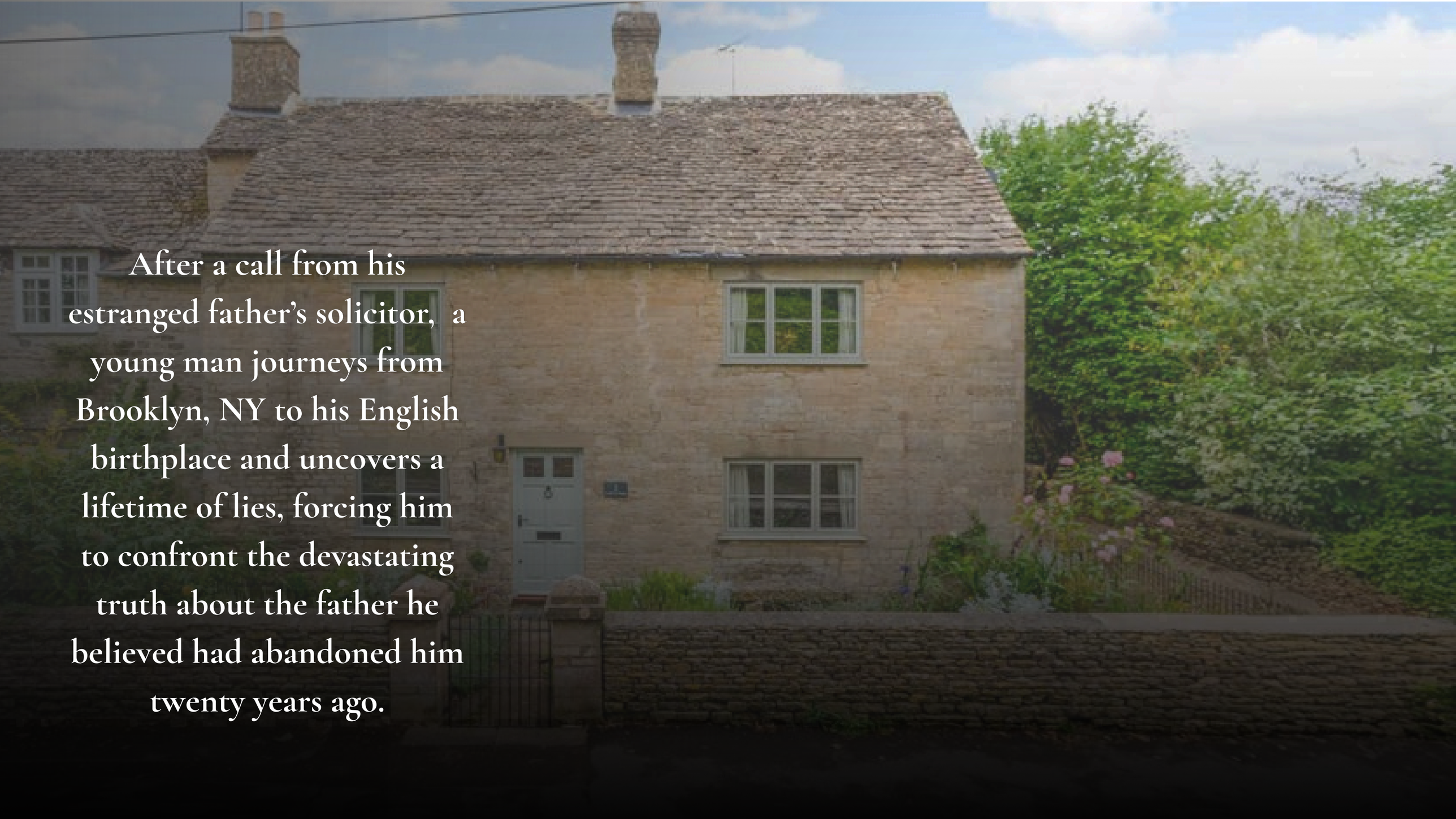

OPEN RETURN
NOTHING STAYS HIDDEN
A FILM BY THERESA GODLY



After a call from his estranged father's solicitor, a young man journeys from Brooklyn, NY to his English birthplace and uncovers a lifetime of lies, forcing him to confront the devastating truth about the father he believed had abandoned him twenty years ago.

THE JOURNEY

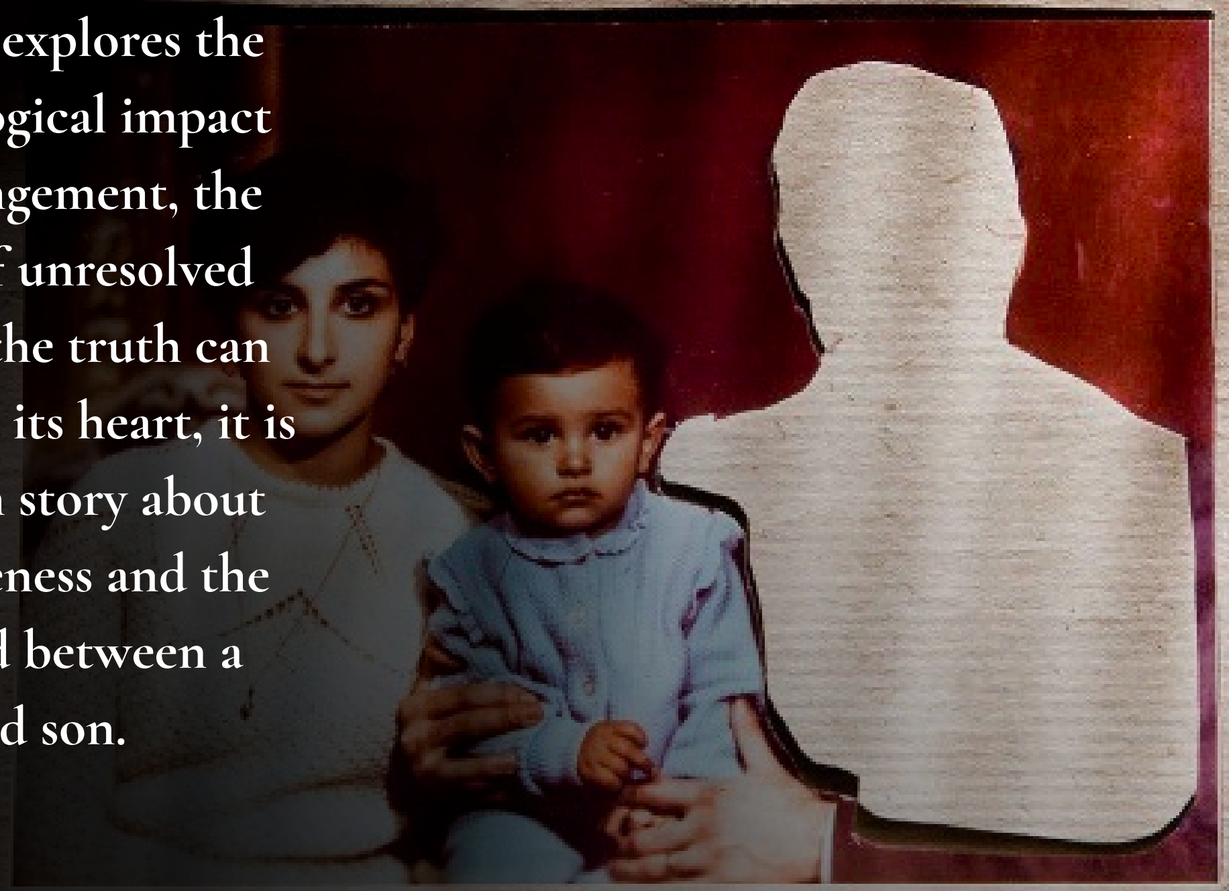
Twenty-six-year-old Ayaan Sharma reluctantly returns to the English village he left as a child, unaware that the answers he's spent a lifetime searching for have been waiting there all along.

Inside his father's cottage, forgotten letters, photographs and memories reveal a man who never stopped loving his son. with every discvovery, the story Ayaan has always believed begins to unravel and weigh on his mind.

Ayaan is forced to question not only his past, but the man he has become because of it.

AT IT'S HEART

'Open Return' explores the lasting psychological impact of family estrangement, the quiet weight of unresolved grief, and how the truth can reshape a life. At its heart, it is a deeply human story about identity, forgiveness and the enduring bond between a father and son.





WHERE THE STORY LIVES

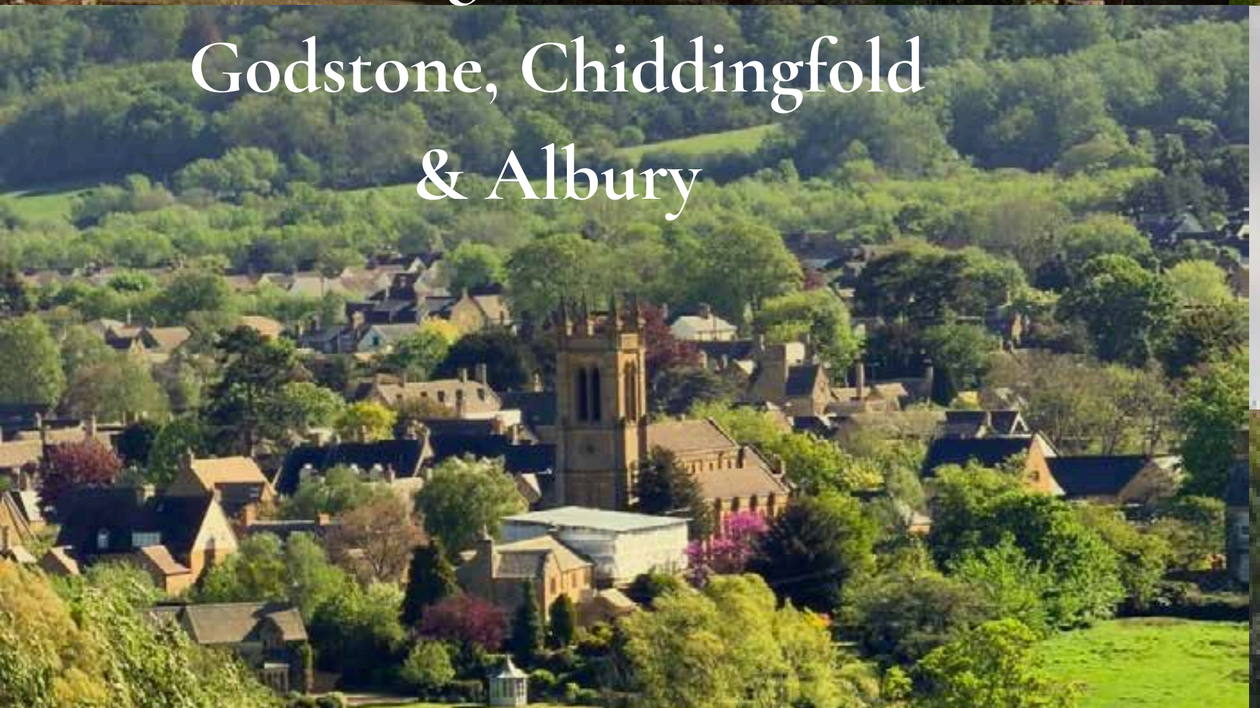
Set in the quiet English countryside, ‘Open Return’ unfolds in places where memories linger: a weathered cottage, narrow village lanes and rooms filled with books, letters and photographs. The landscape reflects Ayaan’s emotional journey—beautiful, peaceful and haunted by the life he never had.

FILMING LOCATIONS

We will film in and around the Surrey Hills, in villages like Shere, Godstone, Chiddingfold & Albury









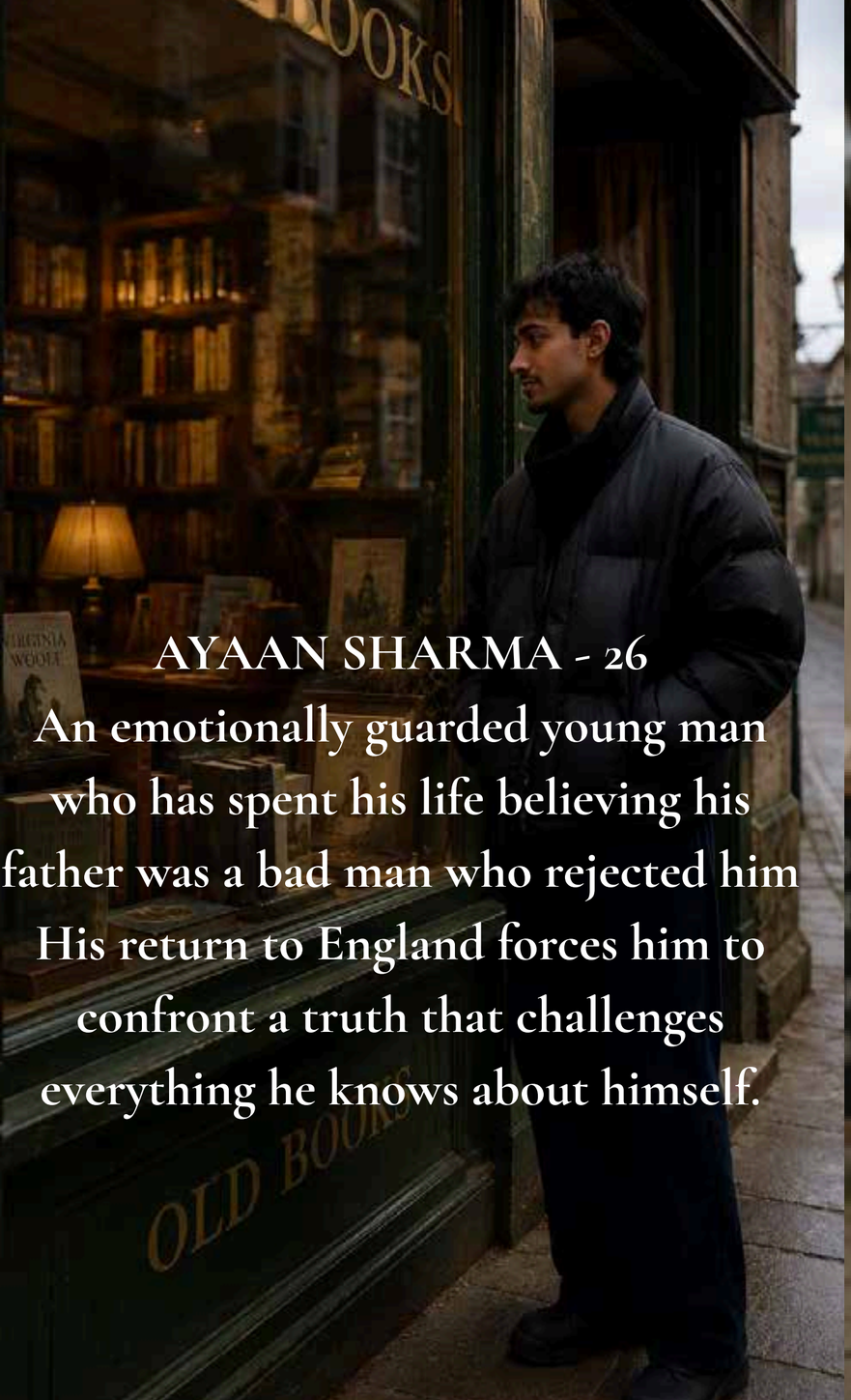
PRODUCTION INFO

Estimated production dates: 24 - 28 April 2027

Estimated completion date: Sept 2027

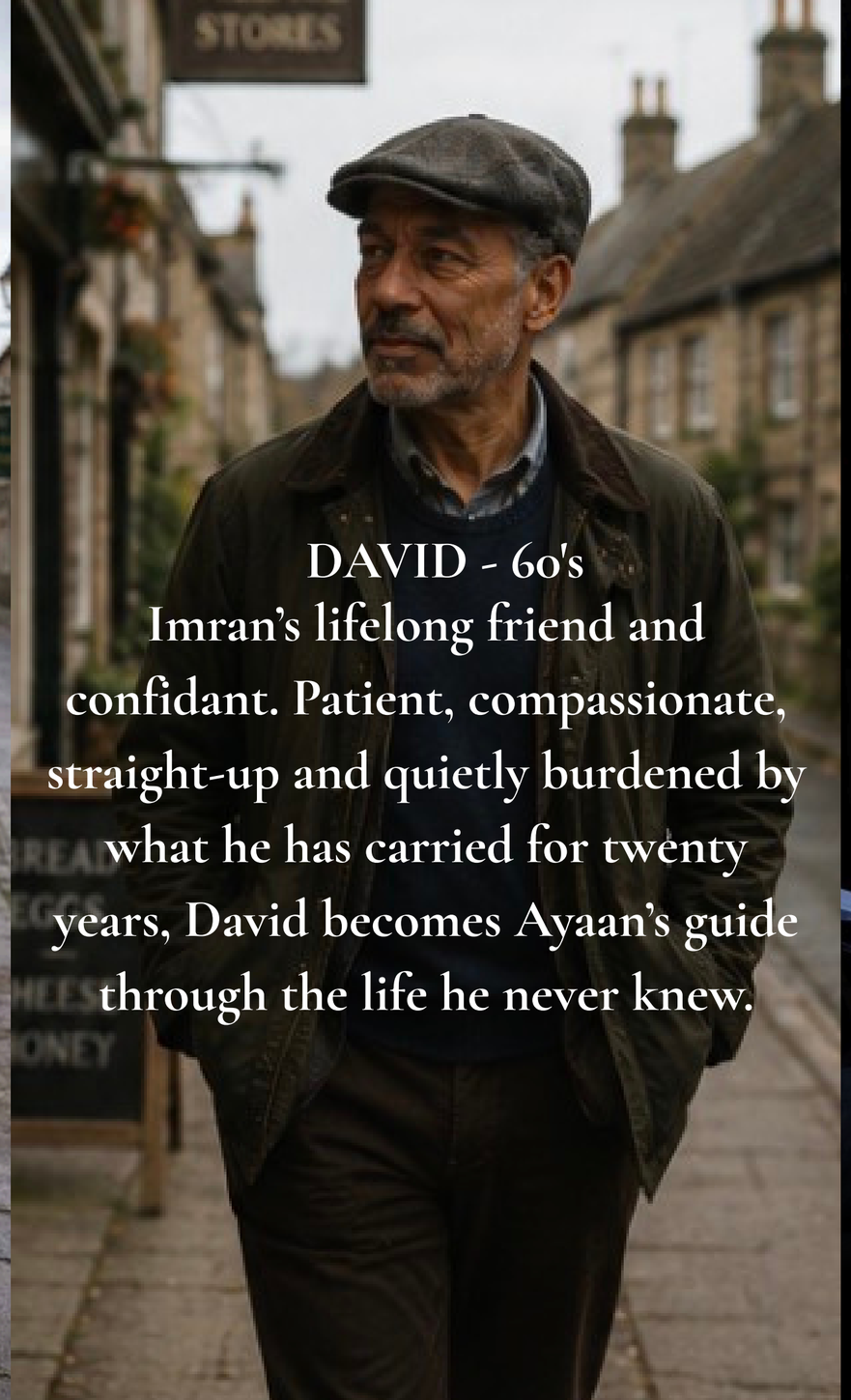
Total Budget: £49,808





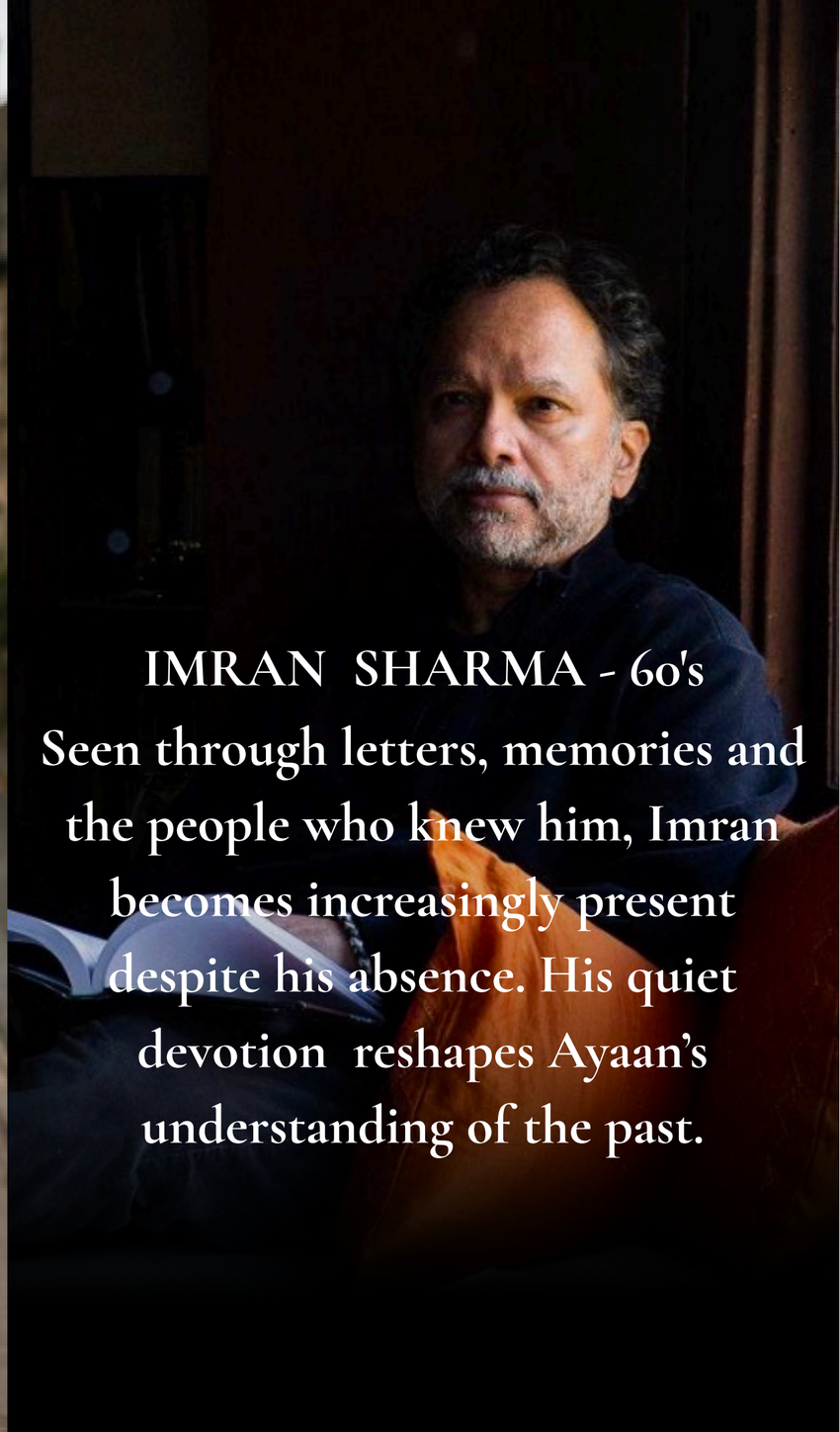
AYAAN SHARMA - 26

An emotionally guarded young man who has spent his life believing his father was a bad man who rejected him His return to England forces him to confront a truth that challenges everything he knows about himself.



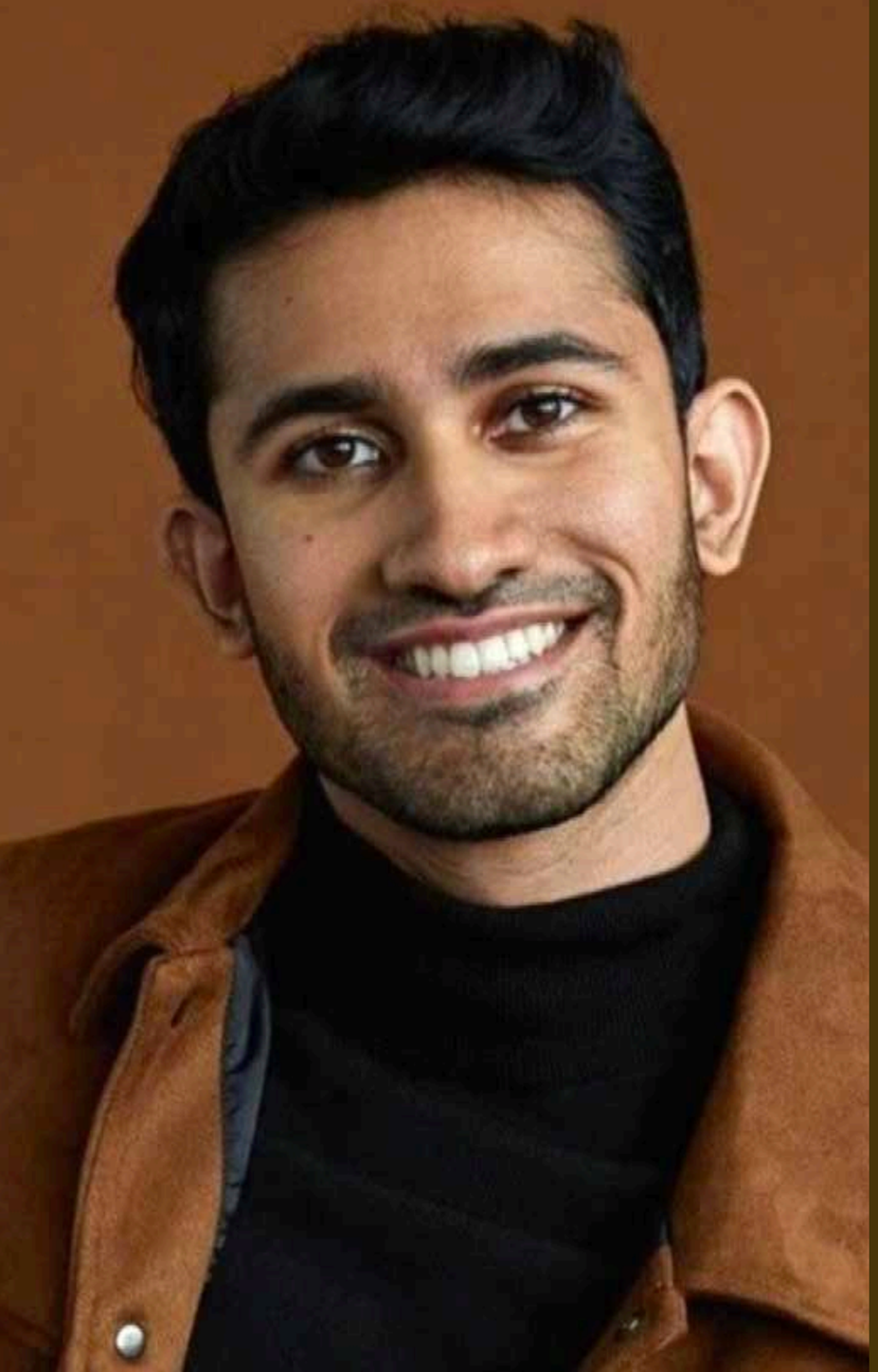
DAVID - 60's

Imran's lifelong friend and confidant. Patient, compassionate, straight-up and quietly burdened by what he has carried for twenty years, David becomes Ayaan's guide through the life he never knew.



IMRAN SHARMA - 60's

Seen through letters, memories and the people who knew him, Imran becomes increasingly present despite his absence. His quiet devotion reshapes Ayaan's understanding of the past.

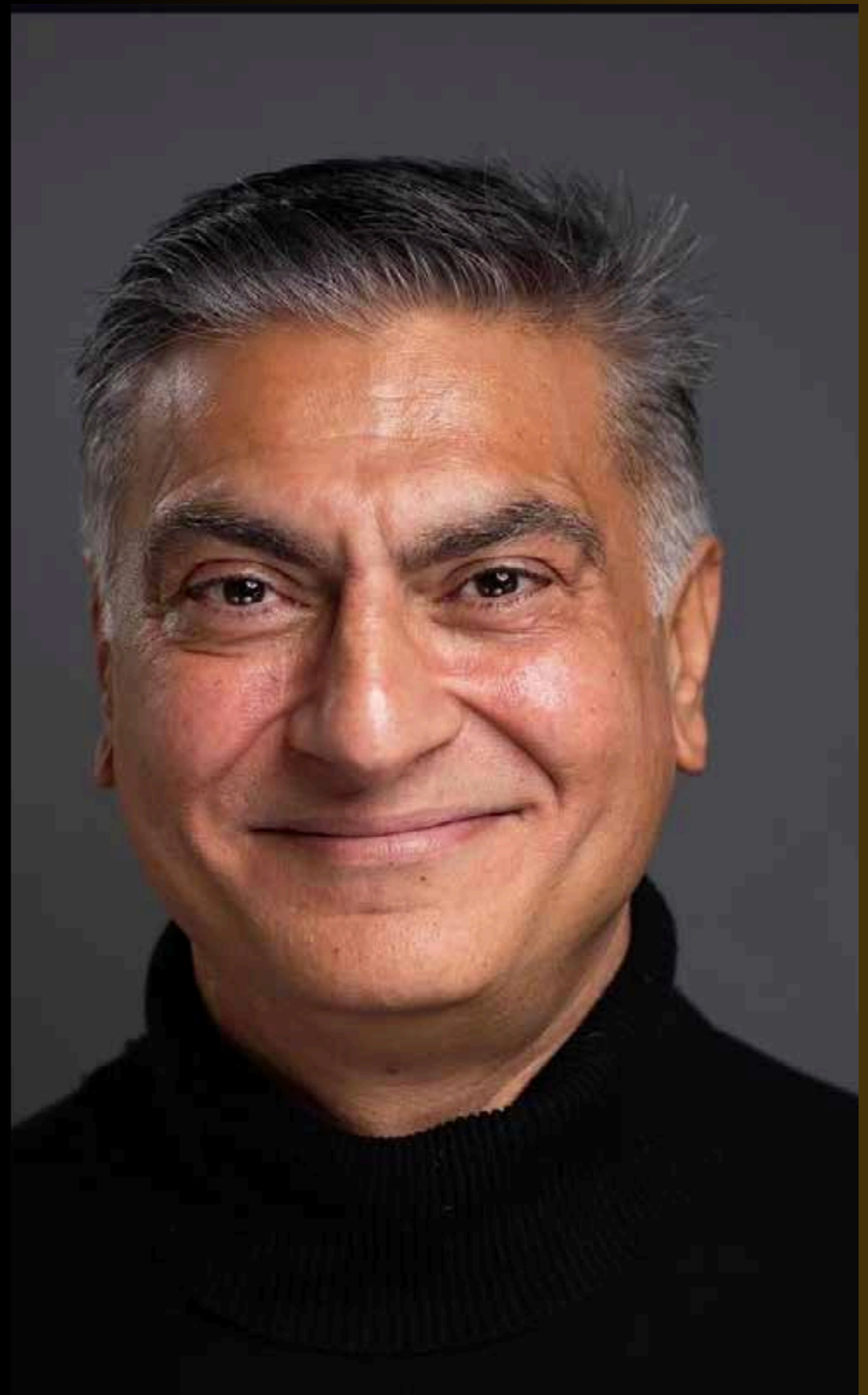


ACTOR: Ary Satish

CHARACTER: Ayaan Sharma

Ary Satish is an award-winning Indian actor and filmmaker based in London, United Kingdom. Born in Kerala, India, and raised across India, Sri Lanka and the United States, Satish has worked internationally across film and theatre in the UK, US and India.. Ary graduated from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with a BFA in Drama and additional study in Film Production. His other leading film roles include Rudy in Model Minority, Michael in American Weasel, The Executive in Arcane Headshots and The Manager in Teddy Ruxpin.

Link to website



ACTOR: Hajaz Akram
CHARACTER: Imran Sharma

Hajaz Akram is a Pakistani-British actor and voice-over artist. Trained at the prestigious Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London, he has built a diverse career spanning film,television and theatre. Hajaz has appeared in a range of film and television productions including Doctor Who, Murder in Mind, Casualty, Hotel Cocaine, Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life, A Winters Lion and Never Had A Chance. His screen work has demonstrated his versatility across a wide range of characters and genres.



WRITER/ DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Theresa Godly

‘Open Return’ is Theresa’s third short film as producer. Her first short ‘The Stranger I Love’ which she wrote, co-directed, produced and starred in, won many awards on 2024 festival circuit and her second short ‘Fire Lily’ has just entered 2026 festival circuit and already won two awards at Oscar qualifying ‘Urbanworld’ in NYC and Newport Beach Film Festival, it was also selected for the Oscar qualifying San Jose IFF.
Theresa is drawn to powerful drama films based on lived experience and which shine a light on important social issues

Link to website



PRODUCER
Arnaldo Stafa at Aki Studio London

Arnaldo Stafa is a filmmaker and founder of Aki Studio London, dedicated to creating emotionally driven stories that blend entertainment with meaning. His work spans short films, music videos, and documentary projects, with a focus on human resilience, identity, and self-empowerment.
He has multiple projects in development, including short and feature narratives plus documentary productions, Arnaldo is building a slate designed for both festival recognition and commercial impact. His approach combines creative storytelling with a clear understanding of audience engagement and market positioning.

Link to website



DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Beatriz Delgado Mena

Beatriz Delgado Mena is an award-winning cinematographer based between London and Madrid. Drawn to the emotion carried within a single image, Beatriz brings a painter's eye and a storyteller's instinct to everything she shoots. Her narrative work includes the BAFTA-winning BBC short film, Quiet Life, BFI-funded films House Party, Cuppa Chai and Octopus, and a string of award-winning shorts. On the commercial side, she has shot for UEFA, Chelsea FC, United Nations, Nike, Google, Samsung and Adidas, among others.
Bea is currently off the back of a string of feature films shot between Portugal and Spain.

Link to website



EDITOR
Bec Jagger

Bec is a London based Editor. She has edited a range of different projects such as films, music videos, documentaries & promos for commercial clients and independent productions.
She has been responsible for editing a number of award winning short films like Fire Lily, Decode Me, Zemi, Scrap of Paper Annie Shared Her Location, The Test, and Make Me Murder as well as commercial work and music videos. Currently two of her short films; Decode me and Firelily have become Academy Award qualified.

Link to website

DIRECTOR'S VISION

Open Return is a deeply personal film about family estrangement, the stories we inherit, and what happens when the truth arrives too late. Estrangement affects millions of people across the world, yet these experiences are often lived privately, behind closed doors. I want to explore the subject through an intimate human story rather than a social-issue drama — allowing the audience to experience Ayaan's confusion, grief and uncertainty alongside him. Ayaan has spent twenty years believing his father abandoned him. When he finally returns to England, he discovers that the truth is far more complicated than he could have imagined. His journey is not about reconciliation. It is about lost time, memory, forgiveness and the devastating consequences of decisions made long ago. I am personally drawn to quiet, observational filmmaking where emotion is found in what remains unsaid. I want the English landscape, the intimacy of a village community and the stillness of a hospice room to create a world that feels truthful and lived-in. Ultimately, I want Open Return to leave audiences with something deeply personal, not only sadness for Ayaan, but a question about their own lives. I hope that when the credits roll, someone thinks of the person they have lost touch with — and perhaps reaches out to them.

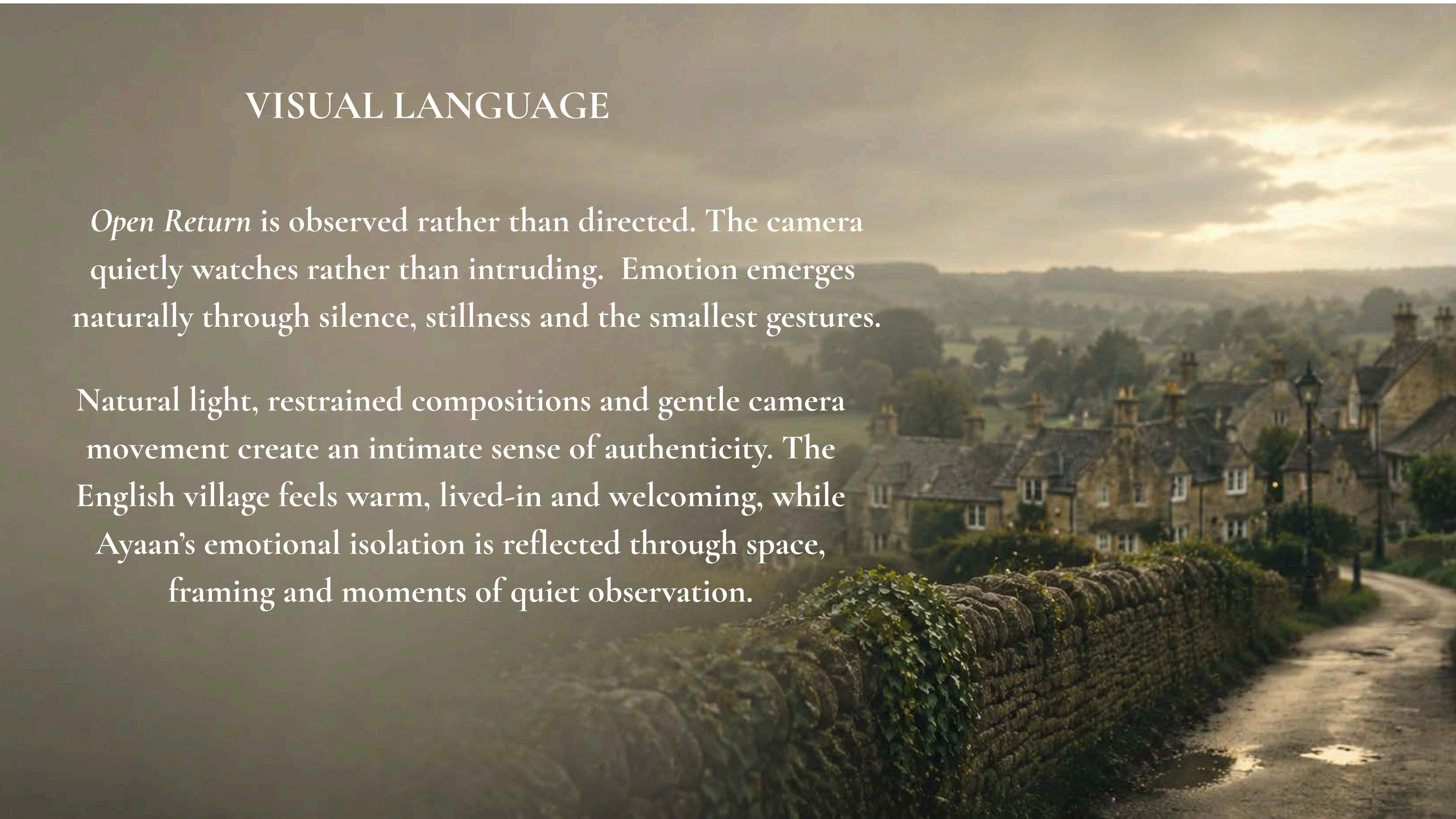
DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I wanted to tell a story about the invisible consequences of family estrangement and parental alienation and how the stories we grow up believing can shape the relationships we carry into adulthood. I have been estranged from my eighteen-year-old son since 2019 due to parental alienation, and this is the film I hope he watches one day. At its heart, OPEN RETURN is about lost time, fractured relationships and the fragile possibility of connection. It explores what happens when life gives us an opportunity to confront the past, but the person we need to reach may no longer be able to meet us there. What interests me most is the complexity of human relationships. We rarely know the whole story, and the truths we hold onto are not always the truths that exist. Sometimes the greatest tragedy is not what happened between people, but the years spent believing a false narrative. I want this film to resonate beyond its central father-and-son relationship. Familial estrangement and parental alienation affect millions of people, often leaving emotional wounds that remain hidden for decades and creating a devastating mental health crisis among young people and their parents.

VISUAL LANGUAGE

Open Return is observed rather than directed. The camera quietly watches rather than intruding. Emotion emerges naturally through silence, stillness and the smallest gestures.

Natural light, restrained compositions and gentle camera movement create an intimate sense of authenticity. The English village feels warm, lived-in and welcoming, while Ayaan's emotional isolation is reflected through space, framing and moments of quiet observation.




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WATCH THE PITCH VIDEO

The palette begins with muted blues, greys and soft greens before gradually introducing warmer earth tones as Ayaan reconnects with the father he never truly knew.



WHY THIS STORY MATTERS

Family estrangement affects millions of people across the world. Relationships between parents and children can be fractured for many reasons, but sometimes they are shaped by misunderstanding, manipulation or years of silence. The emotional cost can last a lifetime.

Open Return explores what happens when the truth arrives too late. Through one man's journey, the film asks whether forgiveness can still be found after decades of lost time, and reminds us that every family has a story we cannot see.

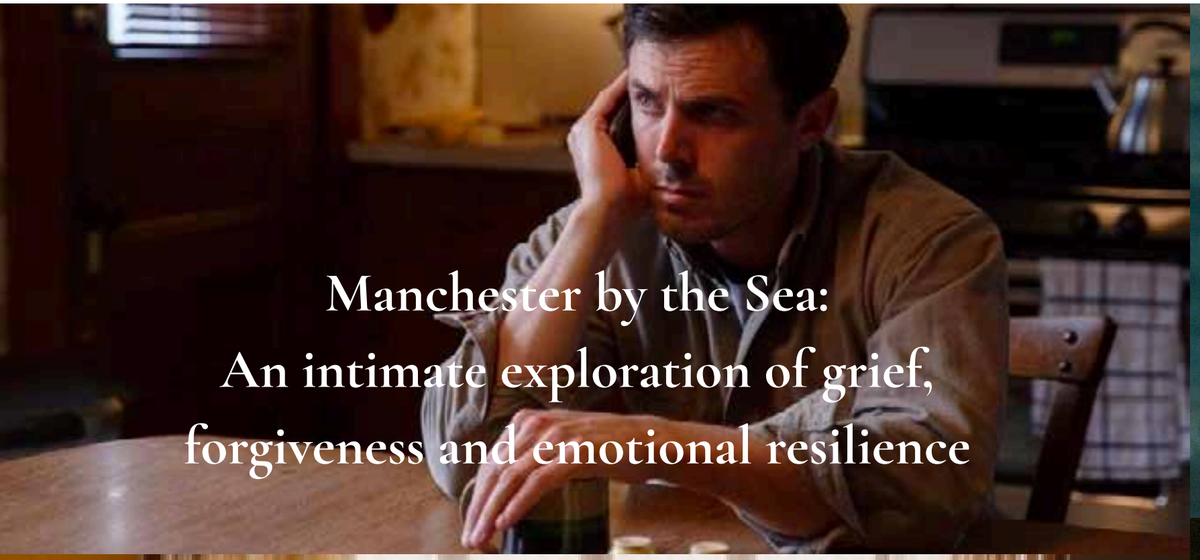


AUDIENCE

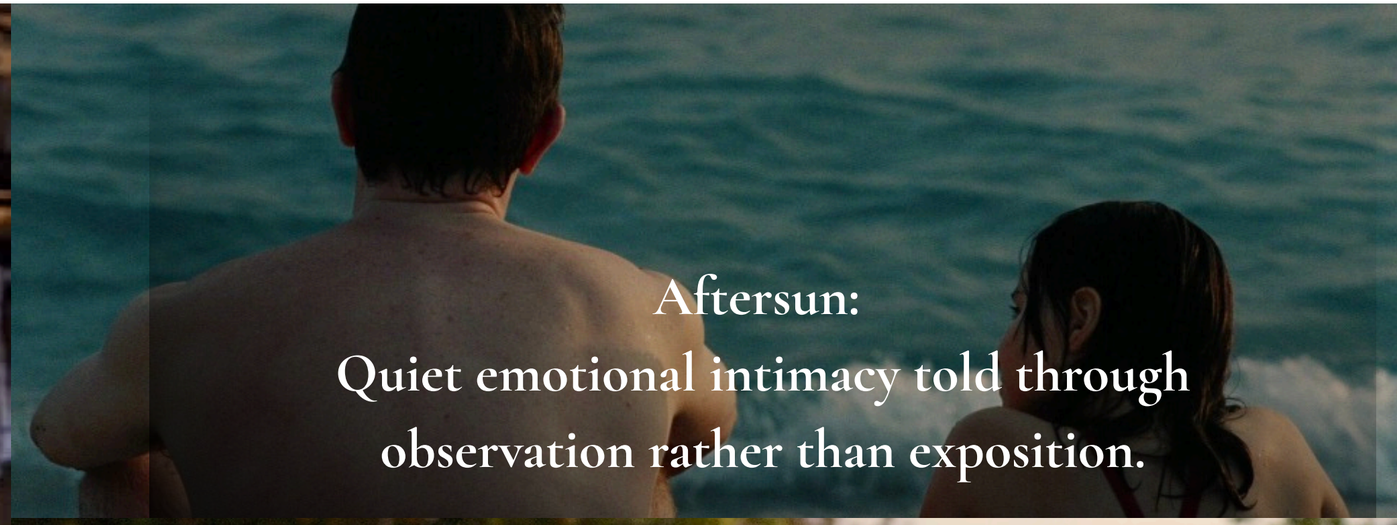
Open Return is for audiences drawn to emotionally honest, character-led stories that explore family, identity and second chances. While rooted in the experience of one British South Asian family, its themes are universal. Anyone who has experienced estrangement, grief or the longing to reconnect will recognise themselves in Ayaan's journey.

The film is intended for international film festivals and audiences seeking intimate, authentic stories which stay with you long after you have finished watching and encourage meaningful conversations about family estrangement and the possibility of healing before it's too late.

TONAL INFLUENCES



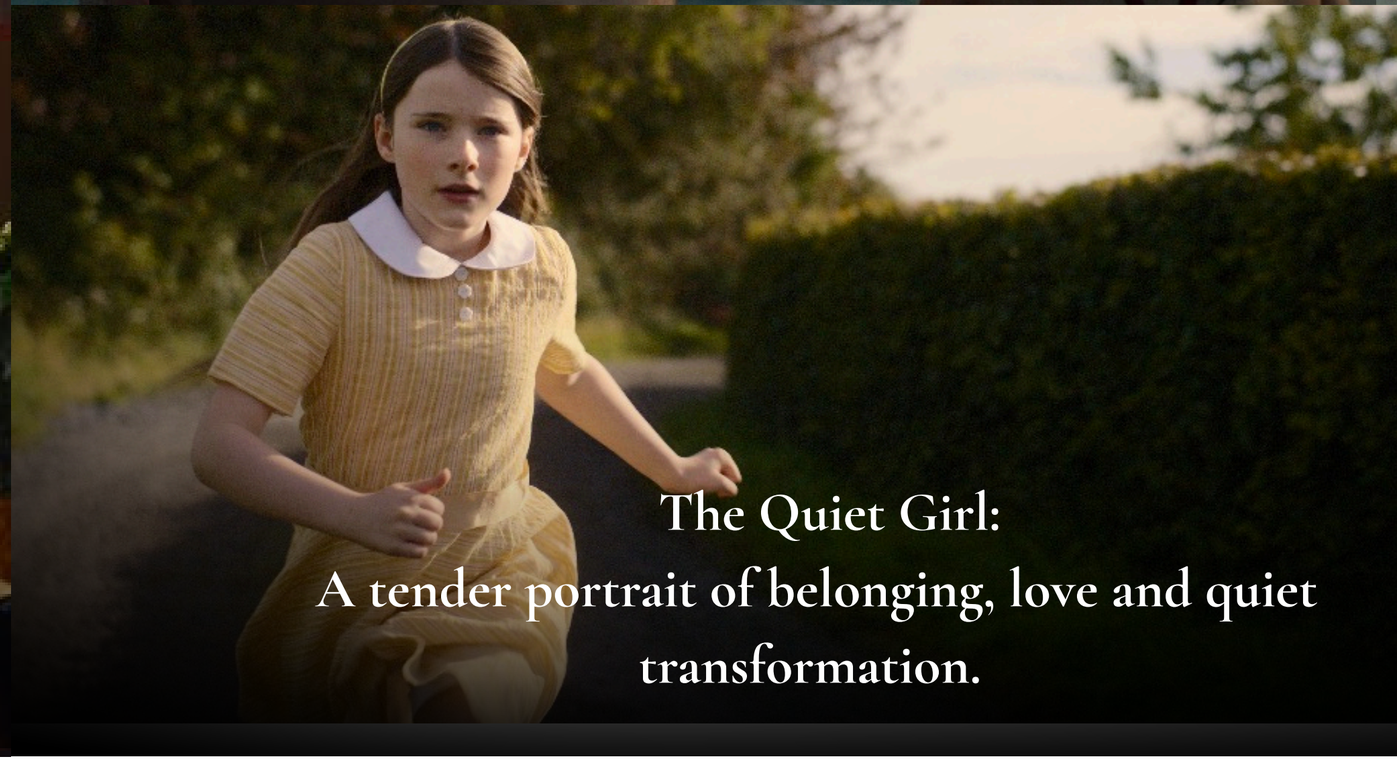
Manchester by the Sea:
An intimate exploration of grief, forgiveness and emotional resilience



Aftersun:
Quiet emotional intimacy told through observation rather than exposition.



All of Us Strangers:
A deeply personal exploration of unresolved family relationships.



The Quiet Girl:
A tender portrait of belonging, love and quiet transformation.

The truth has the power to change a lifetime....



Written by Theresa Godly
Contact: terigodlywriter@gmail.com