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A Bit of Light: Ali Asgari Finds a Small Flame

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Arash has decided to die. He does not rush. He finds a home for his cat, makes arrangements for his patients and tends to his plants. His quiet preparations unfold with a calm that unsettles more than any outburst could, revealing the weight of a decision made in silence.

Ali Asgari's new film follows one day in the life of a Tehran doctor who has lost everything that made his days make sense. In the wake of the protests that swept Iran in December 2025, Arash treated wounded demonstrators in secret. The state answered by arresting him, shutting his practice and revoking his licence. He is not an activist. He is serious, a little heavy, devoted to his work, and he could not turn away someone in pain. He was punished for doing what doctors do, and the film begins in the silence that follows.

Asgari's sixth feature, and his first in Venice's main competition, spends a single day with that decision. Arash sets out to tell his family, starting with his brother and his two sisters. His mother waits at the end of the day. Each visit becomes a small negotiation between what he has come to say and what the room insists on giving back: food, teasing, argument, a tenderness that has no interest in being profound.

Misagh Zareh plays him with the stillness of a man who has already half left. He never begs for sympathy. He is calm, practical, almost polite, and that calm is the most frightening thing in the film.
The city is braced for worse. Windows are taped in the shape of an X against bombs that have not yet fallen. People talk about war the way they talk about weather. One character jokes that a stray missile might save him the cost of demolishing his old house. The humour is dry and a little cruel, and it feels earned. The production itself was interrupted when war arrived, and the film carries that knowledge without announcing it.

Asgari keeps his camera patient and lets silences stand. The palette is muted, with one stubborn exception. Green recurs: in the plants Arash hauls around Tehran and keeps giving away, and in a dress worn by one of his sisters. In Iran green carries many meanings, from the sacred to the political. Asgari lets it keep more than one. A man planning his death will always sit near Kiarostami's Taste of Cherry, and Asgari has said as much himself.

The comparison flatters and exposes the film in equal measure. Kiarostami's road was open and strange. Asgari's is a loop of family rooms, and the risk is clear. The relationships must carry the weight of a life,

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and not every scene is built for it. Some conversations breathe. A few feel placed. Critics have split accordingly, between those moved by the restraint and those who find the story slight.

I side with the restraint, mostly. The film never confuses a kind word with a cure or pretends a family dinner can repair a country. Instead, it offers something smaller and more honest: the possibility that a person may be held in place by the lives around him, even when the future has been taken from him. The title makes no larger promise, and the film keeps it, leaving room for uncertainty rather than easy answers.

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