

# LEILA'S BROTHERS

A film by  
Saeed ROUSTAEI



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
COMPETITION  
2022 OFFICIAL SELECTION

IRIS Film presents



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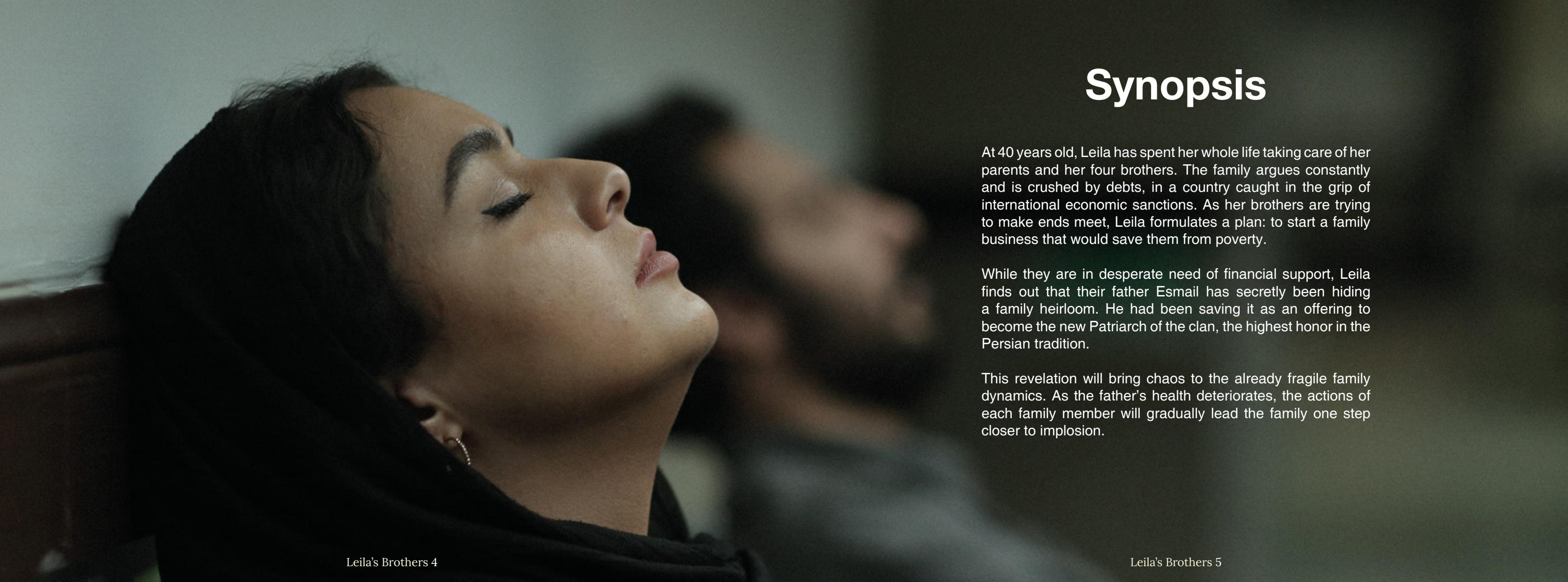
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169 min - Iran - Ratio : 1.85 - Sound: Digital 5.1



# Synopsis

At 40 years old, Leila has spent her whole life taking care of her parents and her four brothers. The family argues constantly and is crushed by debts, in a country caught in the grip of international economic sanctions. As her brothers are trying to make ends meet, Leila formulates a plan: to start a family business that would save them from poverty.

While they are in desperate need of financial support, Leila finds out that their father Esmail has secretly been hiding a family heirloom. He had been saving it as an offering to become the new Patriarch of the clan, the highest honor in the Persian tradition.

This revelation will bring chaos to the already fragile family dynamics. As the father's health deteriorates, the actions of each family member will gradually lead the family one step closer to implosion.



## Interview with Saeed Roustaei

**The story is set in the same family context as your first feature film *Life and a Day*. Is this new film an update of what goes on in the same environment?**

Since my short films, family has been a central theme for me. So in my opinion, *Leila's Brothers* isn't as much of an update as it is a continuity. I also think that even if it has a more or less similar setting to *Life and a Day*, they have many differences in terms of narrative, form, and also characters. This is especially true for the father, which had been absent until now in my films.

**Why did you choose such a big family: the father, the mother, but also Leila and her four brothers? Does each of them represent something in particular in their own right?**

I've in fact been inspired by reality: the true story of a big family. But beyond the specific dimensions that

each brother represents, they are really the elements of a system in which each plays a key role in the family dynamic.

**Through this dynamic you tackle the question of social inequities and social classes in Iran and beyond, on a universal scale. There is also a sense of determinism...**

*Leila's Brothers* undoubtedly has a universal reach. And it is also specific to the Iranian society, as we've had a middle class being developed in recent decades. This is true for the small cities too where families started to reach a certain level of everyday comfort: to own a car and have external signs of wealth. This development created the inner shell of this society. However, since the Ahmadinejad government, this structure has been completely shattered. The middle class disappeared gradually causing an enlarging rift in the society and its massive impoverishing.



In Tehran, those who had been living in middle-class outskirts had to move to places resembling slums. Just a small fraction of the population was able to amass capital.

**This situation is brought to light among Leila's brothers: Alireza is regularly blamed for wanting to escape his surroundings while Manoucher tries to profit from it.**

It isn't really escapism that characterizes Alireza, more of a hunch, or an understanding of seeking calm and serenity. He has understood that in order to achieve this, he has to maintain a distance from his family. Leila recognizes this quality in him when she tells him that, unlike the others, he takes premeditated decisions.

Manouchehr too thinks of leaving, but not for the same reasons: he thinks that the only way to live better is to leave the country, even if it means committing scams and frauds, which leads him to a dead end.

**This idea of a dead end puts the characters in this family in a kind of a Greek or Shakespearian tragedy. This also could be the story of a king or of deprived princes. Did you have such models in mind when writing?**

Shakespearian and Greek tragedies have always been inspiring to me. These are the books I like to read and the films I like to watch. They have unconsciously influenced my writing, especially the characters.

**This creates emotional films, and even more so with *Leila's Brothers* compared to your other films, with a novelesque density and dimension. What about your background as a documentary filmmaker?**

My films are always constructed on the crossroads of these two axes: a story only moves me when it resembles a tragedy. It doesn't interest me if it isn't deeply dramatic, to the point of personally feeling the suffering of the characters. It is the same thing that I try to develop in my scripts. On the other hand, the root of this suffering comes almost always from

things that I have witnessed, and that were revolting to me, in real life. Reality plants the seeds of a tree that grows into novelesque branches. For example, the whole story of *Life and a Day* came from a scene that I witnessed accidentally in an alley where I saw a young drug addict saying goodbye to his sister. The simpleness of this instant, albeit profoundly tragic, was for me the starting point for writing it.

**Let's talk about gazes. The most intense scenes in *Leila's Brothers* are usually those carried by gazes, moments of silence, in a film full of chaos...**

It wasn't intentional. I don't like style for the sake of style. I could easily go from an over-the-shoulder shot to a traveling. Nothing is forced. Same thing for the moments of silence and dialogues. It is the scene in itself, that dictates its own style. If I think that some things have to be expressed explicitly in a scene, I won't shy away from writing dialogues for the characters and I can go on for ever. The same goes for those scenes where I feel that I should just pass the camera over faces in total silence. Also, contrary to popular belief where in films music should express what words cannot, I believe that looks and gazes are even more powerful.

**However, the dialogues among the family members are often filled with violence, when expressing the mutual feelings between generations, between**

**parents and children...**

I'm aware that they could seem harsh and violent between themselves, while they are not always like this. But this comes, more than their inner feelings towards each other, from their living conditions. While working with my set designer, I insisted on being able to convey the feeling that they live in a very small place, and we made it that way.

When a family lives in such a constricted environment, its members don't have any intimacy, a proper and personal space, where they could keep away from the other's looks. They are just piled up. It necessarily creates a lifestyle based upon tension and aggression. When you can't keep a secret from others, no way of retreating from your close ones, you won't take any



precautions with them. It's for the same reason that there are no rooms in their apartment, to reinforce this idea of proximity that provokes the visible violence.

**These relationships bring about the idea of suffering that you were talking about: each generation is blaming the other for their fate. But which one is truly the victim in your opinion?**

I think it's absolutely vital for a person to be able to leave their family, their parents, one day in order to have their own lives. But you need to have the means, the resources, for it. These kids, who are fully grown adults, don't have that. We clearly feel that they are suffocating. The film is thoroughly clear on that.

**Tell us a bit about the actors that make up this family. You have already worked a couple of times with Navid Mohammadzadeh and Payman Maadi, but it's the first time that you are working with Taraneh Alidoosti.**

She is a truly great actress. When I began writing the character, my sister recommended that I work with Taraneh. And my sister is actually called Leila.

*Interview by Alex Masson, May 2022.*



# Technical sheet

**Writer and Director** Saeed ROUSTAEI

**Producers** Saeed ROUSTAEI  
Javad NORUZBEIGI

**DOP** Hooman BEHMANESH  
**Editor** Bahram DEGHAN  
**Set Design** Mohsen NASROLLAHI

**Costumes** Ghazale MOTAMED  
**Makeup** Iman OMIDVARI  
**Sound** Rashid DANESHMAND  
Iraj SHAHZADI

**Sound design** Amirhosein GHASEMI  
**Visual effects** Javad MATURI

**French Distribution** WILD BUNCH  
**International Sales** ELLE DRIVER

# Cast

Taraneh ALIDOOSTI	Leila
Navid MOHAMMADZADEH	Alireza
Payman MAADI	Manouchehr
Farhad ASLANI	Parviz
Mohammad ALIMOHAMMADI	Farhad
Saeed POURSAMIMI	Father
Nayereh FARAHANI	Mother
Mehdi HOSEININIA	Bayram



# Saeed ROUSTAEE

Saeed ROUSTAEE was born in Iran in 1989. After graduating from Soore University with a Bachelor in Cinematography, he first directed three short films, then a documentary which won over 100 awards worldwide.

His feature debut *Life and a Day* (2016), won Best Directing and Best Screenplay awards at the Fajr International Film Festival, the main film festival in Iran, along with several prizes in international festivals.

His second feature, *Just 6.5* (2019), premiered at Venice Orizzonti. It was nominated for the César Award for Best Foreign Film and won the Best Director Award at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

## **Feature Films:**

*Leila's Brothers* (2022)

*Just 6.5* (2019)

*Life and a day* (2016)

## **Short Films:**

*Saturday* (2011)

*Ceremony* (2012)

*Empty street* (2014)



**Taraneh Alidoosti**, born Jan. 12th 1984, is an Iranian actress. She is best known internationally for her role in *The Salesman* (2016), which won the Best Foreign Language Film award at the 89th Academy Awards. Alidoosti won Best Actress in a Leading Role at the 20th Fajr Film Festival and the Silver Leopard at the 55th Locarno film festival for *I'm Taraneh, 15* (2002) her 1<sup>st</sup> film. She is also known for starring in *The Beautiful City* (2003), *Fireworks*



**Navid Mohammadzadeh** was born on April 6, 1986 in Iran. An acclaimed Iranian actor, he notably won the Orizzonti Award for Best Actor at the Venice International Film Festival for Vahid Jalilvand's *No Date, No Signature* (2017). He also won the Best Actor Award at the Tokyo International Film Festival for Saeed Roustaei's *Just 6.5* (2019).



**Payman Maadi** was born in 1970 in New York City to an Iranian couple. His family moved back to Iran when he was 5 years old. He graduated in Metallurgical Engineering from Karaj Azad University. Maadi started his film career as a screenwriter in late 2000s. His acting career began with Asghar Farhadi's film *About Elly* (2009). Two years later, he received the Silver Bear award for Best Actor in Leading Role for his performance as Nader in Farhadi's *A Separation* (2011) at the Berlin International Film Fest.



**Farhad Aslani**, born June 8th, 1966, is an Iranian actor. Aslani played his first role in *The Blue-Veiled* by Rakhshan Bani Etemad in 1995. He was awarded The Crystal Phoenix by the FIFF (Fajr International Film Festival) for his role in *Private Life* (2012). He received the Best Actor award at the 47th International Film Festival of India for *Daughter* (2016). Also known for his portrayal of Ibn Ziyad in 2011 successful Iranian TV series, *Mokhtarnameh*.



**Mohammad Ali Mohammadi**, is an Iranian actor. He works in cinema and theater and is best known for *Just 6.5* (2019), *Life and a Day* (2016), and *Leila's Brothers* (2022). He is a well-known stage actor in Iran having performed most notably in stage



**Saeed Poursamimi**, born Feb. 29 1944, is an Iranian actor. Graduated from the Fine Arts University of Rasht in Acting, he started his career as a stage actor in the 1960s. He debuted in Cinema in 1987 with *Captain Khorshid* directed by Naser Taghvai, and was awarded the Crystal Simorgh for the best actor in a supporting role. He is the only Iranian actor who has received it 3 times. Other notable

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