



WHEN FALL IS COMING

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A FILM BY FRANÇOIS OZON

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LOGLINE

Loving grandmother Michelle is enjoying a peaceful retirement in Burgundy. When her antagonistic daughter and young grandson come to visit, family ties are tested in this twisty and destabilizing thriller from master stylist François Ozon.

SYNOPSIS

After a tumultuous life in Paris, Michelle (Hélène Vincent) has retired to a quiet existence in Burgundy, tending her garden and attending services at her parish. The voracious hostility of her adult daughter Valérie (Ludivine Sagnier) remains Michelle's great puzzlement: how can a child for whom she sacrificed so much treat her with such contempt and suspicion? When Valérie drops off her son for a week with his grandmother, Michelle sees an opportunity to repair the relationship, but a culinary accident soon undercuts whatever trust remains. With the help of her best friend Marie-Claude (Josiane Balasko), whose son (Pierre Lottin) has recently been released from prison, Michelle plots a path towards restoring the family life so long denied her. With a deceptively placid surface, master stylist François Ozon cooks up a twisty and destabilizing thriller where family ties remain the most mysterious ingredient of all.



INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS OZON

When Fall is Coming sees your return to a more intimate film.

After *The Crime is Mine*, a screwball comedy playing with irony and artifice, I wanted to write an original screenplay for a stripped-down film more anchored in reality. Both films explore guilt and murder, but this one has a very different tone, in the vein of Albert Simenon, an author I've always loved. I aimed for a simple, gentle approach in the directing, laced with tension and suspense stemming from the complex moral dilemmas the characters are facing in that grey area between right and wrong. But above all, my aim was to film actresses of a certain age, to show the beauty in their wrinkles, which reflect their life experiences and the passage of time.

I'm appalled at how rapidly older people are disappearing from view in society and on screens. I countered this by filming actresses in their seventies and eighties who wear their age proudly and accept it without artifice. I was often reminded of when I was about to shoot *Under the Sand* with Charlotte Rampling - only 50 at the time - and everyone was already telling me: "She's too old, no one will be interested!"

Where did you get the initial idea for the film?

From my personal history. When I was a child, one of my aunts organized a family meal where she cooked mushrooms she'd picked herself. That night everyone was very ill except for her, because she hadn't eaten any. I was fascinated by this incident and suspected my aunt - so kind and caring - of having wanted to poison the entire family (which I must admit was kind of my own deepest desire at the time!)

When I saw Sacha Guitry's *Confessions of a Cheat* much later, I was obviously reminded of my aunt. When we cook wild mushrooms, are we not, more or less subconsciously, trying to get rid of someone? Starting with that question, I created a character who seems to be the epitome of a doting grandmother, but who might actually be a bit more sinister than outside appearances would suggest.

When Fall is Coming explores the black hole of our subconscious desires.

I wanted to combine the challenges of aging with a thriller component. Many things are left unsaid, or intentionally left to the audience's imagination, so they can create their own story and interpret the characters' behaviors in their own ways. Particularly when it comes to Michelle and Marie-Claude's son Vincent, fresh out of prison, and of whom we only know that "he got into some trouble when he was younger." Sometimes life inadvertently grants you your deepest, darkest wish. We tend to sanctify and idealize older people, forgetting that they've lived complex lives. They were young once, they are sexual beings, they have subconscious thoughts and desires. I wanted to make palpable the ambiguity in Michelle's need to see her grandson again. There is nothing totally clear or willful about her actions; they're influenced by circumstance, happenstance, immanence. I want the film to make us wonder what our own behavior and reactions would be if someone close to us were suspected of committing an act we disapprove of, but for which we have no proof. Doubt sets in. How far would we go to protect them? These questions feel particularly relevant today, in light of the current political and social unrest.

You play with ambiguity, but emphasize Michelle's vital energy more than the weight of her guilt, as evidenced by the way you film her going about her daily life.

It was important to me to open the film on the daily routines of this 80-year-old woman living in her beautiful house in the countryside. She tends her vegetable patch, goes to church, drives her friend around, eats alone... Her life here is very different than the one she led in Paris. Her days are filled with silences. And on many occasions, things that could have been said go unsaid. Michelle is guarded, in a way. She creates her own truth, without being manipulative. It's her survival mechanism.

At the heart of When Fall is Coming is also Michelle and Marie-Claude's friendship, which helps set the pace of the film.

This idea of friendship and sorority was present in *The Crime is Mine* as well, with the two young friends helping each other out. But here we have two far older women who shared a profession and a past. I wanted to capture the pleasure they take sharing simple moments. Michelle and Marie-Claude are like sisters, one of whom has clearly suffered more than the other. Marie-Claude does not have Michelle's strength, nor her lack of guilt. She doesn't know how to cope with reality. It's like a punch in the gut. Her body keeps the score, and she falls ill because of it. She feels responsible for her son's struggles. Racked with guilt, she wonders where she went wrong as a mother, while Michelle has an easier time, saying, "We did the best we could!"

What made you choose H el ene Vincent and Josiane Balasko to play these two friends?

We'd worked together on *By the Grace of God*, in which they were also playing mothers. These were smaller roles, but important ones. I really enjoyed working with each of them and wanted to continue. H el ene Vincent hasn't had many lead roles in the cinema. She's a great actress, capable of expressing toughness alongside real tenderness. She has an everyday beauty that is fascinating to study. She got completely into her character. Coincidentally, she lives in Burgundy, not far from where we shot the film.

Josiane Balasko embodies Marie-Claude's guilt and more modest means in her every movement. Her body and face convey a strong humanity. Pierre Lottin, who plays Vincent, also had a small role in *By the Grace of God*. He is both handsome and scary and brings ambiguity, a hint of duplicity. He was perfect in the role of this charming and dangerous man, a tormented soul whom we sense could spin out again at any time.

And working with Ludivine Sagnier and Malik Zidi again?

I last worked with Ludivine on *Swimming Pool* over twenty years ago. It was moving and a great pleasure to be reunited, and to film her in the role of a fragile and aggressive 40-year-old woman burdened by pain. As for Malik Zidi, his very presence and physicality instantly brings to life the supporting role of her estranged husband. He'd acted opposite Ludivine in *Water Drops on Burning Rocks*. Only a few film buffs and I are aware of this link between them, but it helps flesh out the characters' bond.

And Sophie Guillemin is perfect in the role of the police captain. She has a beauty, a light, a softness, a way of looking at others with intensity. I felt the captain had to be a woman. An understanding woman who makes the choice to lower the curtain on the case, suggesting that this broken but still functioning family may remind her of her own life and recent pregnancy as a single mother.

At the heart of the film is also the strong bond between Michelle and her grandson Lucas.

I wanted to capture the contrast between youth and old age, film the grandson and grandmother's hands entwined, the attachment between grandparents and grandchildren. Michelle lived a very agitated life, but now she's retired and wants to enjoy nature, her good friend and her grandson. There is serenity, well-being, a reassuring daily routine, a chosen solitude... until the moment when she is no longer allowed to see her grandson. Suddenly, everything feels heavy. She can no longer get up in the morning, sleeps all day, falls into a depression. Michelle is loving and giving, but her daughter has not been receptive, so Michelle relieves her frustrated need to give, and to give back, with her grandson. Things are often easier when you skip a generation. In the end, Michelle gives her grandson the keys to the house that her daughter - worried about money and resentful of her mother's past - had tried to take from her coercively. Where the daughter demanded, the grandson receives.

Michelle's past accentuates the weight of this inheritance, and the difficulty of passing it on.

It isn't some deus ex machina to explain everything. A daughter can have mommy issues regardless of her mother's profession. But it does shed light on the tension between this particular mother and daughter. Michelle and Marie-Claude's past is a pebble in their children's shoes. Doing some research, I found that in general there are two types of reactions. Either the child defends the mother, seeing her as a victim who needs help now, to get healthcare, retirement, etc. Or the child rejects the mother, disgusted and shocked by what she did. In a nutshell, Vincent and Valérie's behaviors illustrate these two opposing reactions, although there is of course more to it.

Why did you want to depict Valérie's ghost?

I've always loved bringing ghosts to the screen, ever since Bruno Cremer played one in *Under the Sand*. We live with our ghosts, especially as we get older. And since the film is told from Michelle's point of view, it seemed important to physically manifest her fears of becoming senile, and the guilt that is troubling her, through the ghostly presence of her daughter. I wanted to create a spooky strangeness and a sort of psychological tension. What will this ghost prompt Michelle to say or do? Ultimately the ghost helps her, serving almost as a form of therapy. Valérie lives on in Michelle, but perhaps in a kinder version. Michelle can talk to the ghost more easily than she could with her daughter when she was alive. The ghost is part of Michelle's survival and recovery, even allowing her to admit that she's relieved Valérie is gone. It makes space for a kind of reconciliation between mother and daughter.

And the choice of Sacha and Evgueni Galperine to compose the score?

We'd worked together on *By the Grace of God* and I was very happy with the result. Before the shoot, I gave them the script to read, asking for subtle atmospheric music that would create subterranean, subliminal tension. Before seeing any images they wrote a beautiful melody, onto which they added the sound of falling leaves. It guided us in the editing and the creation of other musical passages.

For the scene in Vincent's bar, the François Valéry song *Aimons-Nous Vivants* (Let's Love While We're Alive) seemed emblematic of the film's spirit, which, beyond the circumstances, is above all about Michelle's friendships, her resilience, and her capacity to survive.

Nature is a major player in the film.

It was important to me to set this intimate story in Burgundy, a region I love, and where I spent my vacations as a child. We shot in Donzy, near Cosne-sur-Loire, an area not often filmed. After some urban films, it was nice to film that calm countryside and revisit part of my childhood. The film explores the autumn years of life, but also the autumnal beauty of those landscapes. Nature and the rhythm of the seasons are found in the colors, the light, the sound, the water running through the canals... The film begins and ends in the forest in autumn. Metaphorically, Michelle blends into nature, surrounded by ferns, and goes back to the earth like a mushroom. It's the life cycle.



CAST

Michelle	Hélène Vincent
Marie-Claude	Josiane Balasko
Valérie	Ludivine Sagnier
Vincent	Pierre Lottin
Lucas	Garlan Erlos
Police Captain	Sophie Guillemin
Laurent	Malik Zidi
Lucas at 18	Paul Beaurepaire
Priest	Sidiki Bakaba
Pole Sergeant	Pierre Le Coz
Bernard	Michel Masiero
Michelle's Doctor	Vincent Colombe
Hospital Doctor	Marie-Laurence Tarta

CREW

Directed by	François Ozon
Screenplay by	François Ozon
With the collaboration of	Philippe Piazzo
Director of photography	Jérôme Alméras
Production Designer	Christelle Maisonneuve
Costume Designer	Pascaline Chavanne
Sound	Brigitte Taillandier
	Julien Roeg
	Jean-Paul Hurier
First Assistant Director	Marion Dehaene
Script Supervisor	Agathe Grau
Casting	Anais Duran
Editor	Anita Roth
Sound Editor	Julien Roig
Sound Mixer	Jean-Paul Hurier
Music	Evgueni & Sacha Galperine
Hair	Franck-Pascal Alquinnet
Makeup	Jean-Christophe Roger
Stills Photography	Jean-Claude Moireau
Production Manager	Aude Cathelin



ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is the prestigious North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary feature films. Recent releases include *Mountains*, the debut feature from Monica Sorelle, who took home the Independent Spirit Awards “Someone to Watch” Award, and *In the Summers*, Alessandra Lacorazza’s heartfelt and subtly powerful coming-of-age directorial debut that won the two top prizes in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance. Upcoming releases include the Cannes Directors’ Fortnight baseball comedy *Eephus* by Carson Lund, and *Ghost Trail*, Jonathan Millet’s tense and haunting revenge thriller that premiered at Cannes Film Festival.

Since its formation in 2007, Music Box Films has distributed award-winning films and art-house favorites that include Academy Award winner *Ida*, *Meru* (from Oscar-winning filmmakers Jimmy Chin and E. Chai Vaserhelyi), Christian Petzold’s *Transit*, the popular Swedish comedy *A Man Called Ove*, and the original *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago’s premier venue for independent and foreign films.

For more information, visit www.musicboxfilms.com.

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