

A dissatisfying portrait of life in the shadow of the Syrian war



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El-Gouna: Syrian filmmaker Soudade Kaadan's fiction debut, "The Day I Lost My Shadow," explores the horrors of the internecine strife in her country, filtered through a simple story of a mother's desire to give her son a hot meal.

Partly folklore and partly magic realism, based on the idea that those who lose their shadows lose their souls, the director weaves a disturbing narrative of disruption, disappointment and distress. She was rewarded with the Lion of the Future award for best debut feature at the Venice Film Festival this month.

Guiding us through some of the most tension-ridden situations imaginable, as the mother walks through forests, dodges sniper fire and hides from trigger-happy rebels fighting government forces, Kaadan conveys most profoundly how such bloody wars can rob people of their souls, if not their lives.

The first 15 minutes give a fair idea of what to expect. Sana (Sawsan Erchied), a pharmacist, rushes home from work, encountering hostile security agents and a funeral along the way, in a race against time to beat water rationing. She has to finish her laundry before the water runs out, and make a meal for her son, Khalil (Ahmad Morhaf Al-Ali). Unfortunately, not only is the power cut off, but the cooking gas runs out. Sana's trials and tribulations begin to multiply after she leaves the relative safety of her home in search of a gas canister.

While the film is effective at portraying the angst of a mother concerned about the son she has left alone at home

and her desperation to get back to him, it is not visually compelling enough to draw us into the sheer magnitude

of the tragedy. In addition, two supporting characters,

Jalal (Samer Ismael) and Reem (Reham Al-Kassar), who choose to go with Sana, are sketchily written.

Overall, there is a sense of dissatisfaction over this depiction of a scenario as grave as what Kaadan sets out to present.
