



Locarno Film Festival
Official Selection



LITTLE ONES

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A FILM BY JULIE LERAT-GERSANT



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SYNOPSIS

Pregnant, 16-year-old Camille is placed in a home for teen mothers by a family court judge. Separated from her own loving yet toxic mother, she strikes up a friendship with Alison, another rather immature underage mother, and rebels against the social worker Nadine, a passionate, albeit blasé authority figure. These encounters will radically change her destiny.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My initial desire to write this script and make this film came about several years ago when I was conducting writing workshops in teenage pregnancy centers. These big group houses are filled with teenage mothers and very young children. I was struck by the disarming combination of carefree adolescence coupled with parental responsibilities. The reality of life there is harsh and unfortunately, dysfunctional family patterns are often repeated from one generation to the next. But thankfully sometimes, certain young women have experiences that give hope to others, leaving an impression on the team of professionals working there. Camille is one of these young women.

Pregnant at 16, the teenager has a fusalional relationship with her mother, living to the rhythm of her mother's mood swings, and love

affairs. Typically, pregnancy has led Camille to question herself and the established relationships within her family, making them evolve as well. Once she is separated from her mother and placed in a teenage pregnancy center, Camille will learn how to think for herself. I wanted to focus on her emotional and sensorial journey during her pregnancy, more than on her choice to keep or not keep the child she is carrying.

With this unwanted pregnancy, Camille is thrown into the world of adult responsibilities that are too much for her to handle. She confronts this world with all the lightness and irreverence of her youth. Playing a tormented character, the radiant actress Pili Groyne carries the film, appearing in every scene except when Camille runs away, a pivotal moment that leads to her emancipation. Her emotions, anger, and

sensitivity are found in the details: a glance, a nervous bite of her lip. I wanted us to be right with her every breath, following the evolution of her body as the pregnancy is carried through, capturing her intimacy in tight close ups: goose bumps, the twitch of an eyelid, peeled off nail polish. Simple details that tell a whole story.

In the teenage pregnancy center, the other residents act like veritable mirrors of Camille's situation. At first drawn to Alison, a young, immature mother, the teenager then slowly starts to identify with Alison's daughter, the little Diana, which allows her to understand for the first time the extent of her own mother's shortcomings. In choosing our own daughter to play Diana, François Roy (my collaborator and life partner) and I decided to adapt ourselves to her own character traits in order to play Alison's daughter. The great understanding and comradery between her and the two actresses was wonderful. During the editing process, the chemistry between Camille and Diana was even

more evident and stronger than we'd realized. Diana is truly a younger version of Camille.

I wanted to make a movie that was like my heroine, perched on her rollerblades. A fast-paced film that rushes by with clear-cut breaks. The electro music by Superpoze reinforces this guideline: music that is sometimes mind-blowing, and always rhythmic. Camille is overwhelmed by what is happening to her. Thrown into a heretofore unknown environment straight out of the housing projects she came from in Cherbourg, France, where she lived with her young mother, she arrives seemingly out of nowhere in a teen pregnancy center filled with young children. She dives right into this new world. Even when she is alone in her room she's on high alert, having to constantly live with the noise inherent to that type of social structure: crying children, slamming doors, girls talking in the hallway. In accentuating the sensory overload of this center, Camille's moments of escape are all the more liberating.

It was important to me to make a radiant and bright film despite the dark subject. Just by being natural, her youthful feistiness and impertinence, young Camille will lead us on a journey towards the hope of a better life, where one's destiny isn't always predetermined. It's a story of transition, a shedding going from darkness to light. After having lived in her mother's shadow, Camille will free herself from her mother's hold over her, both psychologically and visually.

For me, Little Ones is an act of political commitment. It's an open window onto single parent homes, living in ordinary poverty in countless areas that dot our towns and provinces. It's a loud and proud advocacy for the institutions that help these populations, depicted through the character of Nadine, showing how very committed the teams are despite the lack of acknowledgement and funds. It tells the story of how hope can come to people who look like Medhi, who is the modest

incarnation of a possible future. It's the portrait of a young teenager at a crossroads in her life, who breaks with the vicious cycles of her dysfunctional family. A resilient modern heroine, Camille forges ahead and faces, with great courage, a fatalistic determinism.

Julie Lerat-Gersant



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Julie Lerat-Gersant was born in Caen, France, in 1983. After studying theater at the Ecole Supérieure de Théâtre, she cofounded La Piccola Familia with Thomas Jolly in 2006. Since, she has worked in theater as both an actress and a playwright. In 2016, she cowrote and directed the project *Adolescences and Territoire(s)* [Adolescence and Territories] at the Odéon-Théâtre of Europe in Paris.

In 2017, she cowrote the feature film *Aland* with director Thomas Germaine and, with a grant from the Louvre Museum and La Poudrerie theater, wrote a new stage play. In 2018 she was accepted into the Femis' Screenplay Workshop, directed by Jacques Ackchoti. There she developed the first draft of her feature film. In 2020, she focused on writing for series at the CEEA [European Conservatory for Audiovisual Writing] as part of a workshop led by Fabrice de Costil where she developed and co-wrote along with François Roy, a medical thriller – 6 x 52 minutes.

In 2021, she directed her first feature film, *Little Ones*, produced by Escazal Films (Sophie Révil and Denis Carot) and distributed by Haut et Court.





CAST

Camille	Pili GROYNE
Nadine	Romane BOHRINGER
Clo	Victoire DU BOIS
Alison	Lucie CHARLES-ALFRED
Diana	Suzane ROY-LERAT
Medhi	Bilel CHEGRANI

CREW

Director	Julie LERAT-GERSANT with the artistic collaboration of François ROY
Screenplay	Julie LERAT-GERSANT & François ROY
Cinematography	Virginie SAINT MARTIN
Sound	Jean-Luc AUDY
Editing	Mathilde VAN DE MOORTELE
Production Manager	Alain MOUGENOT
Set Design	Ninon DE LA HOSSERAYE
Casting	Marie CANTET & Michaël LAGUENS
Production	ESCAZAL FILMS
Producers	Sophie REVIL & Denis CAROT
With the Participation of	HAUT ET COURT DISTRIBUTION, CANAL+, CINE+
With the Support of	REGION NORMANDIE, THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE CNC and in association with NORMANDIE IMAGES
In association with French Distributor	COFIMAGE 33, INDEFILMS 10, BE FOR FILMS HAUT ET COURT DISTRIBUTION

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Ratio	1.85
Sound Format	5.1
Running Time	90'
Original Version	French
Year of Production	2022
Country	France

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