

Teenagers: Flowers to Water

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Let's extrapolate a sequence. Thirteen-year-old Leo went to visit the mother of his friend R mi who works in the maternity ward of a hospital. The woman does not understand the reason for that visit, but offers to take him home. The two are now silent in the car; Then Me breaks the silence and says, "It's my fault". The woman stops the car and utters one word: "Get out!"

We know what happened, but not what will happen. If, by pure chance, the screening of this second film by Belgian director Lukas Dhont (nominated for an Oscar and awarded at Cannes and the National Board) were to stop here, we could not help but leave the room dragging bitterness and condemnation behind us. It is impossible, in fact, to remain insensitive when tragedy suddenly strikes a family and the joy of two teenagers turns into pain because of...

Yes: Whose fault?

We tie the threads again.

Leo and R mi are two inseparable friends: they play together, love nature, run through the meadows, unload the liveliness of their green years in wild bike races and, with the condescension of their parents, eat and sleep now in the house of one now in that of the other. All is well until they make their entrance into high school. It is there that, for the first time, a classmate mischievously interprets their being too close. A few lines, but enough to put Leo in crisis: "Can I ask you a question? Are the two of you together?" "No, we're not together". "Like, are you super friends?" "Yes. We are super friends, we are almost brothers, we are not together..." "Maybe you're not aware of it".

You can't call it bullying, but we know that you don't just talk with words. The joke, seasoned with smirks and winks from other companions, becomes poison and between Leo and R mi the friendship cracks. A crack a day - separate bench, no more home visits, bike rides no longer next to each other, different interests and projects (sweetness of the flute for R mi and virility of ice hockey for Leo), no more childish couple games, etc. - until the separation of the paths to follow, the accusations and the blatant scuffle in front of everyone. Normal quarrel between kids that, however, results in tragedy. Just the day when the class goes to spend a day of fun at the beach, R mi locks himself inside the house and commits suicide. An inexplicable gesture for everyone, not for Leo who feels all the blame fall on him. The boulder that falls on him is too heavy for him and, if he can no longer remove it from his conscience, he can lift it by confessing his "sin" to his friend's mother. Hence those three words (it's my fault) that cost him the shield of "Go away!"

Hammer blow on the table: the process begins. On the one hand the defendants (Leo, the mischievous girl, the fellow bullies, the family, the school, society, LGBTQ...), on the other a flood of judges (as many as we are spectators).

After *Girl*, his debut film of 2018, Lukas Dhont once again tackles the theme of sexual identity, choosing the exploration of one of the most delicate phases of existential change: that of adolescence, where lightheartedness risks being confused with superficiality and malice. Parents and teachers know how difficult it is to relate to today's thirteen-year-olds. They are no longer children and they are not yet adults; They are flowers to be watered with caution and wisdom. *Close* is a film and we can discuss the Rémi case as much as we like, but when the news is tinged with red we cannot get away with cinephile observations. We need to reflect, review reports and methods, understand the causes and remedy them. To provoke tragedies is enough a reproach, a rejection, a mockery, a disappointment of love, an exclusion, a wrong tone, a seized computer, a text message on the mobile phone, a chat, a video game...

Let's resume the plot. It was said "we know what happened, but not what will happen" and it was hoped that the film would not stop just when the end was coming. Don't worry, it didn't stop.

Leo, chased away from the car, goes (when metaphors have their eloquence!) into a wood. He doesn't know where to go, he doesn't know what to do. He said what he wanted and had to say and feels the full weight of condemnation. Even Rémi's mother said what came out of her mouth spontaneously; After the moment of anger, however, it is time for the examination of conscience. Perhaps, she should have understood and intervened, she should have sacrificed time at work and been closer to her son, she would have...

Needless to list now all the things he could do and did not do. If there is no more time to take back what is no longer there, it is never too late to enter the woods of adolescence, follow in the footsteps of that disoriented and distraught prodigal son, reach him and hold him to his chest as if he were the twin brother of his King.

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