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THE LOVE THAT REMAINS

Directed by Hlynur Pálmason



NEW YORK PRESS

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Film Info: IS | 2025 | 109 minutes | Color | Icelandic with English Subtitles | 4:3 aspect ratio

SYNOPSIS

Charting the gradual evolution of a family in the midst of an irreparable fracture, *The Love That Remains* is a poignant, crisply pointillistic domestic drama that observes life's changes with humor and whimsy, set against the majestic, ever-shifting Icelandic landscape. Visual artist Anna (Saga Garðarsdóttir) and fisherman Magnús (Sverrir Guðnason) were teenage sweethearts but have recently grown apart, and Magnús has moved out of the house. As long as the newly estranged parents put on a good face, the children—and their adorable sheepdog Panda (who won the prestigious Palme Dog award at Cannes)—seem to take the split in stride. Yet as Magnús becomes increasingly alienated from his domestic life, harsh reality can't help but bubble to the surface. Hlynur Pálmason's follow-up to his austere 19th-century drama *Godland* is a constantly surprising film with an immaculate sense of framing and pacing—and an evocative, dulcet piano score by Harry Hunt—dotted with idiosyncratic flights of fancy that never detract from the central emotional authenticity.

INTERVIEW WITH HLYNUR PÁLMASSON

***The Love That Remains* can be seen as a departure from many of your previous films, particularly from the epic scope of *Godland* – what made you want to jump into such a thematically and aesthetically different film?**

I don't like to have too many preconceived intentions because I want my films to be honest, spontaneous, and as close as possible to the actual human experience. The topics are always broad and numerous. This film is about nature, about what we build, re-build or destroy, about what unites and divides us, miscommunication and conflicting feelings. But it is above all about family, that is the core of the film and its beating heart – which is a natural extension of my previous films, both short and long. We tend to think that what matters in the world is the big picture, like politics, but to me, in a way, the most important things as human beings are the small and intimate ones, the ones close to us: your relationship with your family, your siblings, your children, nature, the place you inhabit. After *Godland*, my desire was to tell a story set in the present day, exploring the times we live in. I wanted to shoot what is close to me, around me, in the garden, without having to build or recreate anything. To show things, not in an artificial way, but as they truly are. Working with the intimate, the mundane or even the ugly – not something epic, perfect or outstanding – was both a want and a need. It's a film about the intimate, the familiar and the strange – there is a dreamy aspect, but I also wanted everything to be fluid, to constantly move like water.

Audiences are bound to wonder to what degree the film is autobiographical. Even if it is not, what made you want to write and direct a more personal film, closer in many ways to your own life?

All of my films are personal, because the crew and the cast are often people who are close to me, and even the locations, the houses, the cars... they're all things that I find around me. It was already the case for my previous features, but this one might indeed be the most personal – along with my short film *Nest* – because my three children are in it. The idea for *The Love that Remains* came to me during the process of shooting *Nest* – in which I filmed the kids playing in a tree house over a period of a year and a half. While filming, I started wondering what the parents were doing in the meantime, since they were always off-screen: they are referred to, but never seen. That's when I started imagining different narrative threads, intertwined, that would enhance one another. I originally intended to make *Nest* a part of the feature but time flew by, I shot *Godland*, and the short movie became its own thing. So I started developing another story connected to the core of *The Love that Remains*: the kids constructing the figure of a knight, as time passes and the seasons change. I wanted these scenes to resonate with the central thread of *The Love that Remains*, which offered endless, exciting possibilities. We started shooting those scenes (part of a short film entitled *Joan of Arc*) two years ago, while we were developing

the feature. Other images of the feature were also shot before principal photography, because I always have a camera with me and need to film what's going on around me, in real life. This is the case, for instance, for the images of the roof being taken apart. My process is always very open, it's impossible to know exactly what's going to happen.

The depiction of the relationship, its complexities and grey areas feels extremely authentic. Even in separation there is love. How did you strike this balance?

From the beginning of development, it was clear to me that I didn't want the film to be unequivocal, to settle on just one side. Because in real life, you want something and at the same time you don't want it, you constantly have one feeling and its opposite. Everybody is fragile and complex and that's what makes a character interesting. The film had to remain open to interpretation, both emotionally and story-wise. Nobody is just the good guy or the bad guy. When it comes to the parents going through a separation, the important thing is not why they're splitting, or whether they'll get back together, I'm not giving or looking for any answers or explanations. The film is about how we spend our time: what's important, really? The time you spend with your family, with those you love, the memories you create. It's about life itself, about memory and the sense of belonging. What happens to a family when they split, what happens to all the memories and moments they shared? What happens to the love that remains? Love can only be known by its absence. We become immune to its presence, it's sometimes difficult to see the love around you or the beauty in life. That's what I wanted to try and tackle, that's what I want the audience to feel. Maybe if people just tended to their garden, respected their neighbours, their children and nature, the world would be a better place. But everything and everyone has a darker side, and I don't want my films to convey a glamorized image of life. Life is both light and dark, funny and brutal, full of contrasts. Even children, as we see in the film, are both capable of creating and destroying. Violence is a deep part of humanity, we're an incredibly brutal species. This is also interesting. Life and people can both take a turn for the worse very quickly. Like a lot of people, I often have the feeling that the world is falling apart, and it's impossible to make a film that is not coloured by that.

A through line in the film is the artist's struggle for recognition, understanding; in parallel with the daily struggles of life. Why was the artist's journey, and the art itself, important to bring into the film?

One of the characters, who's an artist and a mother of three who just split up with their father, is struggling in many ways. Not only for recognition, but above all because she's looking for meaning, trying to be a part of the world in a way that stimulates her. She is working a lot while taking care of her children and making their world go round too. She's probably handling everything, all of the small things, while attempting to figure out what she wants, what her own thing can be. And when she fails, she keeps going and tries again. Her artistic process is very physical. It's actually my own process: every autumn I leave a series of art works outside over the cold months, and I collect them before it gets too warm and moist. It's a nice process to look at: you draw, cut out the forms in the iron, lay them

on the ground, then collect them, clean them, dry them... A lot of the things that happen in the movie in this regard, such as when she discovers the horses have ruined part of her work, or when a goose lays her eggs at the same spot, actually happened to me. So the film is also about an artist trying to figure out how to work in this world, how to work on the things she loves and to live an interesting and meaningful life, to create a routine she finds exciting. And of course it's hard to do the things you want to do and still be able to pay the bills and take care of your family. I was exploring all of that with her character, and sometimes also having fun, because part of being an artist is managing to show your art too. That's why I wrote the scenes with the gallery owner – which are crazy, but then again, the world is crazier than most films. But hers is not the only search for meaning. It is juxtaposed with Magnús' journey: a fisherman, her ex-fiancé and the father of the three children. Magnus is still having a difficult time navigating his feelings. We feel his underlying anger, but also his sadness, his struggle with the separation. His feeling of being excluded from the family's daily life. The world he had built is falling apart. But he's trying to hold on to it, while also trying to find his place in his new life.

Your real children have now appeared in most of your films, including this one. What was special about shooting with them for *The Love That Remains*?

This is the first feature in which the three of them all appear, and moreover they had a big responsibility. They're a big part of the film, with long scenes. They're the third thread of the film – the three siblings and their process of building a figure (a knight) and firing arrows at it. We spend time with and gradually learn to know them and their own perception of what it means to struggle in life. Their energy was crucial for me, I don't think I would have been able to make this film without those three crazy kids and their raw, wild energy. It was a lot of fun, and it was easy to include them because they already knew pretty much everybody on set. Everything felt very homemade.

There's something gentle in all aspects of this film. Did you also have to be gentler in your approach?

Each project has a fragile, strange temperament and personality. It's often an idiosyncratic thing you have to take care of, so that it doesn't fall off and die. There is always a core, and you have to find a way to lift it and make it shine. What was important here was to create a nice, safe atmosphere for the actors and the crew to work and play together. I wanted as small a crew as possible on set, just a couple of people running around. A stripped down, very free shooting. I wrote the script with that idea in mind, without scenes that would be complicated to film, no big set ups. Just the camera, a light tripod, almost no lights. In all aspects, it had to be simple and straightforward, in order to capture the specific energy of the film and to balance everything in the right way – the crazy and the funny, the beautiful and the ugly, the family and nature, the siblings and the parents... That's what I thought about the most: to keep the core of the film alive, to keep the energy right, to keep having fun. Because it's so easy to kill a film.

Why use the cycle of the seasons to give a rhythm to the film? And how does this connect to some of the film's most universal themes – rural life, the passing of time, or raising children?

Time is the filmmaker's main medium and I want to explore that in as many ways as possible. I enjoy writing and filming over a long period of time and using it as a foundation, like a narrative thread throughout the movie. When you're working on a film you're always thinking about it and everything reminds you of it, you see and capture something you saw or heard outside and immediately start writing a scene mentally. This allows me to dream deeper, to lose myself in the project, which is what I love the most about the process. If you do that, it's effortless, you don't have to force anything, to force a narrative, what happens just emerges naturally. Being surprised is a huge part of my exploration as a filmmaker.

An additional 'presence' in the film, almost a character, a narrator, is the music of Harry Hunt. How did it become such a fundamental part of the film?

At first, I thought there would be no music in the film except for the diegetic music. But then I heard an album called "Playing Piano for Dad" by h hunt, and I started listening to it again and again while watching the dailies of the film without the sound. There was a lot of material and we needed to make decisions for the editing, and the atmosphere of the album seemed to fit extremely well with our images. So I contacted him, we got along really well and talked about how we could collaborate on the movie. We used this music way more than we thought we would, because it worked so well – also thanks to my editor Julius Krebs Damsbo, who is brilliant when it comes to using music. He knew I wanted h hunt's music from the beginning of the editing process and we ended up using almost the whole album.

***The Love That Remains* feels like a story that you might have to "find" rather than to plan. Did the film change a lot as you were shooting, editing? How did you go about the shoot and what was the process of working with the actors?**

The interesting thing is that many people think that the script was very different from the final form of the film, but it's not. The only big difference is the addition of the scenes with the children and the knight. I think it's because by the time we started principal photography, I had been developing it for a long time, I was ready to film it; we were already deep inside the project and able to stick to it – while keeping a form of freedom, of course. Regarding the actors, we didn't have a lot of rehearsals but we did work together before filming, in order for them to be comfortable together. It was really important to me that you could really believe they were a family, joking around, spending good and hard times together.

ABOUT HLYNUR PÁLMASSON

Hlynur Pálmason (born September 30, 1984, in Höfn, Iceland) is an Icelandic filmmaker, screenwriter, and visual artist. He began his career in visual arts before transitioning to filmmaking, graduating from The National Film School of Denmark in 2013. He made his feature debut with the well-received *Winter Brothers* (2017) and followed it up with *A White, White Day*, which premiered in Cannes Critics' Week (2019). His third feature film, *Godland* (2022), was selected for Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Festival. His 4th feature, *The Love that Remains*, is premiering in the Cannes Premiere section at Cannes 2025. Pálmason lives and works between Iceland and Denmark with his wife and three children.

CAST

Anna
Magnús
Ída
Grímur
Þorgils
Pálmi
Martin

Saga Garðarsdóttir
Sverrir Guðnason
Ída Mekkín Hlynisdóttir
Grímur Hlynsson
Þorgils Hlynsson
Ingvar Sigurðsson
Anders Mossling

CREW

Hlynur Pálmason
Julius Krebs Damsbo
Frosti Friðriksson
Anton Máni Svansson, Katrína Þors
Nína Grønlund
Björn Viktorsson
Katrína Tersgov
Harry Hunt

Director, Screenwriter, DOP
Editor
Production Design
Producers
Costume Design
Sound Designer
Hair & Make-Up
Composer