of the room.

MOTHER
[Almost with resignation] Look!

Setareh stands up and walks towards the colours. She rubs her palm through the pigment and begins to paint herself. She is still crying. In an effort to comfort her, her mother paints herself. Although her mother is hesitant, she lets her daughter help her. Eventually, she looks at herself and sighs.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
I look like a clown!

Setareh laughs tenderly.

SETAREH
(With warmth) Come on.

They take a deep breath and together they pass into the next room.

INT. WARM ROOM (P) - BRIGHT

SETAREH and her MOTHER enter a large, beautiful room laid out with rich food and drink. There are vibrant colours but the paint has begun to dry and on one wall the pigments have flaked off. The furniture in the corner looks weary. By the table, there is a youth placing food on to a plate.

TIM is 23 and handsome. When he sees Setareh and her mother appear, he looks at them surprised ... then he smiles.

TIM

Finally! You must be hungry. Please come! It's fine.
(Looking at Setareh and her mother)
What beautiful colours! (He turns again to the table).
You must be tired. Come! Help yourself.

Tim puts some food on the plate and holds it out to the MOTHER.

TIM (CONT'D)

Here!

Although Setareh and her mother are reluctant, they are also hungry. Tim squats down and begins to eat ... and feeling awkward, Setareh eventually joins him.

CUT TO:

Setareh and her mother are eating food with Tim. Behind them we see the flaking wall, but the room is clearly warmer and more comfortable. There is laughter. Tim pours some water into a glass and respectfully offers it to the mother.

TIM (CONT'D)

The room is drying out (looking behind him at the wall). We'll have to move on. We need to help each other. I think if we keep moving in this direction, each room will have something better.

MOTHER

[Clearly still uncomfortable with Tim's easy nature] Who are you?

TIM

I fled the war. My family were killed.

SETAREH

I'm sorry.

Tim looks down for a moment. We can see that the memory is emotionally difficult for him.

TIM

[Tentatively] What's your name?

SETAREH

Setareh.

TIM

Set... Setar... Hard to pronounce.
What does it mean?!

SETAREH

Stars.

TIM

Like Stella?

SETAREH

Yeah, something like that.

TIM

I'll call you Stella.

They smile at each other, but we can see that the mother is uncomfortable with Tim's familiarity. We see Tim touch the wall and begin to paint himself. Then he looks meaningfully at Setareh.

CUT TO:

The Mother is now painted in new, vibrant colours and she is looking awkwardly at herself. She is clearly not happy.

MOTHER

The colours are too loud.

Annoyed, the Mother begins removing her colours so more muted colours begin to appear underneath. Her actions embarrass her daughter.

Tim is painting Setareh, but the girl stops him for a moment and walks over to her mother. She murmurs something in her ear. She tries to repaint part of her mother's clothing.

SETAREH

[Quietly] Mum! What are you doing?!
You will never pass through like
this!

MOTHER

The colours are gaudy. I am a
respectable woman! Have you no
shame!? Look at you. Who are you?
[Then gently] Darling ... Look, we
can do something better. Here we
can use better colours.

Her mother tries to paint Setareh in quiet, traditional tones.

SETAREH

Mum! These are old! I don't want this!

Tim tries to help by politely interrupting.

TIM

Your colours are very nice but we need to change, to get into better rooms ... otherwise we won't survive. We will run out of food. Stella is...

MOTHER

(Rudely) Her name is not Stella! Have you no respect!?

Stunned, Tim pulls back.

SETAREH

Mum! Don't talk to people like that! He's just trying to help. We were cold and hungry before we came here. Remember? (Gently and holding her mother's hand). Mum ... Please!

Reluctantly, the mother allows the Setareh to paint her in brighter colours.

CUT TO:

Tim is helping Setareh to paint herself in a radiance of coloured stars. She looks beautifully decorated. Her mother watches them. She is still uncomfortable.

TIM

[Standing back and looking at his handiwork] Stella!

Freshly painted, Setareh walks over to her mother. She reaches out and takes her hand. Her mother is not pleased but together, holding hands, the small group passes through the wall.

INT. LUXURIOUS ROOM (P) - BRIGHT

The MOTHER, SETAREH and TIM enter a magnificent room. Everything is abundant and available. The food is more decorative, and the furniture is opulent.

On the table in the corner are a collection of beautiful glass bottles filled with water. Along one wall there are an assortment of exotic musical instruments standing on pedestals.

Tim tentatively walks towards an instrument, but before he picks it up, a short sequence of notes [like fragment of a traditional melody] begins to play. He pulls back then moves towards another instrument - and another sequence is heard. It is lighter and more lyrical. When Setareh touches an instrument it also begins to play by itself and its melody joins the tunes from the other instruments. She looks at Tim then down at her hands. Pigment has flowed from the instrument and her arm is now painted in swirling, bright colours. As Tim and Setareh begin to understand the game, they approach other instruments and, as soon as they reach towards them, they play by themselves and colour continues to flow into their bodies. Setareh laughs with delight. These colours are magnificent. Although the first fragments of melody sound vaguely traditional, the additional instruments contribute to a joint melody that becomes increasingly Western. Laughing Tim takes Setareh's hands and they touch multiple instruments, playing as if conducting a chamber orchestra.

CUT TO:

Angry and increasingly alienated, the mother is trying to talk to SETAREH about her uneasiness, but the girl's concerns have shifted to TIM. The music has covered them in gaudy colours and ostentatious styles and they seem more painted than real. Then Setareh approaches her mother.

SETAREH

It's wonderful! Mum! We can paint your hair. Here. Take off your scarf.

MOTHER

NO!

Tim approaches.

TIM

It will help.

Tim tentatively stretches his hand towards her scarf.

TIM (CONT'D)

Look it's this easy!

Outraged, the mother explodes in anger.

MOTHER

Take your hands off me. How dare you!

As the music continues to play, the woman bursts into tears and runs to the table, grabbing a large bottle of water. She tries to wash off the colours but they smudge then try to recover themselves into bright swirls that move in harmony with music. She screams in horror.

Setareh dashes over and tries to console her distressed mother.

SETAREH

Mum, it's all right. [Soothingly]
It's all right.

MOTHER

(Crying and hysterically trying to wash herself) It's not! No! It's not! This is wrong. This world is wrong! Put on your scarf - we are going home. We don't belong here. Look at him! Nobody knows who he is (pointing at Tim). All paint and fear!

The mother continues to smudge the colours that the music is trying to make on her body. As she scrubs, the pigments continue to congeal into muddiness before trying to recover themselves. Embarrassed in front of Tim, Setareh eventually loses her temper.

SETAREH

Mum! Stop this! I'm not coming with you.

MOTHER

(With anger) Don't be stubborn. You will do what you are told!

SETAREH

No! We have to move on. There is a war. Tim is trying to help! Look at you! ... Your dyed fawn hair, your grey scarf, and your stupid decisions. We would have starved to death if we had followed your advice!

The mother is heartbroken, her eyes are full of tears but she is also resolute. Defiantly, she continues to smudge herself without saying anything. Then the music slowly grinds to a halt.

The patterns are still defiantly evident on her body but the colours have turned more sombre. In the silence, the woman turns and, looking back once plaintively at Setareh ... she walks towards the wall through which she entered the room. Setareh is at a crossroads. It is clear that she doesn't want to go with her mother.

SETAREH (CONT'D)

Mum ... No!

MOTHER

We don't belong here.

The mother looks down sadly, glances up hopefully at her daughter one last time, and seeing the impossibility of the situation - she walks through the wall through which they entered the room. Setareh runs after her but in her bright, new colours she cannot pass through the surface. She bangs against the wall with her hands.

SETAREH

Mum! Mum!

Setareh cries and Tim comforts her.

TIM

She'll come back. No body wants to go back to the war.

INT. WARM ROOM (P) - BRIGHT

The MOTHER returns to the preceding room. But it is not as she expected. There are remains of other people's occupation. The plates on the table are now in disarray and the food has congealed. It is sticky, dark, brown and grey. Confused, she bends down to pick up a child's toy and a small jacket. As she stands looking at them she leans on the edge of the table and it collapses. As she crashes to the floor, the contents of the dishes splash across her and in a panic she tries to rub the revolting colours off. The patterns on her body from the previous room smear into smudges, without form, and she pulls herself off the ground in disgust.

On one wall she sees that a large patch of vibrant colours is beginning to form. In terror she runs to the opposite wall. Its pastel colour has become dull but it is still unaffected by movement. She throws herself against it in desperation. It appears to buckle a little so she heaves herself against it a second time ... and she struggles through. We can see that the room doesn't want this but her fear and force of will are too strong.

INT. DARK ROOM (P) - BRIGHT

The MOTHER enters the dark room where she and her daughter found the hanging woman. The corpse has disappeared and only a residue of the toxic green colour remains. The mother fearfully looks at the noose. We see her wondering if this is what happens to people who turn back. As she looks down she notices the torn patch of her scarf hanging on the door handle. She holds it next to her scarf. The intricate, traditional hues in beautiful designs, stand in stark contrast to the discordant, smudged colours of what she is now wearing. She examines the cloth. Holding it close, she shuts her eyes and begins to cry. But only for a moment. Resolved she looks again at the cloth, then uses it to further smudge her remaining colours. Then, with intricate care she paints the pattern of the scarf, with its distinctive, traditional patterns and colours on to her scarf. Then she turns and looks at the wall.

INT. WHITE ROOM (R) - BRIGHT

The MOTHER enters the original white room. She is relieved. The basin and pitcher are still on the floor. She kneels down and begins washing the remaining paint off her face and arms. We can see that her clothing is now in the original patterns she was wearing when she entered the building.

INT. LUXURIOUS ROOM (P) - BRIGHT

Sad and resentful at the loss of her mother, SETAREH is sitting by herself. TIM is worried and eventually he walks over to an instrument to entice it to play. The music begins comfortingly, but then it becomes more beautiful and rhythmic. It has a clear effect on him. Hopefully he walks over to Setareh and reaches for her hand. In the hypnotic melody he holds her close and they begin to move until they are dancing ... tender at first, but increasingly absorbed into the ethos of the room. The music becomes lighter, more insistently western, and they begin to laugh. As they dance, we see very subtly, then with increasing clarity, that the walls of the room are beginning to dissolve.

EXT. GARDEN (P) - DAY

SETAREH and TIM stop dancing. They are in a beautiful garden now, the first open space they have seen so far. However, it is thickly textured, like an exuberant oil painting. They are amazed by the beauty of their surroundings and the feeling of freedom in this new exterior world.

Beyond the gardens, we see the backdrop of a western city with the tops of skyscrapers in the distance. It seems that the city is calling them. They walk toward its distant buildings.

EXT. LIFE A (P) - DAY

(As a series of fragments of family videos) In this heavily painted world, we see SETAREH and TIM in more western clothes. They are running playfully on a green hill. A beautiful cityscape is behind them.

INT. LIFE B (P) - DAY

SETAREH and TIM are walking in their wedding ceremony. Flower petals fall on them.

EXT. LIFE C / LARGE VILLA (P) - DAY

SETAREH and TIM enter a large beautiful villa.

INT. LIFE D (P) - DAY

Pregnant, SETAREH is looking out of a window at a painted garden, but we can see that she is worried. TIM stands behind her and wraps his arms around her. She smiles awkwardly.

INT. HOSPITAL (P) - NIGHT

SETAREH and TIM are looking sadly at their newborn baby. Setareh slowly waves her hand in front of the baby's face but we see that the infant doesn't react to the movement. The baby is blind. Distressed, she looks at Tim. (The video ends.)

INT. BABY'S ROOM (P) - DAY

Setareh's BABY is playing in a room full of toys. The infant blindly fumbles at a cupboard door and crayons and an assortment of paper spill out on to the floor. The child fumbles with the new objects, shaking them, listening to them and smelling them. Then he gives up and gropes anxiously with the tangle of toys. He is confused and frightened. With tears in her eyes SETAREH lifts him up, out of his confusion.

INT. BEDROOM (P) - NIGHT

TIM holds SETAREH's hand, after a while Setareh pulls away and shakes her head. Tim tries to embrace her but she pulls away again. Her husband is despondent. Tim walks to the door and looks outside. It is evident that he has decided that he can't continue to support her. He looks back at his wife and baby for a moment ... then he walks upstairs.

EXT. FRONT YARD (P) - DAY

TIM leaves the house with packed suitcases, while he looks back to a window in the house for a moment. We see at the window, SETAREH and the BABY watch him go.

INT. LOUNGE (P) - DAY

While playing, the BABY stretches his hand out and dislodges some books. They scatter on to the floor. When he cries, SETAREH cuddles him and picks up one of the books. It is an old family photo album.

CUT TO:

Setareh is looking at the album. The pictures show images of her life with Tim. Eventually she comes across a snap of a beach. This picture contains no other people and she is intrigued. In the distance she sees the old church that she and her mother entered long ago. She takes the image out of the album and reads a note on the reverse [it is written in foreign language]. She puts the photograph down and thinks. Then she picks it up again, and we can see there is a glimmer of memory. She looks at her baby, at her painted hand and back at the photograph. We see a resolve.

EXT. DESTINATION BEACH (P) - DAY

At the tide's edge we see footprints in the sand. When we look up we see SETAREH walking with her BABY. There are no sounds of war, just the muted calling of gulls. Fatigued, she stops for a moment and puts down an old suitcase she is carrying. Then, cuddling her baby, she looks again at the old photograph. The church is ahead of her in the distance, but it is older now and it has begun to subside into the tide.

EXT. OLD BUILDING -DAY

SETAREH is trying to gain entry into the building, but the door is locked. Holding her BABY she eventually enters through the same window she broke years before.

INT. OLD BUILDING (P/R) - DAY

Inside, the building is much more dilapidated than when she last experienced it. SETAREH sees that one of the walls has collapsed and the sea is encroaching. She walks towards the decayed wall and through the gaps she sees an old boat anchored a few metres off shore.

EXT. OLD BUILDING (P/R) - DAY

Holding her BABY in her arms, SETAREH steps into the water. She looks down and sees the colours on her legs begin to wash off and dissolve. She looks around for a moment as if almost understanding something, then she breathes deeply, closes her eyes and holding her baby against her chest, she lowers herself into the water.

When she stands up, the day is brighter and very realistic. The sound of the gulls is suddenly sharper and the waves lapping against the boat are pronounced. Setareh looks around. Her baby is gurgling playfully. There is no paint on him. She looks down and he reaches up and touches her face with wonder. She moves her hand once in front of his face and he watches it. He can clearly see. She lifts her head up crying ... then, she bends down and clasping her child to her she kisses his head. The boat nudges against her and she steadies it.

EXT. SEA (R) - DAY

SETAREH rows through a foggy sea with her BABY beside her. Around her we see the residue of bombed boats but they have decayed and are now semi-submerged in the tide.

EXT. DEPARTURE BEACH (R) - DAY

When she reaches the beach, it is misty but calm. Embracing her BABY, SETAREH steps on to dry land.

EXT. RUINED STREETS (R) - DAY

Carrying her BABY, SETAREH walks between the ruins of her city. It is evident that the war has been over for a long time. We hear the sound of CHILDREN playing in the distance. Green plants and flowers have grown through the ruins.

EXT. HOUSE (R) - DAY

SETAREH finds her old house. She lifts her BABY up on to her shoulder and he looks around. The baby looks at a bird and reaches out to touch it but it flies away. The child watches as it soars into the sky. Setareh follows its flight too, then she looks tenderly down at her child. The baby looks up at her inquiringly.

SETAREH

A bird.

The baby makes a sound as if trying to repeat the word. Setareh smiles and kisses him on the head.

INT. HOUSE (R) - DAY

Holding her baby, SETAREH discovers that all of her things are covered with dust. Then she hears familiar music, the same music her mother once criticised her for playing.

EXT. CITY STREETS(R) - DAY

SETAREH and her BABY leave the building and they follow the sound of music.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD(R) - DAY

SETAREH arrives at a school building. Although parts of it are still damaged because of the war, it looks lively and happy. The walls are painted in bright colours and festooned with preschool images of flowers and animals.

From inside, we can hear children singing and dancing. In the yard, there is a table full of local food, snacks and fruit. On the corner of the table, Setareh's old cassette player is perched. It is taped together and it is relentlessly playing the same music she once listened to. Suddenly, the device jams because the cassette becomes stuck.

Suddenly her MOTHER appears. She walks outside to fix the player. She is wearing a colourful dress and her same scarf, but now it is infused with vivid natural colours.

Suddenly, she stops in amazement. Time freezes for a moment. Her hands fly to her mouth and she makes a small cry of wonder. Then she throws her arms open and runs towards Setareh and her BABY.

They embrace and cry. The mother holds her grandchild and smiles at him. The baby looks around himself in wonder.

The small bird on the branch of the tree takes flight. We
float with it upwards,
above the school yard,
above the city,
... into the brightness of the day.

The End