



There was no one moment when Jon Stewart knew it was time for him to leave what he describes as “the most perfect job in the world”; no epiphany, no flashpoint. “Life,” he says, in the lightly self-mocking tone he uses when talking about himself, “doesn’t really work that way, with a finger pointing at you out of the sky, saying, ‘Leave now!’ That only happens when you’re fired, and trust me, I know about that.” Instead, he describes his decision to quit The Daily Show, the American satirical news programme he has hosted for 16 years, as something closer to the end of a long-term relationship. “It’s not like I thought the show wasn’t working any more, or that I didn’t know how to do it. It was more, ‘Yup, it’s working. But I’m not getting the same satisfaction.’” He slaps his hands on his desk, conclusively. “These things are cyclical. You have moments of dissatisfaction, and then you come out of it and it’s OK. But the cycles become longer and maybe more entrenched, and that’s when you realise, ‘OK, I’m on the back side of it now.’”

Stewart and I speak twice in the space of a few months. The first time last October, when he flew from New York to London with his family for the premiere of his directorial debut at the London Film Festival. Rosewater is an engrossing and pacy film

that tells the true story of Iranian-born journalist Maziar Bahari, who was arrested and tortured in Iran in 2009, after sending footage of street riots to the BBC.

The second time, we speak soon after Stewart announces his retirement from The Daily Show. He is in his office in New York, preparing to shoot a Friday-night episode, and the difference in his mood is striking. His voice is about an octave lower, and he sounds weary, weighed down.

But talking about his film in London, he is animated to the point of hyperactivity, gleefully pointing out the pretentious decor in the hotel room where we meet (“A photo of a submissive woman with a cigar in her mouth! Just what every room needs!”). He notes, in a tone that is both sincere and satirical, and that will be familiar to fans of The Daily Show, the lavishness of the food: “My compliments to the prop master,



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because that really is a beautiful tomato and mozzarella salad,” he intones solemnly to a bemused waiter.

Like every TV celebrity, in person, Stewart is both better-looking than you expect and smaller, with his long torso making up most of his 5ft 7in, giving the illusion of height from behind his studio desk. He is dressed casually, and after years of watching him on TV wearing a suit, seeing him in a T-shirt and casual trousers feels almost like catching my father half-undressed.

At 52, Stewart has the bouncy energy of a man half his age and, unlike most in the public eye, has an aversion to compliments. If I tell him I liked something about the film, he will immediately deflect the compliment and insist it was all

[to read the full story please click here](#)

