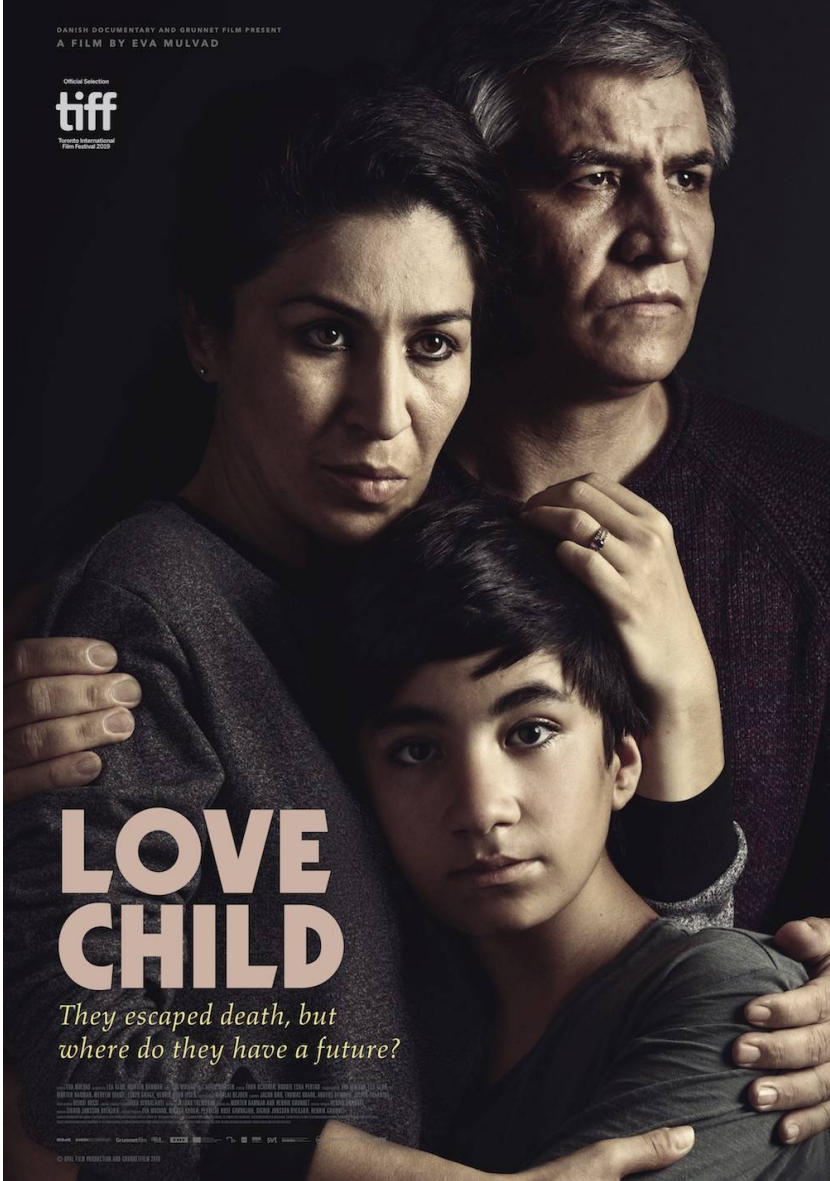


DANISH DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

# LOVE CHILD

A FILM BY EVA MULVAD



## **SYNOPSIS:**

### **LOVE CHILD**

They have escaped death, but where do they have a future?

On a cold winter's day a plane arrives in Istanbul. The four-year-old Iranian boy Mani and his parents are on board. At first glance, everything seems normal, but the little boy doesn't know that the journey is an escape, that the three of them can never return to Iran and that the 'uncle' he is travelling with is really his biological father.

Mani is the offspring of a secret love affair between a married woman and a married man. They could never live together in Iran, so they fled their country. Now they seek asylum for themselves and for their love – at first in a UN office in Turkey, but the hope is to move on to a safe place in the West, somewhere they can build a life together.

When the little family makes it to Turkey, they arrive amidst a wave of refugees from the wars and crisis of our time. At first, Leila and Sahand, the parents, are optimistic, but the wait stretches on, and the bureaucratic system of the UN poses many unexpected challenges. A constant threat hangs over their heads: if the asylum application is rejected, they could be forced to go back to Iran, where they would be cast out – or worse, sentenced to death, Leila could be facing to be stoned to death – for their forbidden love, and Mani would be shamed as a 'bastard'.

The family's escape becomes the start of a protracted struggle to stay together, to get away from the ghosts of the past and to secure a stable future for their little child. LOVE CHILD is an intimate love story, which plays out against a backdrop of the dramatic political events of our time.

LOVE CHILD premiered at TIFF 2019 and received a Special Jury Mention at DOC NYC Film Festival 2019 and a Gold Hugo at Chicago International Film Festival 2019.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Did you ever do something wrong? Do you know the icing cold feeling of shame running through your body? Are you familiar with the constant fear that these hidden actions will be exposed?

Most of us get out of forbidden affairs with fewer consequences than the couple Leila and Sahand – the protagonists of Love Child. Their secret forced them to leave a privileged life in Iran and start from scratch in a world full of people on the run.

They are managing the situation quiet well. Still their life as refugees is dominated by despaired, longing and powerlessness.

But also love – the main target for the escape is to create a decent life for their small son Mani, a life with a father and a family.

I started this project 6 years ago to create a story which makes it understandable what living conditions so many deal with when exiled: You are a stranger, a faceless system determines your fate, you meet ups and downs, but constantly you feel vulnerable, because you are without the basic rights many of us take for granted. The right to live under protection from the health, school or legal system of a nation, a guaranty that you can build you life on presumably stable ground.

The refugee crises is one of the big tragedies of our time, both to the people out there on miserable boats, walking the roads of Europe, meeting a fence in a desert or held back in inhuman camps by barb wire. But also to us – the people of nations, which had the capacity to help, but closed the eyes.

Do you know the numbness, occurring when you have read about and watched a problem repeat too many times? Do you know the shame of doing nothing? It was that numbness I wanted to break when we started shooting in the outskirts of Istanbul many years ago. We had an ambition to break passivity and use what stories are good at: to get an audience involved.

Documentaries have the quality that they can take us beyond the headlines, because you spent time and get to know the characters. These stories can be a vaccination against generalisations; they can show us what is the consequence of politics.

The way we talk about the world, influence our opinions and perceptions. I believe it to be important to tell universal human stories that communicate across cultural differences. In this case, the story of a secret agent from a country, which is considered a part of the "axis of evil", his peculiar and complicated love story and a family's unpredictable way through the UN refugee system.

Director Eva Mulvad, September 2019

## LOVE CHILD: FLEEING FOR LOVE

*Interview with Eva Mulvad.*

Eva Mulvad's documentary 'Love Child', about a family fleeing Iran, is as much a love story as a refugee film. The veteran filmmaker wants to add a narrative to the refugee debate that audiences can see themselves in. The film is world premiering at Toronto Film Festival.

According to recent UN estimates, 70.8 million people around the world are refugees. Some are fleeing war and bombs, others impossible living conditions and corruption.

In 'Love Child', an Iranian couple, Leila and Sahand, and Leila's young son, Mani, have fled for love and the dream of a life together as a family. A dream they cannot realise in their homeland, whose strict marriage laws forbid Leila from leaving an unhappy marriage and creating a new life with her lover, Sahand, and their son, who everyone thinks is her husband's.

In Iran, if worse comes to worse, their infidelity is punishable by death. So the two lovers, who seem to have it all – good educations, stable careers and outwardly happy families – leave it all behind to make a new, uncertain life for themselves as refugees in Turkey.

Hoping they will be more secure if their story is documented, they get in touch with the film's co-producer Henrik Grunnet and co-director Morten Ranmar, and through them Eva Mulvad, who later takes over the project.

I wanted to nuance the refugee debate and humanise the statistics by presenting people we can mirror ourselves in.

Despite their troubles, the family in 'Love Child' seems better off than most of the refugees we usually hear about in the media. Both parents speak English, are well educated and left behind good jobs and families in their home country, which is not war-torn. Why did you choose to tell their story?

"I wanted to nuance the refugee debate and humanise the statistics by presenting people we can mirror ourselves in. I myself have a lot in common with the two protagonists, Leila and Sahand. I, too, have a son and a small family trinity, and I have seen Bergman films, like they have. So perhaps it's easier for me, and others like me, to understand them and relate to the tough situation they're in. Or at least that was the idea."

"For good reason, we have heard a lot about Syrian refugees and immigrants from Africa seeking Europe's 'promised land'. We don't often hear a lot about the more resourceful refugees, yet they also exist in great numbers. Obviously, the refugee category is made up of people who are every bit as different and diverse as the rest of us, who aren't refugees. The film makes the simple point that it could just as well have been you or me."

While journalism typically deals directly with what's relevant, a creative documentary couches what's relevant in a familiar skin.

The film features many heart-wrenching and happy scenes, but it lavishes attention on everyday routines, as well. Why is it important to portray the family's everyday life?

"While journalism typically deals directly with what's relevant, a creative documentary couches what's relevant in a familiar skin. For me, the familiar is in the everyday scenes and the relationship issues between Leila and Sahand. In fact, it's as much a love story as a refugee story. Personally, it's in their different ways of reacting and their strong cooperation as a couple that I recognise myself the most."

You filmed the family over six years, from 2012 to 2018. How does following them for so long impact the story?

"Following them over such a long period, we don't force reality to match the film's needs. Instead, we keep coming back, again and again, until the story has the right duration, and the characters have the depth and complexity they deserve. That makes the documentary very powerful filmically, I think."

"We capture all the big and small moments of their lives. We see a small boy grow up, and we're there when he's told who his father is. We see how the parents and the family come together, and we pick up all the little movements between three people who have been struggling so long to create a new family life for themselves in a very difficult situation. That's a long and complex process, and we took the time to capture it."

You're an experienced director who has made films with very different themes. Do you see a thread in your work?

"Overall, I have worked along two lines. There's the socially relevant and humanist line, which we see in 'Enemies of Happiness', where I track a female Afghan politician bravely fighting for democracy. And there's the other line, where I'm more interested in the luxurious and decadent – as in 'The Good Life', which takes a close-up look at a family's extreme fall from wealth to poverty, and 'The Castle', which is about luxury housing for seniors."

"In general, what I'm probably most interested in is the form of my films. I like films with complex stories and characters and no easy solutions. I guess, what I particularly have to offer is a kind of thoroughness. I try to make films that stay with you and can hopefully prompt inconvenient realizations and force the audience – including people who usually have a negative view about refugees – to think about what it means to leave behind everything you know and start over again from nothing. I want the audience to put themselves in their shoes"

Interview by Sara Prah Larsen, published by The Danish Filminstitute

## BIO DIRECTOR EVA MULVAD



In 2011 Eva Mulvad (born 1972) won the prestigious, Danish "Roos Award" granted for her entire body of work. Mulvad graduated from the Danish Film School in 2001 and by 2006 she had her international break-through with ENEMIES OF HAPPINESS, which focused on the female politician Malalai Joya's political campaign ahead of the first democratic elections in Afghanistan 2005. The film won the Silver Wolf Award at IDFA and subsequently the World Cinema Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival.

With her intrinsic flair for drama and with many international awards in the baggage, Eva Mulvad is one of the most prominent Danish filmmakers. Mulvad's filmography includes among others the wellknown family-chronicle entitled THE GOOD LIFE (2010). The film was shown at IDFA and went on to win the award for Best Documentary at Kalovy Vary International Film Festival.

She has recently toured the world with the film A MODERN MAN, about classical violinist Charlie Siem and her film A CHERRY TALE premiered at CPH:DOX in 2019, an amazing story about entrepreneurship in modern time.

## BIO PRODUCER SIGRID DYEKJÆR



Producer Sigrid Dyekjær has produced over 20 documentary films in the last 16 years. Amongst them is AI WEIWEI – THE FAKE CASE by Andreas Johnsen (winner of the film critics' award in Denmark, the Bodil, and nominee at IDFA's feature length competition in 2013). She also produced FREE THE MIND by Phie Ambo, A NORMAL LIFE by Mikala Krogh (winner of the Audience Award at CPH:DOX), was executive producer on BALLROOM DANCER (winner of Nordic Panorama 2012, and Best Documentary Film at Raindance 2012 [UK], and opened Taiwan Film Festival). Additionally THE GOOD LIFE, THE MONASTERY, MECHANICAL LOVE and CAIRO GARBAGE.

In 2014 she produced both Mikala Krogh's film THE NEWSROOM - OFF THE RECORD about the insides of a major Danish newspaper, and Oscar-nominee Hanna Polak's SOMETHING BETTER TO COME. For this she was nominated at The Producers Guild of America Awards 2016 for Outstanding Producer of Documentary. Sigrid is now a member of The Producers Guild of America.

Besides LOVE CHILD, she also produced THE CAVE by Oscar-nominee Feras Fayaad and co-produced THE KINGMAKER by Lauren Greenfield which are all being presented at TIFF this year.

## BIO EDITOR ADAM NIELSEN

Editor Adam Nielsen is an editing graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 2003. The Awardwinning Danish editor, Adam Nielsen, has edited a large number of fiction and documentary films. Among these are the Oscar-nominee A WAR by Tobias Lindholm, BEFORE THE FROST by Michael Noer, BOBBI JENE by Elvira Lind, THE WAR SHOW by Andreas Dalsgaard, AI WEIWEI THE FAKE CASE by Andreas Johnsen and A HIJACKING.

Adam Nielsen did also edit Eva Mulvad's previous films ENEMIES OF HAPPINESS and THE GOOD LIFE.

**INTRO CREDITS**

DANISH DOCUMENTARY AND GRUNNET FILM

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