

## Agnese Laizane about THE GRANDFATHER

**“The fields and apples are stored somewhere deep inside me”**

How to talk in admiration to someone you're holding responsible for killing a bunch of little kittens? How to silence that voice in the back of my mind: it was she who killed the cats? By listening to what Agnese Laizane has to say about her rustic, fascinating film, that carries the smell of fresh apples hanging from trees and hay in the barn, and that was one of the revelations in the Film'on festival.

Emilia will spend a few days with grandpa and grandma on a farm in the Latvian countryside. What a surprise... In the barn she finds a litter of little cats. This will be a holiday full of cute and cuddly kittens. But her grandparents don't see it that way. Emilia must find a home for the animals as quickly as possible, or grandpa will kill them.

THE GRANDFATHER takes you to a place and time when people were

living by the simple, practical laws of nature. It's impossible to talk about this film without giving away the final spoiler: two days later, Emilia finds the barn door locked. with no trace of the cats to be found.

### **Did you purposely film during the apple season?**

Agnese Laizane: We needed to film at the time when there's little kittens, which is from summer to autumn. Those seasons partly define the atmosphere of the film, through the intensity of the light and colours.

### **I could almost 'smell your film'. While watching, it was as if the room started smelling like apples and hay.**

Laizane: I come from the countryside, and my memories are so strong that I can easily recall them. When we were scouting locations, I knew exactly what kind of scenery I was after to project my Latvian countryside mem-

ories, with these single houses, no close neighbours around. I live in Riga and I love that city, but at some point, I will never be an urban girl. The colours and smells, the fields and apples are stored somewhere so deep inside me that I'll never get rid of them.

### **Even if I treasure sweet pastoral memories to my childhood, I also**



### **remember it as a time when people had a much tougher approach towards nature.**

Laizane: You learn that nature – besides beautiful and inspiring – is also cruel. The countryside makes you stand closer to the food chain, with people making a living on farming, bringing food to our table.

### **But we don't eat cats. Kittens are killed from a practical point of view. Grandfather doesn't exactly enjoy doing it, but it simply needs to be done and he's not going to cry over it.**

Laizane: Nowadays it's forbidden by law, but that won't keep people from doing it. Emilia discovers how the adult world sometimes can be harsh.

Where the child's perspective collides with reality, an understanding is born about some things in life not being the way she hoped them to be. Somehow sad things will happen to you, as a part of life, even if you wish they weren't.



**By not being able to find a home for those cats, Emilia is made partly responsible for their death. How can a child cope with such responsibility?**

Laizane: The story is inspired by my own childhood. When we had kittens, we had to go around to find them a home, asking classmates and neighbours. It was a huge pressure on our shoulders but somehow we always managed. Both children and parents still connect to that story. In one festival screening a kid started to cry, and I felt so sorry. But in Germany adults came telling me how much the film reminded them of their youth. This film shares a small individual experience with many people.

**Actress Emilia Mevedeva has this earnest look on her face.**

Laizane: At first sight I liked the maturity that she carries inside her. I had not worked with children before, and it was challenging. They don't have any acting experience, they get tired and impatient, and you need them to deliver what is needed for the story. But Emilia was wonderful!

**You had kids and cats on the set!**

Laizane: I had a tough day, filming those kittens. They were so small and looked so lost in space when in front of the camera. I felt sorry for those

poor creatures feeling unsafe and insecure.

**Even if we all understand what has happened to the cats, you leave room for interpretation.**

Laizane: From the questions I get in Q&A's I can tell how much children are looking for a 'yes or no' answer. Should I say it or not? That was my main dilemma throughout the entire writing process. I decided not to show the cats from too close, I didn't want the audience to get attached to them. It's not a cat film anyway.

**The main question is not if grandpa killed the cats, but if Emilia will forgive him some day and return.**

Laizane: It can also be a lesson for grandpa to maybe rethink his usual habits and try to do things differently next time. Stop being so stubbornly sure about things – "this is how we do it and this is how it should be done forever". This is one of the many layers underneath the story's surface.

–  
Gert Hermans  
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## Eva Cools about CLEO

### "There is beauty in human failure"

The Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninov was a versatile man, he adored not only the splendour of nature, but also fast cars. Fortunately, Cleo is not aware of this trivial fact. Rachmaninov's music is one of the few things still offering her comfort, since she lost both her parents in a traffic accident. Now the 17 year old is terrified of cars. In her own, somewhat stiff way her grandmother Bobonne offers Cleo a warm home, but ends up bearing the brunt of a rebellious teenager. Then Cleo crosses paths with Leos. He is a bit older, not unattractive, and a warm bond grows between the two.

**Cleo describes how it feels to be among others after her parents have died: "Everyone is just weird around you".**

Eva Cools: People feel uncomfortable and don't know how to react to the death of Cleo's parents. Her best friend hasn't given a sign of life for six months. Her aunt reacts equally clumsily: "You can always call me."



**I suppose you did some research with next of kin?**

Cools: First and foremost, the story is personally inspired - I lost a niece in a hit-and-run accident at a young age - so I could draw on my own memories. And I conducted interviews with both victims and perpetrators. I was famil-