

Marie lives alone with her 16-year-old son. She fights to keep going, to get him out of the shady deals that he is caught up in. Worn down and frustrated in her life as a woman, Marie is trapped between her ex who is still in love with her and her impossible teenage son. Communication between them is more and more difficult and love finds it harder and harder to express itself. Violence and rejection rule their lives. He is a bad son, she will be a bad mother. Anyone would think there's no love between them...



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MATHILDE SEIGNER
KACEY MOTTET-KLEIN
PIERFRANCESCO FAVINO

A MOTHER

A FILM BY **CHRISTINE CARRIÈRE**



Photo © David Koskass

CHRISTINE CARRIÈRE

2007 - **Darling** with Marina Foïs and Guillaume Canet
Nomination Cesar Award for Best Actress and Best Adaptation / Nomination International Press Lumières Prize for Best adaptation / Nomination Jacques Prévert Prize for Best Adaptation / Golden Hublot for Best Adaptation / Nomination young audience Prize for Best Adaptation at the Festival du Croisic

1999 - **Who Plucks the Moon?**
With Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Garance Clavel
Best Film Prize, Best Screenplay Prize, Best Actor Prize, SCAD Prize Festival de Namur / Selection in Quinzaine des Réalisateurs Cannes 1999 / AFCAE Prize / Jean-Pierre Darroussin: Best Actor Prize Thessaloniki International Film Festival

1994 - **Rosine** with Mathilde Seigner, Eloïse Charretier
Cyril Colard Prize / Gan Foundation, Gervais Prize / Nomination First Film Cesar Award / Bronze Leopard, Press Prize and Public Prize in Locarno / Mathilde Seigner: Michel Simon Prize

CAST

Marie **MATHILDE SEIGNER** • Guillaume **KACEY MOTTET-KLEIN**
Pierre **PIERFRANCESCO FAVINO** • Suzanne **SALOMÉ DEWAELS**
Lorianne **FIONA HERNOUT** • Grandmother **JENNY CLEVE** • Martine
CATHERINE SALEE • Baker girl **ELOÏSE CHARRETIER** • Young blonde
woman **CHARLOTTE TALPAERT** • Police captain **SIMON FERRANTE**



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FRANCE / 2015 / 2.35 / 2K / 5.1 / 1H40

CREW

Screenplay **CHRISTINE CARRIÈRE** • DOP **JEANNE LAPOIRIE (AFC)**
Editing **MARTINE BARRAQUÉ-CURIE** • Sound **PHILIPPE FABBRI**,
CHRISTOPHE WINDING, **ELISABETH PAQUOTTE**, **CHRISTOPHE**
VINGTRINIER • Original score **ERIC NEVEUX** • Settings **JULIA**
LEMAIRE • Costumes **JACQUELINE BOUCHARD** • Casting **LAURE**
COCHENER • Director's assistants **PHILIPPE BUCHOT**, **MARIANNE**
FRICHEAU • Hair & make up **AGNES LAGUERRE** • Script
MARIANNE FRICHEAU • Location manager **AUGUSTIN WERKOFF**
Production manager **MARIE-FRÉDÉRIQUE LAURIOT-DIT-PRÉVOST**
Producer **NICOLAS BLANC** • An **AGAT FILMS & CIE** production
In coproduction with **GRUPE TSE, POLY SON POST PRODUCTION**
With the participation of **CINÉ +, PICTANOVO** • With the support
of **LA RÉGION NORD PAS DE CALAIS, LA RÉGION HAUTE-**
NORMANDIE • With the participation of **CENTRE NATIONAL DU**
CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE • In association with **CINÉMAGE**
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INTERVIEW

CHRISTINE CARRIÈRE / MATHILDE SEIGNER

Christine Carrière: Ever since *Rosine*, our first film together, I have wanted to work with Mathilde again and write a new part for her. I felt this as an obligation, something self-evident. Mathilde is unique. You just have to take the time to get to know her. Her physique, her gaze and her modesty have touched me for 20 years. We are alike because we don't take ourselves seriously. We have an unusual relationship with our profession, which gives us a great deal of freedom and a lot of pleasure in working together. We are very close even though we are from completely different backgrounds; I love the down-to-earth aspect of her personality and her uncomplicated nature. The years have passed, for her as for me, and we have changed - we are older, we have become mothers - and, at the same time, there is something of our first meeting that has never been lost.

Mathilde Seigner: We've never really been apart. We see each other, we talk, we know all about each other's lives. The connection has been interrupted at times, but never severed. There are very few directors with whom I have such a bond. What binds me to Christine is unique because *Rosine* was her first feature and the film that launched my career, that made me an actress. It wasn't my specific goal at the time: I wanted to be a music hall performer.

C.C.: In the meantime, after *Who plucks the Moon?*, there was a screenplay, *La Décampeuse*, written for Mathilde and that was never produced: the story of a woman who dumped everything, husband and children, to go and live elsewhere, to make a fresh start. After that, Christine Gozlan asked me to adapt Jean Teulé's novel, *Darling*. Once again, I thought of Mathilde but the character was not right for her. With *Darling*, I was of course confronted with some very moving accounts from women who had suffered in a similar manner but, moreover, with a great many from mothers (usually single) who were subjected to the daily violence of their sons. Social workers told me that this phenomenon is in constant progression and is a current social taboo. I met my producer, Nicolas Blanc, when I directed a documentary for Agat Films and

France 3, a film in the collection "Histoires d'ados", *Jérôme, c'est moi* (2001). I embarked upon a lengthy casting period in apprentice training centres, vocational and horticultural high schools in my local region, Picardy. I love that kind of thing: I met loads of adolescents, heard all kinds of stories. But, above all, encountered all kinds of waste and broken dreams. I remember an adolescent who told me, "I shouldn't be in this vocational high school, I want to be a clown but they put me here because it's close to home, my parents don't have a car." Moreover, I had been deeply marked by a documentary, *Chroniques d'une violence ordinaire* by Christophe Nick that was shot in 2003 near where I live, in Creil. After *Darling*, all that inspired me to start writing the story of a woman, worn down by life and at the end of her tether, doing her best to uphold her dignity, exhausted by the violence of her adolescent son, faltering and imperfect. It's the struggle of a mother forced into a position of guilt who can no longer find her place. She is trapped between this difficult child who can be scary at times and her former partner, a gentle man who still counts for her but whom she is incapable of reuniting with. A love story that does not declare itself as such right away because of too much anger, too many silences, too much shame and other things that it's impossible to explain. I wrote it, of course, with Mathilde in mind.



M.S.: When I read the script, it was obvious that I was going to do the film. That was non-negotiable. There are screenplays that I hesitate over; I take my time to think about them. That was not the case here. I loved this politically incorrect character. This woman tossed about and worn down by her life, mistreated by her son, and who is going to end up becoming a bad mother. I fully assume this destabilized and destabilizing character that is outside the norm. She fights like crazy to set her son straight when he starts going off the tracks. To stop him becoming a delinquent, to save him from prison on turning 18. She fights to make their life pleasant. For him, she does everything that a mother can do: she attempts to be gentle and caring, she defends him when he is indefensible, she lies to protect him... But when her son goes beyond the limits, by impulse or out of disgust, she is going to go a very long way too. It's a desperate, harsh and no doubt unacceptable act but it is nonetheless going to save them. The people that Christine describes in her films are real. They are alive, they exist. This is no documentary but, given the way you direct your actors, you force us to search inside ourselves, you go to the very heart of things. You erase an actress's tics. You put us through a scanner, an MRI. It's extremely motivating.

C.C.: It's true, in casting, in rehearsals, during shooting, I check them over from head to foot. It's an obsession, I check them, I analyse them. Everything has to be present in Mathilde before we begin: costume, bearing, walk, look... And that goes for the other actors too, of course. They have to become the characters but, above all, I have to feel they are comfortable. The thing that moves me a great deal, even after all these years, is Mathilde's fear. This extreme modesty weighs down on her body, occasionally giving her too "stiff" a bearing, a way of walking that I know by heart, that moves me and makes me laugh. If you inspire her self-confidence, she surrenders herself. The key phrase is, "You have to let go."

M.S.: My mother told me, "I forgot you were my daughter." Nothing can make me happier. It's a complicated thing for well-known actors and actresses: stepping aside and making room for the character. You must not be more intelligent than your role. I know in any case that performing in *A Mother* did me a lot of good. I even think I act better since! I allowed myself to be guided, I let go, I had faith in Christine. It's important to feel yourself observed, loved and respected. I feel more serene.

C.C.: I sensed right away that she was comfortable. And then, when I saw the three of you, with Pierfrancesco Favino and Kacey Mottet-Klein, I knew that there was something happening between you. For Pierre, Marie's former partner, I wanted a strong presence, a steady, gruff and tender guy. Pierfrancesco Favino was suggested to me by Frédérique Moidon who is his agent and also Mathilde's. I felt sure that he was the right choice on seeing him again in *Romanzo Criminale* by Michele Placido (2005) and in *Cosa voglio di più* by Silvio Soldini (2010). Pierfrancesco is a wonderful actor, incredibly hard-working, funny and modest too. And as soon as I put them side-by-side, there were sparks, an obvious rapport. They complement each other perfectly as actors and as characters. When I look at them, their past - which I did not write - is immediately apparent: they form a couple. For the adolescent, we searched for a very long time. My idea was to use nonprofessional actors, apprentices met in the different vocational centres and high schools, but that did not work out and in the end, my casting director, Laure Cochener, suggested Kacey Mottet Klein (*Gainsbourg vie héroïque* (2010), *L'Enfant d'en haut* (2012)), and, there too, there was an undeniable reality about this mother/son relationship. Young Kacey easily found his marks between these two adults, it was very pleasant to see how he loved working on his "loutish" character, he closely watched the adolescents he was supposed to represent. We had very

little time for shooting, six weeks with two cameras, and only one week for rehearsals. And when I say "rehearsals", they are more like encounters: I watch the actors meeting and discovering each other. We sit down together, we read, we drink coffee, we eat chocolate and, thanks to these rare and magical moments (that I would like to be much longer), I save an incredible amount of time. We work in an odd manner, but we work. The characters are built up. Then, I need to hear the dialogue, to listen to how each line fits in with the others.

M.S.: And since the dialogue is very well written, it is easy to speak... Poorly written everyday stuff is much tougher: it never sounds right. Christine's dialogue flows smoothly, and she puts in words of her own, pretty words that you rarely hear: "You run me ragged", "I'm parched"...

C.C.: When I write, I play all the characters and I look for musicality. I play with words: working class words, the ones I heard during my childhood and that amuse me, or blends of two words that do not exist...

M.S.: The words flow in this film, Guillaume repeats remarks that his mother has made to him, making them his own. These tiny details reveal the bond that still exists between them despite their confrontation. This is their way of loving each other. There is no communication because the two of them do not speak the same language. Communication does not take place with words, but through the bodies, brutality and revolt.

C.C.: People often talk about the strangeness of my stories. They're not strange; all I do is talk about love. In a different social setting, true, that is rarely seen in the cinema and where love - filial or otherwise - does not show itself necessarily in the same way as elsewhere. These people haven't been educated, they manage as best they can, they don't have time, but they hold on to their dignity. That's what fascinates me: that love and that dignity. And I want my characters to relate that. My approach with them tries to be beautiful, touching and admiring. They are fighters, they are alive and beautiful.

M.S.: However, in France, when you make so-called *auteur* movies, but even in popular cinema too, harsh is often synonymous with ugly. Christine's film is indeed raw but it is delicate, nothing is ugly, far from it. Everything is glorified: the landscapes, the characters.

C.C.: We shot in Upper Normandy and the Nord where you find glorious light, textures and colours. I deliberately tried to avoid the usual clichés that are mistakenly trotted out about these regions. I simply stopped on the seashore... I realize there is still a lot of work to be done when, even now, telling the story of simple people necessarily has something unusual about it. ■

