



A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY
KATEŘINA HAGER & ASAD FARUQI

A MARRIAGE

LOVE IN THE TIME
OF INTERNET

www.amarriagefilm.com



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Synopsis

Wheelchair-bound Zdenka from the Czech Republic and Tabish from Pakistan met online playing FarmVille on Facebook. But instead of a crop of virtual tomatoes, a real friendship grew, soon blossoming into a romance – and then a marriage.

Five years into their official marriage, Czech authorities serially reject Tabish’s application for a visa to enter the Czech Republic, convinced they’re protecting Zdenka from a “feigned marriage” with a younger calculating Pakistani and the Czech Republic from an economic migrant.

After years of trying to prove their “real love” to the authorities and a relationship eked out online, a breakthrough in their case gives Tabish and Zdenka new hope that their dream of living together could soon become reality.



Quotes

“A Marriage is a story about an unusual relationship born on the internet and facing a wall of prejudice. The unique protagonists Zdenka and Tabish enrich the dramatic account with spontaneity and even some laugh-out-loud moments.”



KATEŘINA HAGER,
DIRECTOR / PRODUCER

“Love in the time of FarmVille, marital etudes of the digital age, the virtual highway from Asch to Karachi...The love story of the Czech Zdenka and the Pakistani Tabish is a fascinating tale of love that breaks through borders, religious systems, age differences, and handicaps. It is an entertaining but also very deep documentary about the essence of human closeness.”



JAN JÍLEK,
PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF CZECH FILM CLUBS

“Zdenka and Tabish’s story is that of love and perseverance and it comes at a very important time in human history. As borders grow thicker, the expanding reach of internet has connected us in ways never seen before. That is exactly what has shaped the thesis for this unique love story.”



ASAD FARUQI,
CO-DIRECTOR / DOP



Kateřina Hager

Director & Producer (Czech)



Kateřina Hager is a documentary filmmaker and producer based in Prague, Czech Republic.

She graduated with a masters degree in Cultural Anthropology from Charles University in Prague and received her formal film training at Prague Film School. In 2012, Katerina founded Bohemian Productions, a production company focusing mainly on independent documentary films.

Her work includes the documentary CHILDREN ONLINE (2017, 52 min), the feature documentary CHILDREN OF FLAMENCO (2013, 66 min) and several short films. Her work has been screened on different TV channels and presented at many international festivals including CPH: DOX in Denmark, Busan Film Festival in South Korea, and The International Art Film Festival in Montreal, to name just a few.

Asad Faruqi

Co-director / DOP (Pakistani)



Asad Faruqi is an Emmy awarded filmmaker, cinematographer and photographer. Over the years he has worked extensively as DOP in fiction/non-fiction film and commercials and has shot a number of award-winning films that include

2016's Academy Award winner "A Girl In the River: The Price of Forgiveness" and 2011's Academy and Emmy Award winner, "Saving Face." Some other notable works include Emmy and Alfred I Dupont Award winning, "Pakistan's Taliban Generation," "Song of Lahore," "Peacekeepers: A Journey of a Thousand Miles," to name a few. His feature documentary "Armed With Faith", co-directed with Geeta Gandbhir, was awarded an Emmy in 2019. Asad's work has featured on HBO, The New York Times, PBS, Channel 4, TIME, The Atlantic, CBC, SBS, Arte among others.

Šárka Sklenářová

Editor (Czech)



Šárka is one of the most sought-after Czech editors. After completing her studies at FAMU (Prague's Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts) and Saint Denis in Paris, she started her career as an assistant editor on films by Roman

Polanski (Oliver Twist), Terry Gilliam (Brothers Grimm) and Andrzej Bartkowiak (Doom) and since then has worked on mainly documentaries. She cooperates with several well-known Czech and international directors and edits only those projects that have a social purpose.

Jakub Šimůnek

DOP (Czech)



Jakub Šimůnek graduated from FAMU - Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Since then he has been working as a camera operator on many documentaries (Children Online, 2017, dir. K.Hager; Forgotten Transports, 2009, dir. L.Příbyl, Czech Lion Award), short and feature films (Václav, 2008, dir. J.Vejdělek) awarded in the Czech Republic and abroad.



Director's Statement

After finishing my previous film CHILDREN ONLINE (2017), I was often asked by festival audiences whether my next film would also explore how the digital world is changing our lives, since there is a real lack of films on this important topic. I confess at that time I was looking for a new story to tell. But in the spring 2017, the story found me.

I was at that time in discussions with Iva Pekárková, a well-known Czech author, on a different topic when she told me about the true story of disabled Czech Zdenka and her Pakistani husband Tabish who met online, fell in love, got married in Sri Lanka, but years later were still not permitted to live together and forced to maintain their marriage online via Skype and Whatsapp.

I was intrigued and investigated the story further. But I didn't feel ready to start making the film until I met the Pakistani filmmaker Asad Faruqi at the Sheffield Doc Fest. Asad immediately saw the potential of this story for a documentary and was open to collaborating with

me as cinematographer and co-director in Pakistan. This meant that we could begin our cooperation on the film knowing that we could rely on our local expertise and experience in order to obtain authentic footage in both Czech Republic and Pakistan where our protagonists were based.

We both became very close to the main protagonists during research shooting, learned about their love and struggle and became committed to telling their story. Our film is about one couple's struggle against social prejudices and institutional discrimination in the context of growing xenophobia in Europe, but also about a fascinating relationship in the time of social media. Thanks to the unique personalities and openness of our protagonists, the documentary is also full of touching and humorous moments. We strongly hope the film will inspire viewers and challenge them to question their own prejudices.

Kateřina Hager, director/producer

Co-director's Note

Most of my work has focused on themes ranging from war and conflict to violence against women in deeply patriarchal societies such as Pakistan. For me, the universal human condition has always been the motivation to tell a story.

A Marriage is a film that starts conversations on many important issues. As a recent immigrant to the United States myself, I can connect with our film's protagonist, Tabish who in the course of the film immigrates to a new country to start a new life.

Tabish's immigration comes at a time when xenophobia and hyper-nationalism have polarized the world.

For me this is a film about Zdenka, our film's protagonist. Her struggle to bring Tabish to the Czech Republic is incredibly inspirational and resolute. Challenging the law of her land for love, and her perseverance and determination throughout the film make her emerge as a true hero and a champion for the many women who

will watch this film.

"A Marriage" is a story that I am very excited to share with the world. It is a simple story of two people and has so many moments that will touch a global audience.

Asad Faruqi, co-director / DOP



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We Don't Run Away from Problems Just to Make Our Lives Easier

Interview with Zdenka and Tabish, the protagonists of the film *A Marriage*

You had to overcome an almost endless number of obstacles together. Which of them was the most difficult?

Zdenka:

The hardest thing for us was probably when we were forced to wake up from our naïveté. At first, we were on cloud nine; we made fun of all of the misunderstandings that arose because I didn't know a word of English and translated everything using Google. It was sort of an online love affair. No one expected that it could go further.

Our naïve expectations ended around the time Tabish's visa was denied for the second time.

We discovered Sri Lanka. Spending five weeks a year in Sri Lanka sounds marvellous, but the long trip was hell for me. Then of course it was awesome. But after that followed our parting. That was the worst because we had no clue when we would see each other again. As time passed, the waiting didn't last months but years. I became depressed, thinking that things would never work out, that he would never come to the Czech Republic, and that we would end up holidaying in Sri Lanka to the end of our lives.

Those were the moments marking our gradual return to reality. We won our court case and there was hope that Tabish would be granted a visa, but it was denied again. I had the feeling that this was something we would never overcome. And on top of that, there were the accusations made by officials: “It’s a sham marriage. You took money from him and he wants to get to Europe. Why don’t you move to Pakistan and live there?”

Tabish:

We didn’t have to overcome any problems in our relationship. Our problem had to do with my visa, and, because of that, we couldn’t be together.

And what about Zdenka’ disability?

Tabish:

No. I never felt that was a problem. Where I come from – and I think that’s even mentioned in the film – once you marry someone, even though your life partner may be blind, deaf, or have some other disability, you stay together. We don’t run away from problems just to make our lives easier. Marriage is

truly a bond, once and for all.

The bureaucratic process, that was our problem.

You allowed a documentary telling your story to be made. What was your motivation?

Tabish:

For a long time, we did everything possible so that we could be together, but because of the problem with my visa, we only saw each other once a year in Sri Lanka. We tried absolutely everything to make the authorities pay attention to our situation. But every time I applied for a visa it was denied. So I said to myself that it couldn’t hurt if the media and the general public learned of our story. Maybe they would start treating us like ordinary people and we wouldn’t be so alone.



Technical information

Title — A Marriage

Director, producer — Kateřina Hager

Photographer — Jana Plavec

Country of origin — Czech Republic, USA

Co-director, DOP — Asad Faruqi

Executive producers — Kateřina Hager, Jiří Vlach

Production company — Bohemian Productions

DOP — Jakub Šimůnek, Aleš Hart

Creative Producer — Czech TV: Alena Müllerová

Coproducers — Czech Television, Circus Lion Pictures

Editor — Šárka Sklenářová

Screening format — DCP, MP4, HDCAM

With the support of — Creative Europe MEDIA, Czech Film Fund

Sound — Ivan Horák

Aspect ratio — 1.85:1

Festivals and awards — Czech TV Co-production Award from the East Doc Platform 2019

Music — David Ossa, Alan Grezl, Tariq Hager, Matt Prior (dna-musik)

Audio format — 5.1

Lenght — 74 min / 52 min

Language — English, Czech, Urdu

Subtitles — English

Bohemian Productions

 Česká televize

CIRCUS LION PICTURES

 statní
fond
kinematografie

 Spolufinancováno
z programu Evropské unie
Kreativní Evropa MEDIA

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