



**HER  
WAY**

DOMINO FILMS  
presents

LAURE CALAMY

# HER WAY

a film by CÉCILE DUCROCQ

RUNNING TIME: 1h37

# INTERVIEW WITH CÉCILE DUCROCQ

**What prompt you to take a new interest in a prostitute character? Did it already exist in your short film BACK ALLEY?**

A character was born with this short film and I felt that I wasn't done with her. I still had things to tell, and the desire to carry her elsewhere, to let her out of the perimeter I had locked her in. I wanted to give her a breath of fresh air, to turn this woman into a heroine. And, also, I wanted to work again with Laure. I had this picture in my mind: Laure with a gold trench coat, walking through the city, driving, looking for clients, for money, for her son.

**Did you meet that type of woman?**

I was inspired by one prostitute I met with Laure for my short film: Marie-France. She worked *rue Saint-Denis* in Paris, with a picture of her son hung above her bed. I was shocked by this vision. "Of course, I have a son" she told me. I felt stupid, and immediately asked: "How do you raise a child when you do this job?". Marie-France explained in the most natural way she was just doing the same as everyone else. Even though she had to find a family to take him in at some point because she couldn't work and keep him at home at the same time.

**And that is exactly what Marie, the character played by Laure Calamy, had to do herself. That is at least what we can imagine when she and Adrien visit this old couple in the countryside.**

Yes, it's the family that took Adrien in when he was little. It's a happy time for him. Almost a cliché: there's the dog, the farm, the stream, the countryside, and what could be his grandparents. It also shows how Marie managed to find the best for her son. Despite the pain of leaving her son, these people are good, they have offered him a more suitable place than if he had stayed with her in the city, in her apartment.

**It also refers to a more classical vision of prostitution history...**

Yes, all of a sudden, we are brought back to the 19th century when these women had to send their children to a nurse in the countryside. I wanted Marie to be a part of a line of women before her.

**Even though Marie had to go through this, she is not a victim. She likes her job.**

At least she defends it, like a lot of sex workers who say: "It's not the most

beautiful job in the world but it's the one I chose, I don't want anyone to help me get out of it. Leave me alone."

Of course, it is important to draw a line between consenting sex workers, and the girls being captive of networks handled by pimps. I'm not saying it's a job like any other. But the prevailing view is that even if they say it's their choice, it is not possible. I can't see why we should take their free will from them. If they say they are ok with it and don't have a gun to their head, who are we to argue? When we say no, it's no. And prostitutes add: "When we say yes, it's yes!"

Marie is a free woman despite her financial difficulties. She is a woman who refuses social determinism that supposes her son cannot choose his future because he was expelled from his cooking training and she doesn't have any money. She cannot accept it. So, she fights. With her own means.

**These are feeble means in which many parents can recognize themselves: shaking their children to wake them up, coaching them for an interview, boosting their self-confidence. Marie is like everybody else.**

Yes, her story should speak to everyone. I want the audience to relate to her, to identify with her difficulties, and to hear her say: "Leave me alone, I exist and I want to help my son!" I don't want people to look at her as an exception.

**Her case is, despite everything, out of the ordinary: not everybody calls a cross-dresser to help prepare a child for an exam.**

Marie manages to find the right people to help her. The man is a cross-dresser but he is a lawyer first. She makes the right choice because, thanks to him, her son is finally able to express his passion for cooking. I wanted a bit of humor in this moment: Adrien starts by refusing to talk to him and Marie has to ask her friend to dress as a man. This character broadens Adrien's view, he will no longer look at cross-dressers the same way.

**The banker she applies to for a loan does not see her as a normal customer either...**

How does a sex worker get a loan? To write this scene, I went to my own banker and explained to him the story I was working on. When I told him my



character was a prostitute, I watched him gulp awkwardly. “No problem”, he said. At the same time, I could clearly see that, yes, there was a problem. There’s a problem with hypocrisy in our society: sex workers pay their taxes but have no social rights. They can’t get a loan because they have neither basic salaries nor payslips. The law allows them to work, but penalizes the client. Nothing makes sense.

**To get the money she needs, Marie must accept to go work in a brothel in Germany...**

It shows how far she’s willing to go for her child. This brothel represents everything she stands against. Suddenly, despite the brothel keeper’s promises, she loses her independence. Even though she doesn’t have to pay a percentage on her earnings, the entrance fee (which we could compare to rent) is so expensive that she needs to work a lot more to even get a decent salary. It is exactly like an Uber driver who needs to do more and more rides just to get by.

Age is also important: Marie competes with younger women, for instance Sofia (Melissa Guers) who, at twenty, is ready to do anything. In the brothel, girls are both rivals and allies.

**One of the hardest scenes in the movie is the one where Adrien comes to the brothel to see his mother. What is he thinking at this moment? Is it the decisive moment that leads him to find a job? You remain very elusive.**

Because I stick to Marie’s point of view, never Adrien’s. He asks questions about her job. And she answers as a mother would: “Don’t worry, I do what I want. And it’s not because I am a prostitute that you can sleep all day and do stupid things.”

Except that she doesn’t see she is mistaken, meanwhile, Adrien is making his own way. She is so stubborn, so focused on her goal that she ends up acting recklessly. The reasonable thing would be to give up and find another way. But she won’t. He finds an odd job? She only sees the small salary she will add to her own earnings. That’s why, when she goes to the barge at the end, she is surprised to discover he has succeeded in becoming a cook—in his own way. She did not succeed in getting the money for the private school, but she gave him strength. She was leading the wrong fight, but in doing so, she passed her strength onto her son.

**Despite some terrible moments, the movie always tries to picture a down-to-earth everyday life: short dialogues, scenes stripped of their sulfurous**

**context...**

I need something concrete, I need the simplicity of reality. These are very important anchor points for me. But I can be weary of ultra-realism, so I wanted some bigger-than-life elements. That’s why I wanted Laure to wear this golden trench coat no matter the circumstances. And that she suddenly goes extort one of her clients at the end. She has a lapse of judgement. I wanted to show how far she would go.

**You do not linger on trick scenes.**

It was a question of balance. For example, I really wanted to show how things work when a prostitute receives a client. I wanted this to be the first scene of the movie: we immediately discover Marie’s daily life. I wanted to show the crudeness of the scene. Like most prostitutes, Marie has a real power over men. I said to Laure: “Do as if you were a doctor. You tell the guy to undress, you ask what he wants, but you’re the one who leads.”

On the other hand, it was out of the question that sex scenes became recurring and took too much importance. That’s not the subject. There’s only one, very short but quite violent scene with a Moldavian in the club. In test screenings, it was perceived in many different ways: unbearable for some, soft for others. When it comes to sex, everyone has its own cursor.

**Love is not a subject in the movie.**

No. We never know who Marie has been with, what she has done. She has no sexual desire. Her only love is her son.

**Where does your interest in prostitutes come from?**

From Laure Adler’s book about brothels that I’ve read during my History studies. This book left its mark on me, especially what she wrote about these women who are both submissive and masters of the game, just free. I’ve always found this paradox interesting. Later on, I met some of them and I continued to admire them. They are strong, beautiful, funny, incredibly resourceful women who have an extraordinary knowledge of men and society—in this respect, what Grisélidis Réal wrote in her books is fascinating as well. All of this led me to write these two stories.

**We know all about men’s fantasies about prostitutes, but what about women’s?**

For women, the prostitute is not a fantasy at first. It’s a woman-to-woman gaze. That’s why Marie is a character before being the representation of a profession or a function.

**How do you explain there is such a difference between the way we look at an independent prostitute in the street and the representation of a call girl?**

Call girls are part of the fantasy of luxury and glamour. They only exist through male gaze and it's striking in cinema. A lot of directors, for instance Paul Verhoeven, like filming them. On the other side is miserabilism with the girl on the sidewalk. Every time the cinema takes an interest in prostitutes, it's to show how they try to get out of it. But I wanted to show a different side: under-represented independent sex workers who claim they are no victims. Marie's challenge is not to get out of prostitution but to offer her son a future. That's why, in the last image of the film, Marie is back on the street, but it is no failure.

**Working again with Laure Calamy was, as you say, one of the driving forces**

**behind the movie.**

Even though she has an incredible comic talent, Laure has also a tragic dimension. The first time I saw her was in a play, in a very strong role. Without being too glamorous, I wanted her to be beautiful, with her cascade of hair, her red dress, that famous golden trench coat... And especially, I wanted her to put on a performance, as prostitutes do. They lead the game: they are the ones who decide to be seductive, to wear fishnet stockings, costumes... And Laure knows how to do that very well.

**You mention some inspirations. Which ones did you have? Did you ask Laure to watch some of those movies?**

Many filmmakers inspired me to do this job but I wouldn't say they were references on this specific project. I obviously watched again some movies





with strong prostitute characters. It's almost a category in itself in cinema history: Fellini's NIGHTS OF CABIRIA, Pasolini's MAMMA ROMA, Fassbinder's films... As for Laure, she has an amazing cinematographic culture, she has seen everything.

### **What directions did you give her to play this part?**

It was not so much about directions, it was more of a dialogue. She had a lot of suggestions, we talked a lot. She is very funny, she always looks for the funny thing, a register in which she is very comfortable. And it's a good thing because prostitutes—those I met anyway—have a lot of humor. I wanted her to be tragicomic.

### **Let's talk about Nissim Renard, the actor who plays the son: Adrien.**

We started casting at the end of the first lockdown when schools and high schools were closed. Elsa Pharaon, the casting director, had to massively send requests and posts. We received over five hundred applications, and Nissim's really stood out. It was an obvious choice. He has some kind of grace, he is very natural, and he's got a crazy "*cinegeny*". He started by playing in short films in Belgium at the age of four, and now he's seventeen.

### **How did you prepare with actors?**

I wish that Laure and Nissim had spent some time together beforehand, but the Covid made it impossible. Luckily, they immediately found their own way of working together. I had more chances with the preparation of the actresses who played in the club. I took time with them to create a group. We took pole dancing classes together, I asked them to bring some little personal things on set—pictures, things to eat—as real prostitutes do. I wanted them with different body types, some fatter, some thinner, like those bodies you see at the beach with so much variety. And of course, I wanted all of them to be beautiful in their own way.

### **Noé Bach is the director of photography of the movie. How did you work with him?**

The preparation raised many questions: it was obviously a question of having a beautiful light but without being too glamorous. How, for example, do you create a difference between the scenes in the club, very lit, very pink, and those, very raw, in the break room where the prostitutes sipped their Red Bull under aggressive neon lights? How do we go from this atmosphere to the even gloomier one on the parking lot where Marie takes refuge in her car? How can we also give the film a thriller dimension? After all, Marie is a woman looking for money. On top of that, I didn't want heavy set-ups. I hate

that. What I want is to be as close as possible to the actors.

### **What kind of director are you with the actors?**

I like my actors to feel free so that they can express themselves. They spend a lot of time waiting on set, so I want to give them as much time as possible when shooting. I usually do six or seven takes. On HER WAY I often asked the actors, especially Laure, to play one version with comedy, one more tragic. I like to have as many options as possible to work with. It allows me afterward to navigate between realism and fiction... With Laure, it's so easy! She's full of propositions, ten thousand a minute! She always finds little things, little gestures to add...

### **You said you shot a lot. Was the editing complicated?**

I had the chance to work with Sophie Reine who is wonderful. We chose the takes together, talked a lot about the movie without me getting too much involved in the technicity. We cut a lot of scenes, but it was not painful. I loved this moment.

### **Do you think the topic of the movie is still taboo?**

Without any doubt. I was naïve, I didn't think that showing a prostitute could have a negative impact on the film feasibility and that the character would always be brought back to its profession whereas it's first and foremost the story of a woman who fights for her son. I am all the more grateful to my producers Stéphanie Bermann and Alexis Dulguerian.

# INTERVIEW WITH LAURE CALAMY

**Seven years after BACK ALLEY, you're back with Cécile Ducrocq for her first feature film.**

It's a project we had in mind for a long time. I was very eager. I put all my desire into it.

**You're once again playing the role of a prostitute. What was your reaction when reading the script for the first time?**

Since Marie, my character, has a son, the subject of prostitution was no longer the same as in the short film. I immediately moved on from the previous story. What mattered was this woman's journey, how she fought for her son to get a chance, how she raised him alone and all the difficulties she faced every day. Prostitution is not so different from other jobs affected by globalization, sex workers also face poorer working conditions, decreasing pay and a sense of a foreshortened future. In this context, Marie's situation is similar to that of many people.

**In the beginning, however, Marie doesn't see herself as a victim. Even though she has to face the competition, she fights for her rights, she is involved in an association...**

She is a lioness, with an incredible life force. She doesn't let fate get the better of her: she does her job without asking anything to anyone. It's a bit harder for her to make ends meet because of prostitution networks and her getting older. But however fragile she may be, she feels supported by the association that she and other independent prostitutes are part of. This mutual assistance is beautiful..

**It seems that this woman has no weaknesses. Whatever obstacles she faces she reacts immediately. Her son gets expelled from school: she dismisses the guidance counselor and has her son apply to a prestigious school. It's as if she never doubts.**

It's probably more complex than that, we don't know her past, nor do we know all the problems she encounters with her son. Having a mother doing this job can't be easy and she's aware of it. However, Marie is obsessed with two things: to give her son a better chance and to preserve her freedom. At one point, her son takes precedence and she has to sacrifice her independence, but always in her own way, without backing down. She's a warrior. Will she be able to raise enough money? It's impossible not to feel empathy and not

to be moved by her...

**Marie is very spontaneous: with her son, her clients, the school secretary, her banker...**

She's straightforward but at the same time we can never fully figure her out. I like those kinds of characters, a bit rough at the edges but with real ambivalences and ambiguities. Everything is not completely clear-cut in Marie. She has no problem with using people if it helps her, ditching the association if something more interesting comes up, or stealing although she has scruples. She's a bulldozer. And that's what interests me in this movie: it shows how difficult it is to live without constantly jeopardizing your principles.

**Marie is always brought back to what she does for a living: her son's foster family advises her to find another job, the banker refuses to grant her a loan...**

It's true, but essentially, we follow her in very common situations that many independent women have to face, and I like that very much. It is other people who have a problem with her profession and stigmatize her as a prostitute. I find that Marie stands up to them with a lot of panache.

**Prostitution is a subject you've been interested in for a long time.**

I became fascinated many years ago with the writings of Grisélidis Réal, the Swiss prostitute, painter and revolutionary, whose most famous book is *The Little Black Book*. In it, she wrote down her thoughts about her clients, what they liked, what they didn't like, and some rather funny observations about each one. Grisélidis—like many independent prostitutes who practice this profession by choice—considered that she was actually treating some of these men. It was, of course, a way to make a living, but it went beyond that.

The first scene of the movie, in which Marie writes a commentary on her client, is a tribute to Grisélidis Réal and her famous *Little Black Book*.

**Like Grisélidis Réal, Marie seems content with her job.**

If she is not a victim of a network or a pimp, a woman can accomplish herself in prostitution, it all depends on the relationship she has with her body. Contrary to abolitionist reform groups, I am convinced that a woman can use her body as she wishes. It's up to her. If she wants to make a

living out of it, I understand. In the seventies, the revolutionary movements of prostitutes were already demanding this right. “Leave us alone”, they said. “And give us social security because we pay our taxes like everyone else!” Why shouldn’t they be entitled to the same things as everyone else? Why punish them or their clients? Whatever their past, it is a choice they made, and to refuse this choice is infantilizing them.

**Apart from the scenes in the club where Marie accepts to lose her independence in order to earn more and is confronted with a violent man, she indeed has a very human relationship with her clients.**

This reminds me of Virginie Despentes’ stories of her past as a prostitute where she recounts her surprise in finding in her clients vulnerability, tenderness, and even sometimes recognition. Of course, there are twisted and perverted people, of course, this profession can be dangerous and there are women who come out of it traumatized. But this can be said of many other professions. In *King Kong Theory*, Virginie Despentes writes that this kind of mistreatment can be found in many other jobs. Working in a factory, unloading crates in a supermarket, or running the clock to fill packages at Amazon is no more tempting. Bodies are just as badly treated, and on top of that, for miserable wages. This brings us back to the ravages of capitalism, which affects a whole segment of the population.

**What about her son’s attitude?**

He can be selfish like a lot of teenagers his age and, more importantly, did not ask his mother to make all these sacrifices for him. He tries to make her understand that she doesn’t have to put herself in danger as she does, but she doesn’t hear him. Marie doesn’t even realize, while she is hitting rock bottom, that he is getting better. He

has found a way to achieve his dreams without enrolling in that prestigious school she wants to pay for at all costs. At least, she has passed on her son her mantra: anything is possible...

**How does it feel to take on the same type of character again, years later, with the same director?**

It was a long time ago, so it was different. I come from the theater and hate that expression “get into character”. It’s the opposite that happens: the character gets into you. The part of Lisette I played in Marivaux’s *The Game of Love and Chance*, has been played by forty thousand other actresses before me. It’s just that one day she took my appearance and I fed her with what I am. Playing a part is a back-and-forth journey between yourself and an imaginary character. It is never rigid.

I obviously had some memories of *BACK ALLEY*, I already understood the character and my imagination was full of it. I had sensations, fantasies, and I was all the more eager to dive into the reality of the shooting. Because then everything changes: it’s when facing a character on a daily basis that you can understand him or her. Before arriving on set, I didn’t know what would be the relationship between Marie and her son. It can fully develop when you meet the other.

**Precisely, tell us about the first time you met Nissim?**

We didn’t see each other that much, we did some tests and we really met on set. Nissim is wonderful. He is only seventeen but he’s already very mature as an actor. Behind a rather fragile appearance, he has an incredible tenacity.

**You often say that nudity does not bother you.**

It is not a problem for me. Why should it bother me as long as it’s meaningful? Nudity is interesting,





it's telling the human in its simplicity, its universality, its timelessness. Young, old, beautiful, ugly, all bodies are beautiful in my eyes. They give off a power and a strength that I find magnificent. However, as much as we have no problem admiring a naked body in a classical painting, we find it disturbing in a play, for example. It is less true in movies.

I don't have any modesty about it: I showed it in plays, in movies. I consider my body as an instrument, a battlefield. It is as strong as my thoughts.

**You seem to expect a lot from the shooting to get into character. Does that mean that you don't prepare much beforehand?**

I prepare my characters, of course, and all the more so if the role requires something particular. I document myself. For example, I read a lot about unionism before shooting Guillaume Senez's OUR STRUGGLES. I knew that we would have to improvise our dialogues, and even if the movie dealt more with the intimate lives of the characters, I couldn't be caught off guard. And I probably would have read about prostitutes if I wasn't already familiar with this culture. But sometimes, it's also good to be in the unknown. In terms of preparation, everything depends on what the character is going through.

And then there is the text, of course. Learning it is also a way to prepare the character's thoughts. But the most important thing for me, and the most difficult, is to wait - to convince yourself you are going to arrive without knowing what is going to happen. What can you prepare? Many things and nothing at the same time: the anxiety is there and is also part of my preparation. Waiting and being anxious. I know that everything happens on set.

**We can't imagine you being anxious.**

I can put myself in such a state that I feel liberated when the shooting starts. Like many, I take a very hard look at my work. Will I be in the right place? Will I not be mediocre? We know that we have to explore one road and then another but often the shooting will take us elsewhere.

**Does your character's costume help you?**

It is essential, as are the hair and makeup. Sometimes it's also interesting not to work on it too much: behind an apparent banality, we discover things we hadn't suspected.

**What memories do you have of this second shooting with Cécile Ducrocq?**

I was of course much less anxious because of the relationship we had

previously built. I was more confident and, even when we had doubts, our friendship meant that we could share them together. Cécile and I both like to look for very different versions of takes. We like to explore my situations to the end. In spite of the very tight work schedule and the enormous days, she never lets herself be overwhelmed by technical difficulties. The joy of acting has always remained intact. She was making her first feature film and I was really impressed by her will and tenacity. Cécile is a bulldozer, like Marie.

# CASTING

<b>LAURE CALAMY</b>	Marie
<b>NISSIM RENARD</b>	Adrien
<b>BÉATRICE FACQUER</b>	Camille
<b>ROMAIN BRAU</b>	L'avocat
<b>DIANA KORUDZHIYSKA</b>	Tatiana
<b>AMLAN LARCHER</b>	Awa
<b>VALENTINA PAPIC</b>	Encarna
<b>SAM LOUWYCK</b>	Bruno
<b>LEONARDA GUINZBURG</b>	Greta
<b>KIM HUMBRECHT</b>	Joy
<b>SARAH OUAZANA</b>	Kate
<b>MELISSA GUERS</b>	Sofia
<b>MAHIR FEKIH-SLIMANE</b>	Ronan
<b>MAXENCE TUAL</b>	Martin

# TECHNICAL LIST

**A film written and directed by**  
**Produced by**

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ALEXIS DULGUERIAN

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**Director of photography**

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NOÉ BACH

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**Sound**

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MARTIN SADOUX  
RYM DEBBARH

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**Costume Designer**  
**Post-Production Manager**  
**Production**

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