

FOROUGH : A LONELY WOMAN

DRAFT 4.8
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THIS FILM IS DEDICATED TO THE INIMITABLE STRENGTH
OF THE WOMEN OF IRAN.

Developed with the assistance of the
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N.B: Dates, when needed, appear at the start of each sequence.
The film focuses on three time periods told non-linearly :

1. CHILDHOOD

2. FIRST MARRIAGE (PARVIZ) & THE WRITING OF THE POEM "SIN"

3. HER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOLESTAN

Just not in this order...

4. **Scenes in RED**: Are ONE continuous session with a DOCTOR in Alborz Hospital following her third suicide which we see.

Continuity and filming texture on screen will make it clear which time period we are in.

TEXT ON BLACK SCREEN: *On the day of her death, The 300 page autobiography that FOROUGH was writing disappears...*

FOROUGH (V.O.)
*I respect poetry the same way a
religious person respects religion.*

1 EXT. BACKYARD- NIGHT

AN UNSEEN MAN'S hand feeds typed pages into a raging bonfire.

FOROUGH (V.O.)
Poetry is my God--

Page after page burnt...

2 EXT. FUNERAL PROCESSION ZAHIRO-DOLEH CEMETERY (ARCHIVE)- DAY

February 14th, 1967. DAY OF BURIAL

A light snow is falling. Masses of BLACK-CLAD MOURNERS gather around a slight body, draped in rich paisley fabric, elevated onto the shoulders of STOIC MEN walking in sombre procession. MOURNERS jostle and vie to walk alongside their beloved.

BLACK CLAD WOMEN, perhaps the MOTHER and SISTERS of the dead, faint; caught and supported by those on either side. Heads roll back to implore the sky as they march forward.

FEMALE MOURNER (V.O.)
They killed her.

MALE MOURNER (V.O.)
Savak? No. She finally did it.

FEMALE MOURNER 2 (V.O.)
Probably. (Beat) Is he here?

The body is transported in a flower-strewn procession car along streets lined with FRANTIC PUBLIC MOURNERS. Attendees walk briskly to keep up with the pacing car.

MALE MOURNER (V.O.)
Who? Her father?

The TINY SHROUDED BODY is lowered into the gaping mouth of a grave which awaits its early reward. Cracked, faded red plastic buckets quickly deliver moist earth over the body.

FEMALE MOURNER 2 (V.O.)
No. The lover... That coward.

MEN stand astride the grave; and rake the ground.

The wailing CROWD confirm that an idol has been snatched away. The contorted, anguished faces of MOURNERS. Tears. Hysteria. The great and the good are present. The crushed bodies the only thing holding each other up.

A fragile boy, HOSSEIN, 7, and a similar dark-eyed boy, KAMI, 14, stand sentinel. A man, perhaps her FATHER, 70s, stands in full military attire. All hearts broken.

FEMALE MOURNER (V.O.)

They pulled her to pieces when she was alive. Now look. We worship the dead.

Finally. A tiny grave. A final handful of dirt.

TITLE : FOROUGH, A LONELY WOMAN

WHITE FLASH TO:

3 EXT./INT. JEEP- DAY

February 13th, 1967. DAY OF DEATH

A messy-haired raven, FOROUGH, 32, weaves through apocalyptic Tehran traffic. Intense black saucers for eyes, she's alluring though she smokes and cuts off a car. A speed demon.

Snow sprinkles the air outside as smoke fills the car. Her passenger, RAHMAN, 45, doesn't like the smoke and exhales loudly. Rolls down the windows as FOROUGH enjoys jostling between cars. Her RED SCARF flaps in the wind. Bright eyes. She beeps at zig-zagging taxis. Smokes more.

RAHMAN

Pull over. There. Just--

4 EXT. FILM LABORATORY, TEHRAN- DAY

Impressive iron gates. The car waits. Beeps. Waits. Beeps again. A CARETAKER, 60s, whose crushed heels have turned his dusty shoes into slippers, emerges. A canister of film handed over. FOROUGH attempts to return to the car, however, he wants to talk. She impatiently thanks him. Over and over as

RAHMAN makes faces; mocking her from behind the OLD MAN. She giggles; knows she's being too serious. Blows out her cheeks in faux-exhaustion as she skips back to the car. Finally--

5 EXT./INT. JEEP- DAY

A good stretch of road at the outskirts of the city where she can finally floor it. The tree-lined road stretches out in front of her, wide, yet predominantly winding. Exhilaration. Joy. We like her. We really like her.

FOROUGH lights another cigarette. She breathes in. Smoke enveloping her slight frame. She's an enviable vision of an artist at the height of her fame.

Through the windshield, FOROUGH looks glorious. The dappled light plays on her cheeks. The radio mixes an Iranian newscaster in with The Doors, *Light My Fire*.

RAHMAN

You don't need to do his dirty work,
Forough. That's my job.

FOROUGH

Just this last thing.

RAHMAN shakes head. FOROUGH tunes in the radio. Ella Fitzgerald's Night and Day comes through the static.

FOROUGH (CONT'D)

Shahi. He loves this one.

RAHMAN

You know, he's not worthy of you.

FOROUGH, enraptured, glances up at the mirror, smiles softly. Through the windshield the first snow flakes start falling.

ELLA FITZGERALD (SINGS)

*There's an oh such a hungry yearning
burning inside of me, And its torment
won't be through, 'TIL you let me spend
my life making love to you, Day and
night, night and day...*

Then. Intersection of Marvdasht and Loqumanoddowleh streets in Darrus. A bus carrying CHILDREN rattles towards them. Suddenly the two vehicles are on a collision course. Danger.

RAHMAN

My God!

Panic! A swerve. Sharp intake of breathe. A CROW SQUAWKS. Black feathers. Horror. The jeep veers to avoid collision...

Screeching. BLACK. BLACKNESS: The sound of an unending piercing metallic signal. Spinning wheels; steam and shouts from ONLOOKERS. Just then--

One solitary black feather.

RAHMAN (V.O.)

Forough! Forough!

RAHMAN runs out the car screaming; face covered in blood. He looks around. Looking for the driver. She's not in the car.

CHILDREN are now wailing; choking. An inferno. The BUS DRIVER also appears, bleeding from his head, petrified; sobbing. Surrounded by steaming carnage. Searches...

They find her TINY BODY, ejected from the vehicle lying in a ditch. FOROUGH's breathing is laboured. Her chest moves slowly as she watches the panicked faces. RAHMAN flags down a passing car. Life is ebbing away. CLOSE ON FOROUGH'S PUPIL--

FOROUGH (V.O.)

*The whole of my being is a dark verse
of Scripture...*

6 EXT./INT. FOROUGH'S LIFE- [MONTAGE]

--FOROUGH'S life flickers like an exploding Rolodex, scenes from the film to come: **A teenage FOROUGH writing, a child running in a bare apartment, the making of a bed with fresh sheets, FOROUGH's struggle to write, a lover's abandonment, a book of Hafiz in a father's library, a quarrel between FOROUGH and a MAN, making love with another MAN, more arguments, a lover's electric smile, ink... more ink and painful, conflicted love...**

LANDING ON:

7 INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL- NIGHT [FLASHBACK]

TEXT ON SCREEN : 7 YEARS EARLIER

Ink-covered hands dangle from a bedside. A thick pipe leads to the fragile throat of FOROUGH, in a MUD-COVERED NIGHTGOWN.

VOICE (V.O.)
Forough! Forough!

VOICE 2 (V.O.)
Forough!! Forough...

Regurgitates charcoal as she tries to wrench out the pipe. Gruesome. A DOCTOR restrains her ink-blackened hands.

GOLESTAN, 42, her handsome thick-set lover joins the manic chorus. White as a sheet. The sound of retching reassures us she'll be fine. A bucket fills with bile and fragments of white pills.

Just as A NURSE pushes GOLESTAN out of the room.

8 INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL- DAWN

Solitude. BARE FEET walking on linoleum floors accompany the hum and bleeps of medical equipment.

FOROUGH wanders the hospital corridors, unable to sleep. She peers into patients' rooms: AN OLD WOMAN snores. ANOTHER, bandaged, not long for this world. FOROUGH observes.

Then. FOROUGH reaches the maternity ward with rows of cots.

She finds A TINY ALERT BABY. Yearning for comfort. Crying. She strokes the BABY's face which quietens with touch.

FOROUGH picks up the BABY, cradles her. The BABY, reassured, heavy eyelids, now falls asleep.

FOROUGH
*I sinned a sin full of pleasure,
next to a shaking, stupefied form...*

A NURSE, 52, is startled as she looks in.

NURSE
You can't do that!

THE NURSE grabs the BABY who cries leaving FOROUGH's embrace.

FOROUGH

*O God, who knows what I did
In that dark and quiet seclusion.*

9

INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL, DR SHOKOUFI'S OFFICE- DAY

The dull buzz of florescent lights. FOROUGH, despondent and unkempt, faces a LOW CAMERA as she speaks to PSYCHOLOGIST, JAMSHID SHOKOUFI, 50s, who initially remains off-screen.

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.)

Your husband's sick with worry.

Silence. Only the sound of a pen scratching on paper. He flips through the medical folder on his desk.

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Why did you do that to yourself?

No answer.

DR SHOKOUFI (CONT'D)

Well?

FOROUGH

He's not my husband.

DR SHOKOUFI

I don't have all day.

FOROUGH

Well, in that case, I'm off home.

FOROUGH stands. He violently yanks her down.

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.)

I decide if you go home. I can section you. Now talk. (Beat) What's at home?

FOROUGH

Uncertainty. Doubts.

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.)

--About what?

A long pause. A silence to be filled.

FOROUGH

I was tired. Took some pills. I guess too many. Drank a little too much--

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.)

--You make it sound like an accident.

He reads the file.

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

It says here you've done this before. Three times? Jesus. Mohammad. Moses!

FOROUGH
Any more holy men in there?

For the first time, we see DR SHOKOUFI who has a grey-speckled beard and deep-set eyes set beneath dark eyebrows.

DR SHOKOUFI
Forough? Farrokhzad? The poetess.

His wide eyes. No response as she looks up.

DR SHOKOUFI (CONT'D)
--Why would YOU do a thing like that?

FOROUGH
Why wouldn't a woman today want to kill herself?

CLOSE-UP: FOROUGH picks at the wooden splinters of the desk.

DR SHOKOUFI
Sweetheart. Why are you here?

FOROUGH
I can't write.

DR SHOKOUFI
What? Who kills themselves over writers block?

FOROUGH
--If they had it as bad as me.

He sits back. Takes in the celebrity sitting in front of him.

DR SHOKOUFI
Your work caused such a stir.

FOROUGH
Nothing's stirring now--

DR SHOKOUFI
-- The nurses when that poem came out. They talked about it the whole summer. (Softly) What happened; what are you after?

FOROUGH
A cigarette?

DR SHOKOUFI
(Now angry at her attitude)
I stand between you and home. You hear? (She nods). Then talk.

FOROUGH
I want to be a poet. To tell my story. To exist. You understand?

One last splinter. But softened edges.

DR SHOKOUFI
But. You're a poet already.

FOROUGH
No. A poet of merit.

DR SHOKOUFI
What's stopping you?

WHITE FLASH TO:

10 INT. TEHRAN UNIVERSITY SCREENING ROOM- NIGHT [FLASH FORWARD]

Clapping. The house lights brighten. FOROUGH with shorter hair, visibly older, GOLESTAN and FAKHRI (his wife) are sitting several rows back in an auditorium.

DR. RAJI (O.S.)
Miss Farrokhzad? Would you join us?

GOLESTAN and FOROUGH walk through the seats, climbing over AUDIENCE MEMBERS, apologising. They don't walk to the front but to the back of the theatre.

11 INT. TEHRAN UNIVERSITY, CORRIDOR- NIGHT [FLASH FORWARD]

GOLESTAN
(Grabbing her arm. Hard)
Where are you going?! This way--

FOROUGH
No! They're idiots.

GOLESTAN
Why do you care so much what they think if they're idiots. Go!

FOROUGH
You go. They say you made it, anyway.

DR. RAJI (O.S.)
Miss Forough? Where's that spotlight?

THE AUDIENCE look around trying to spot her.

FOROUGH
This is being hijacked; I'm not a political pawn. I'm a poet.

DR. RAJI (O.S.)
Can we find Miss Farrokhzad??

GOLESTAN
You're your own worst enemy.

FOROUGH
I didn't want this.

GOLESTAN
But. You got this.

He looks at her mean. She's tender. But defiant.

GOLESTAN (CONT'D)
Get up there before they find you.
(Mean) Enough! You're embarrassing.

12 INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL, DR SHOKOUFIS OFFICE- DAY

DR SHOKOUFI
Blocked?.. So. Why can't you write?

FOROUGH
I wish I knew. Honestly, doctor, I do.
The writing's dried up. Too much
doubt. I try but... It's painful.

DR SHOKOUFI slides over cigarettes. A reward.

DR SHOKOUFI (O.S.)
What you've done is forbidden.

FOROUGH removes a bit of tobacco from her mouth; no answer.

FOROUGH
Everything I've done is forbidden.

A final splinter goes into FOROUGH's thumb. Winces.

13 INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL WARD- MORNING [A FEW DAYS LATER]

Morning. FOROUGH applies mascara. More and more. Black eye make-up and heavy lashes that explode like fireworks on her delicate face. Her sister, POURAN, 35, has brought clothes.

A MEAN MATRON, 50s, is preparing discharge papers.

POURAN
I stink at lying. Call them. It was in
the papers anyway.

FOROUGH exhales, shrugs. Now turns the upturns neat piles of her effects as she searches for something. Fevered.

FOROUGH
Where are they? (To Nurse) You seen
them? (To Pouran) I've something for
you. Some words finally came...

POURAN smiles. Pleased.

POURAN
I'll go see if the car's here.

POURAN exits as FOROUGH keeps searching.

FOROUGH
(Pushes past the nurse)
Excuse me.

MEAN MATRON
I threw them in the furnace.

FOROUGH
You did what?

MEAN MATRON
Poet? Pff. How dare you talk about
(Whispered) sex. Men's bodies...
You're no Shamloo, honey. No Hafiz.
Not even Parvin.

The NURSE wrestles the notebook from FOROUGH's hand.

MEAN MATRON (CONT'D)
Shame on you. Go home. Be a mother.

FOROUGH contemplates the mirror, pursed lips; her face in ruins. Broken. The MEAN MATRON returns to her outpost.

14 EXT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL ENTRANCE- DAY

FOROUGH, crushed, waits with POURAN. The fancy car of IBRAHIM GOLESTAN (seen earlier) arrives. POURAN keeps a distance.

POURAN
You could stay with us. A week. Maybe.

FOROUGH looks up. Knowing this is only a polite gesture.

FOROUGH
He's... My everything.

POURAN
--He's making you sick.

In the distance, GOLESTAN is preening in the visor.

POURAN (CONT'D)
Plus he's only interested in his hair.

Both sisters manage a grin. POURAN hugs her. Tight.

FOROUGH runs back to the car, enters. Under her sleeve, folded like a handkerchief, finds the poem she was seeking.

Runs back. POURAN takes the paper. Who reads.

FOROUGH thoughtful. She turns, sprints back to the hospital.

POURAN (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Where you going?!

15 INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL NURSE STATION- DAY

FOROUGH searches. She spots the MEAN MATRON in the distance. Rushes behind her and taps her shoulder, only to give her a big bear hug. The NURSE is startled. Held.

FOROUGH
 (Into her ear)
 You think you know me? Well, I know
 you. You're a tiny hiccup of no
 consequence. An enemy of progress.
 Shamloo? Parviz? Who you kidding?!

POURAN arrives, horrified, she tugs at FOROUGH.

POURAN	FOROUGH (CONT'D)
Let's go.	(Grins, follows)
	I'm done.

FOROUGH and POURAN exit as A PAPAZZO appears, calls her name. Snaps. FOROUGH covers her face. Poets are the rock stars of their day. POURAN, swears at him. Shields FOROUGH.

The engine starts as FOROUGH gets in the car with GOLESTAN.

16 INT. GOLESTAN'S CAR- CONTINUOUS

A manly hand on a gear stick. GOLESTAN glances at FOROUGH. Concerned. Her smile drops as soon as he turns his head. They drive on and the hospital disappears. But not her fears.

17 EXT./INT. DARRUS HOUSE, KITCHEN- DAY

GOLESTAN
 You sure?

GOLESTAN and FOROUGH enter with plastic bags of fruit and food they've bought from roadside vendors along the way.

FOROUGH
 Yes. Go.

She hugs him. Tight. Breathes him in.

GOLESTAN
 OK, joon (Persian: "dear"). I'll call
 you. Rahman's outside. Zahra's coming.

FOROUGH
 Stay. Don't go. Wait.

GOLESTAN holds her. Exhales. Changes his mind.

GOLESTAN
 I... The little one's birthday. I
 can't miss it--

She pushes him off. Nods.

FOROUGH
 OK. I'll be fine. Go.

GOLESTAN	FOROUGH (CONT'D)
I'll check on you.	When?

GOLESTAN (CONT'D)
 (Kissing her forehead)
 Tomorrow.

FOROUGH watches him leave. Through the window there's a mound of earth resembling a GRAVE. A shovel next to it. RAHMAN, sleeps with his legs dangling out the Jeep's open window.

Now, almost entirely alone, FOROUGH has a mission. She scans the room; searching. Turns drawers and cupboards inside out.

FOROUGH
 (Shouting to the ceiling)
 Zahra? Where the hell is everything?

She continues. Finding nothing she's seeking. The drawers are mostly empty. Cutlery gone. No knives. No scissors. Only spoons. There's ink but nothing else. Nothing sharp. Frantic.

FOROUGH (CONT'D)
 What have you done, imbecile?

Back in the kitchen: She finds an shrivelled pencil hidden in the dust between the wall and fridge. Looks for paper. Pulls out newsprint with another paparazzi snap of her:

"Rumour has it that Ms. Forough Farrokhzad has gone insane. This news reminded us of what Tha'alebi said: "Poets lack reason, and reason is no criterion of poetry. The day Daughters of Eve, who are lacking a rib, heaven forbid they become poets and beware the day they go crazy; it is truly worth seeing." In any case, we hope that the rumour is not true." She crumples it up. Disgusted. To the BLACK CAT:

FOROUGH (CONT'D)
 "Daughters of Eve"? Talentless
 vampires. What mediocre horse shit!

FOROUGH sits at a desk; holds a pencil with recycled letter. Tries to write but can't. Blocked. Nothing comes.

18 INT. ALBORZ HOSPITAL, DR SHOKOUFI'S OFFICE- DAY [RETURN TO]
 Silence.

DR SHOKOUFI
 But. How can you do this to people who
love you?--

FOROUGH
 --He says I love too hard.

DR SHOKOUFI
 Who?

On the desk rests a pile of wood splinters. And blood.

DR SHOKOUFI (CONT'D)
 If he's not your husband, tell me
 about the man who brought you here...