

AFTER LOVE EPK 30/09/2020

Short synopsis

Mary Hussain, who converted to Islam when she married and is now in her early 60s, lives quietly with her husband Ahmed. Following his unexpected death, she suddenly finds herself a widow. A day after the burial, she discovers that he had a secret life just twenty-one miles away from their Dover home, across the Channel in Calais. The shocking discovery compels her to go there to find out more.

Long synopsis

Housewife Mary Hussain (62) lives with her husband, Ahmed (63), a ferry captain in the increasingly transient but historic seaport town of Dover in the south east of England. Having first met as teenagers in the early 70s, Mary later converted to Islam in order to marry the man she loved. She embraced Ahmed's religion and culture; she changed her clothes, cooked the food and learnt his language in an attempt to gain acceptance from his family and become the woman he wanted and needed her to be. As the years rolled by, Mary's metamorphosis from Mary to Fahima, as she is now known within his family, was completed.

When Ahmed suddenly dies of a heart attack, Mary, at 62, must re-calibrate her life without him and contemplate living her advancing years alone. Ahmed was Mary's soul mate; she lived her life for him, and through him. He was the one who helped construct her sense of self. Without him, she begins to lose sight of who she is.

In the days following Ahmed's funeral, Mary goes through his things. When she discovers a French driver's licence belonging to a woman named 'Geneviève' in Ahmed's wallet, Mary digs a bit deeper and finds that Ahmed's mobile phone is full of messages from this unknown woman. With Geneviève's address in hand, Mary boards a ferry at Dover to travel the twenty-one miles across the English Channel to France and tracks Geneviève down at a small terraced house in the centre of Calais.

Mary stalks the address, but when she is caught peering through the window by Geneviève, she is mistaken for a house cleaner who was due to carry out a trial clean. Despite the obvious risks of being caught out, Mary is swept up in the confusion and uses the opportunity to get inside the house. Like Mary, Geneviève is white, but she's younger and she hasn't converted to Islam. Mary is confused and resentful, but most of all, she's heartbroken.

With Geneviève in the process of preparing to move to another part of Calais, Mary is put to work packing and cleaning, but it's only when she catches a glimpse of Solomon (16), Geneviève's teenage son, that the magnitude of Ahmed's deceit presents itself. Discovering that Ahmed had a child with another woman is almost too much for Mary to bear, especially since she and Ahmed lost a sixth month old baby boy earlier in their marriage. Though difficult, Mary decides to continue in the job as a means of staying close to Solomon, whom

she sees as a link to the child she lost almost two decades earlier and the husband she's just buried.

With keys to the house, she gains access to Geneviève and Solomon's lives and very quickly earns their trust, but the more Mary learns about Ahmed's secret family, the more she is forced to re-examine her own faith, identity and marriage to a man she thought she knew inside out.

As Mary's emotional attachment to Geneviève and Solomon deepens, so does her feeling of guilt. With Geneviève and Solomon still unaware of Ahmed's death, Mary witnesses their growing concern at Ahmed's unusual silence intensify. Mary struggles with her own morality, knowing she has become complicit in Ahmed's deceit.

As Geneviève's moving date and Ahmed's pre-planned arrival draw closer, Mary knows her time is running out and she confesses all to Geneviève and Solomon. Wracked with guilt, she pleads for forgiveness as she tries to explain herself, but the damage has been done. In shock and unable to process the news, Geneviève reacts furiously and attacks Mary before throwing her out onto the street.

A number of months have passed and Mary has returned to Dover. One afternoon, when Mary arrives at the cemetery, she is shocked to find Geneviève and Solomon searching the gravestones. Mary watches on for a while before she enters and leads them to Ahmed's resting place. The three of them stand silently, connected by the man they shared, loved and lost – the triangle complete.

Director's statement

My need to tell this story was initially born out of a desire to express something about my own experience of existing between two worlds and in two skins.

Being mixed English-Pakistani meant I grew up within two cultures, and being Muslim and gay caused me to lead two very separate personal lives for a long time. These dichotomies in my youth were difficult to reconcile with and the feeling that I never fully belonged anywhere operated at quite a cellular level within me.

There was a turning point in my life when I was around 19. I was at Uni and I was going through a kind of inner separation with myself. I was coming to terms with my sexuality and falling out of faith with the religion I had been brought up with and was devout in observing. This questioning and reconfiguration in my own life happened to correspond with a personal crisis my mother was having at the time surrounding her own identity. There was something about this emotional crossover that had always stayed with me and it's something I wanted to explore further.

AFTER LOVE is a story built up of many layers, but at the centre of it is a woman grappling to piece together the fragments of her heart and her shattered sense of identity. She is searching for truth, for understanding, and ultimately, to recover a sense of family.

Q&A with director Aleem Khan

Are any of the elements in the story autobiographical?

The plot isn't autobiographical, but the characters; their inner workings, and their experiences of navigating identity and loss are very close to home. Mary was very much modelled on my mum whilst Ahmed is loosely inspired by my dad.

Reflecting on my parents' relationship was central to developing the story – they met and fell in love when they were fourteen, on an estate in Walthamstow, and when they married in their early twenties, my mum converted to Islam and they relocated to the Kent coast. She gradually stopped wearing western clothes and started dressing in shalwar-kameez; she learnt how to cook curry and also learnt to speak Panjabi.

AFTER LOVE follows a woman who, upon learning of her husband's deceit, is forced to question her entire life with him and the choices she made whilst in a state of acute grief, but what I hadn't expected was how central the loss of a baby earlier in their marriage would be to Mary's arc and to me personally.

I realised quite late in the writing process that the incorporation of Mary's dead child was really about my own coming to terms with the loss of my sister when she was six-months-old. I was a child when she died and I don't remember anything about her or how my parents and other siblings dealt with her loss. It's all blank and it wasn't until I was editing the film that the significance of this event in my life hit me.

What was the writing process like?

AFTER LOVE is the first feature-length screenplay I've written and the task of writing this film required a level of introspection I had never undertaken before, nor expected. It sounds clichéd to say, but the writing process was like therapy – it was difficult; it was confronting and it brought a lot of things that were tangled and hidden deep within me to the surface, which may be why it took six years to write. The blessing of this though was that I was able to reevaluate and ultimately re-order those experiences into something tangible for my characters – and myself.

What were the central questions you wanted to explore through this work?

I wanted to explore how our notions of identity are constructed, and more specifically, who we construct them for.

We are highly adapted to change the way we behave and act according to the environment and people we are with, and we also do it for those that we love. We can even go so far as to construct personas for ourselves to project onto others – but for what reason? Is it to make us more desirable, more acceptable – more loveable? Do we do this because we are simply too afraid to bare our true selves from fear of being rejected?

With Mary adopting Ahmed's religion and culture to such an extent that much of her original self seems to have been erased, it raises the question of how much of ourselves really belongs to us. Through Mary's journey I wanted to explore the process we go through after we lose someone we love, the process in which we grieve and how we come to terms with losing our 'other half', and what is left of ourselves when we do.

I was also very pre-occupied with how truth, morality and deception intersect in relationships and how the characters in this story navigated and broke their own moral codes. It was important to me not to condemn or judge any of the characters in AFTER LOVE, including Ahmed, for each of the characters are guilty of betraying one another and crossing lines – even Mary. But although Mary is unquestionably the victim of an awful betrayal, in pursuing her own needs she inadvertently, then actively, becomes complicit in Ahmed's deceit.

I'm curious to know at what point someone watching would say Mary has crossed the line beyond return – because where that point lies reveals something about the viewer's own moral compass. In watching the film, I hope the audience comes away re-evaluating their own relationships; the secrets they keep from, and the lies they tell those that they love.

Producer's statement

I first came across AFTER LOVE when Aleem pitched the idea in the context of Save Our Scripts that we were running from The Bureau back in 2013. The story and his very personal relationship to it immediately appealed to me and we joined forces to develop it.

Aleem also had a very touching short film script he wanted to direct. It became THREE BROTHERS that we made together through Film London's London Calling Plus Scheme. The short film went on to be BAFTA-nominated in 2015 and allowed us to cement our collaboration.

AFTER LOVE found early support in Creative England, under the generous care of Celine Haddad. Casting Director Shaheen Baig joined us early on in the process to assist us in imagining who our lead actresses could be and I teamed up with Gabrielle Dumon from our Paris office to explore the French elements of the film. It was about the production challenges of shooting between Dover and Calais as much as the technicalities of the magical aspect of the cinematic language we were developing.

A selection at the Sundance Screenwriter's lab soon followed, giving our development another boost. Eva Yates, then working from Film4, had been tracking us closely and, when leaving for BBC Films with Rose Garnett, took us with her, confirming development as well as our first production support in the process. We started speaking with Natascha Wharton at the BFI Film Fund who soon confirmed its support too, completing our budgetary needs. A selection at the Sundance Director's lab followed, further boosting our progress.

We cast Joanna Scanlan and Nathalie Richard as the leads. A search led us to Talid Ariss for the part of Solomon. His audition really made him stand out. We assembled a wonderful crew: Director of Photography Alexander Dynan, fresh from the Best Screenplay Oscar-nominated FIRST REFORMED; Joakim Sundström (THREE BILLBOARDS, THE CONSTANT GARDNER) joined as Supervising Sound Editor, as well as Editor Gareth C. Scales (HOW TO BUILD A GIRL, HARLOTS) and composer Chris Roe, to name only a few members of the team, and we shot over the summer in 2019.

So far, our festival selections have been as one of only five Cannes 2020 Critics' Week films, and as part of the 2020 Telluride line-up. The film was also one of the TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) Industry Selects and was chosen for the 2020 BFI London Film Festival with both cinema and online screenings. It will have its international premiere in Official Selection at the Rome Film Festival and its Asian premiere at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

Technical info

Duration: 89 min

Production country: United Kingdom

Production year: 2020

Director biography – ALEEM KHAN

Born and raised in Kent, Aleem Khan is a writer and director of mixed English-Pakistani heritage. His debut short film, DIANA, premiered at the 2009 London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. His subsequent short, THREE BROTHERS, was commissioned by Film London on the inaugural London Calling Plus scheme and premiered at the 2014 BFI London Film Festival before touring the international festival circuit. A BAFTA nomination for Best British Short Film followed in 2015 and later that year, Aleem was named a Screen International Star of Tomorrow. A 2017 Fellow of both the Sundance Screenwriter's and Director's Labs, Aleem is also an alumnus of Guiding Lights, The Locarno Filmmakers Academy and BFI Flare.

Cast biographies

JOANNA SCANLAN

Joanna Scanlan's recent film credits include THE VOYAGE OF DR DOLITTLE (Universal), HOW TO BUILD A GIRL (Film4), PIN CUSHION (Pinpoint), HOW TO TALK TO GIRLS AT PARTIES with Elle Fanning and Nicole Kidman (See Saw Films), BRIDGET JONES' BABY (Universal) based on Helen Fielding's 2006 columns; the film fills in the gap between the last film and Fielding's subsequent book 'Mad About the Boy.' Other film credits include Joanna's hugely celebrated performance as Charles Dickens' wife in the Ralph Fiennes-directed THE INVISIBLE WOMAN (BBC Films), GET SANTA (Scott Free), THE TESTAMENT OF YOUTH (BBC Films), IN THE LOOP (BBC Films), BAD EDUCATION THE MOVIE (Cave Bear Prod), THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL, STARDUST, NOTES ON A SCANDAL, THE GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING and KINKY BOOTS.

Joanna's TV credits include MCDONALDS AND DODDS (ITV), THE ACCIDENT (CH4), DRACULA (BBC), the critically acclaimed REQUIEM for BBC, CRAZY DIAMOND by Philip K Dick (CH4), THE WOMAN IN WHITE (BBC), MAPP & LUCIA (BBC), REV (BBC), GETTING ON (BBC), THE THICK OF IT (BBC) and FUNGUS THE BOGEYMAN (SKY). Joanna wowed audiences in Channel 4's hit show NO OFFENCE, playing the lead detective Viv Deering, which went on to have three series. Other recent TV shows include HOLD THE SUNSET (BBC) and THE TURNING written by Julia Davis. Joanna has been BAFTA-nominated for Best Female Performance for her role in GETTING ON and twice nominated for her screenwriting on the show, which she co-wrote. The comedy series was adapted for an American audience with HBO, with Joanna onboard as an executive producer and she was a guest star in the American version reprising her role as 'Denise Flixter'. Joanna also co-wrote and starred in the hilarious comedy drama PUPPY LOVE (BBC) with Vicki Pepperdine.

On stage, Joanna has worked with Thea Sharrock in her production of CLOUD 9 at the Almeida Theatre and TOP GIRLS, with Rufus Norris in VERNON GOD LITTLE at The Young Vic and featured in Polly Teale's MADAME BOVARY.

Joanna has recently finished filming the lead in a feature film AFTER LOVE and can be seen in MCDONALD AND DODDS on ITV. She also has a production company with Vicki

Pepperdine called George & George Co and is responsible for the Sex Lives project on Instagram.

Headshot for Joanna: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8-Le-MgRT2qVEpMU1ZIMl9ISXM/view>

NATHALIE RICHARD

Nathalie Richard was born in Paris, France. She received the Prix Michel Simon film prize for most promising actress/actor for her role in the 1988 Jacques Rivette film GANG OF FOUR. Her film credits include GOODBYE MISTER WONG (2019) by Luang Kiyé-Simon, MY LIFE WITH JAMES DEAN (2017) by Dominique Choisy, APOCALYPSE AFTER (2018), THE WILD BOYS (2017) and OUR LADY OF HORMONES (2015) by Bertrand Mandico, HAPPY END (2017), CACHÉ (2005) and CODE UNKNOWN (2000) by Michael Haneke, YOUNG & BEAUTIFUL (2013) by François Ozon, NEVER LET ME GO (2010) by Mark Romanek, THE DIVORCE (2003) and A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER NEVER CRIES (1998) by James Ivory and IRMA VEP (1996) by Olivier Assayas. Her recent theatre credits include A LA TRACE (2020) written by Alexandra Badea and directed by Anne Théron, LA TRILOGIE DE LA VENGEANCE (2019) written and directed by Simon Stone and VENTS CONTRAIRES (2019) written and directed by Jean-René Lemoine.

TALID ARISS

Born in 2002, Talid Ariss started acting lessons at the age of 6. One year later his teacher proposed he participate in a casting for a feature film. It was for R.I.F by Franck Mancuseau in which he went on to take part, working alongside Yvan Attal. The experience led to him being asked by casting director Patrick Metzle to act in an advertisement, which enabled him to find an agent. He is now represented by the Zélig agency. Multi-talented, his performances have included the stage play THE LEFT HANDED WOMAN, written by Peter Handke and directed by Christophe Pertou in 2013 and the television film LA FIN DE L'ETE by Helen Angel in 2019. He has been combining his studies with his passions – the theatre and filming, ever since. AFTER LOVE by Aleem Khan, in which he plays the male lead, is his latest feature film to date.

Producer biography – MATTHIEU DE BRACONIER

Matthieu de Braconier produces from The Bureau, an established, BAFTA-winning production company well known for launching new filmmakers including Asif Kapadia (AMY, SENNA), Andrew Haigh (WEEKEND, 45 YEARS) and Harry Macqueen (upcoming SUPERNOVA starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci). Trained in philosophy, systemic psychotherapy and creative writing, he worked his way through the roles of programmer, production coordinator and development executive before executive producing the UK Film Council and Film4's Cinema Extreme short film scheme. With support from Creative Skillset he developed the scheme to include script development and training

support. It launched a generation of talent including Andrea Arnold, Rupert Wyatt and Andrew Haigh.

Matthieu's first feature as screenwriter, ALL CATS ARE GREY, premiered at the Rome International Film Festival and went on to win several awards. His second, THE ELEPHANT AND THE BUTTERFLY, was produced by the Dardennes brothers and executive produced by Martin Scorsese. He is presently writing English language screenplays which are at different stages of development and include Film4 and BBC Films commissions.

A Sundance Institute alumni and BAFTA-nominated producer, his credits also include co-producing LONDON RIVER by Oscar-nominated Rachid Bouchareb (DAYS OF GLORY) and Aleem Khan's award-winning short film THREE BROTHERS.

In 2018, Matthieu produced the BAFTA-nominated and BIFA-awarded ONLY YOU, directed by Harry Wootliff and starring Laia Costa (VICTORIA, PIERCING) and Josh O'Connor (THE CROWN, GOD'S OWN COUNTRY).

Matthieu's most recent production, AFTER LOVE, the debut feature by Aleem Khan, was supported by BBC Films and the BFI. AFTER LOVE was awarded the Cannes 2020 Critics' Week label, followed by selection for Telluride 2020, TIFF Industry Selects, Rome Film Festival Official Selection and the 2020 BFI London Film Festival.

Main credits



[CANNES 2020 CRITICS' WEEK LOGO]

BFI and BBC Films present

A Production from The Bureau

AFTER LOVE

Cast

Joanna Scanlan

Nathalie Richard

Talid Ariss

and

Nasser Memarzia

Written and Directed by

Aleem Khan

Produced by

Matthieu de Braconier

Co-Produced by
Gabrielle Dumon
Gerardine O'Flynn

Executive Produced by
Eva Yates
Rose Garnett
Natascha Wharton
Vincent Gadelle

Director of Photography
Alexander Dynan

Editor
Gareth C. Scales

Production Designer
Sarah Jenneson

Costume Designer
NirageMirage

Hair and Make Up Designer
Diandra Ferreira

Supervising Sound Editor
Joakim Sundström

Original Music composed by
Chris Roe

Casting Director
Shaheen Baig

Line Producer	Dylan Rees
First Assistant Director	Jeroen Bogaert
Location Manager	Ben Lee
Location Manager (France)	Rémi Jollant
Casting Director (France)	Lucciana de Vogüé
Key Grip	Llewellyn Harrison
Production Sound Mixer	David Giles
Gaffer	Howard Davidson
Spark	Ana Krkljus

VFX by	Technicolor VFX
VFX Creative Director	Gary Brown
VFX Producer	George Tully

Sound Re-recording Mixer	Per Boström
Titles and End Credits designed by	Intermission
Music Supervisor	Connie Farr

International Sales by	The Bureau Sales
International Sales	Clémentine Hugot
Festivals and Servicing	Geraldine Bryant

The Bureau Head of Development	Valentina Brazzini
Producer's Assistant	Aileen Flanagan

[SUNDANCE INSTITUTE LOGO]

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[CREATIVE ENGLAND LOGO] [BFI NET.WORK LOGO]

Made with the support of the BFI Film Fund

[BFI STATIC LOGO] [BBC FILMS LOGO]

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