

SHE ALWAYS WINS

a film by HAZEL McKIBBIN



Starring HONOR SWINTON BYRNE with ISABELLA THOMPSON and MERCER BOFFEY

Cinematography ALLISON ANDERSON and SHANE SIGLER Production Design JULIA PAYNE and EMMA HALL-MARTIN Editors ALBERT THOLEN and HAZEL McKIBBIN Composer DAN STRINGER
Executive Producers CABIRIA FILMS and ALEX C. LO Co-Producers CLARISSA BLAU and AILSA VANESSA TAPPING Co/Development Producer MIRIAM NEWMAN Post Supervisor STEPHANIE FINE

Produced by LAUREN GOETZMAN and ALEX POLUNIN Written & Directed by HAZEL McKIBBIN



SHE ALWAYS WINS

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Running Time: 9:50

Aspect Ratio: 1.85

Shooting Format: 35mm

Audio Format: 5.1

Color, English

CONTACT INFORMATION

WRITER & DIRECTOR Hazel McKibbin

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PRODUCER Alex Polunin

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LOGLINE

Stella views her new relationship through her sister's eyes and, for the first time, understands that she is making herself small to accommodate her partner's ego.

SYNOPSIS

Stella brings older boyfriend Luke to meet her family at her parents cottage in the Welsh countryside. While waiting for them to arrive, Stella and Luke have lunch with Stella's younger sister Lola. When deciding how to spend the rest of the afternoon, Lola suggests that Stella teach Luke how to play backgammon. As the game begins, Luke is uncharacteristically on the back foot. He is not familiar with the game, nor is he comfortable needing to be taught anything. Lola plays as the quiet observer. She watches her sister make a move that lets Luke win and is disgusted by her weakness. When the game has ended, Luke thinks he's won and the relationship's order is restored. But when Lola reveals the truth, the relationship's fragility resurfaces. Stella let Luke win and they wordlessly realize that their relationship is untenable.

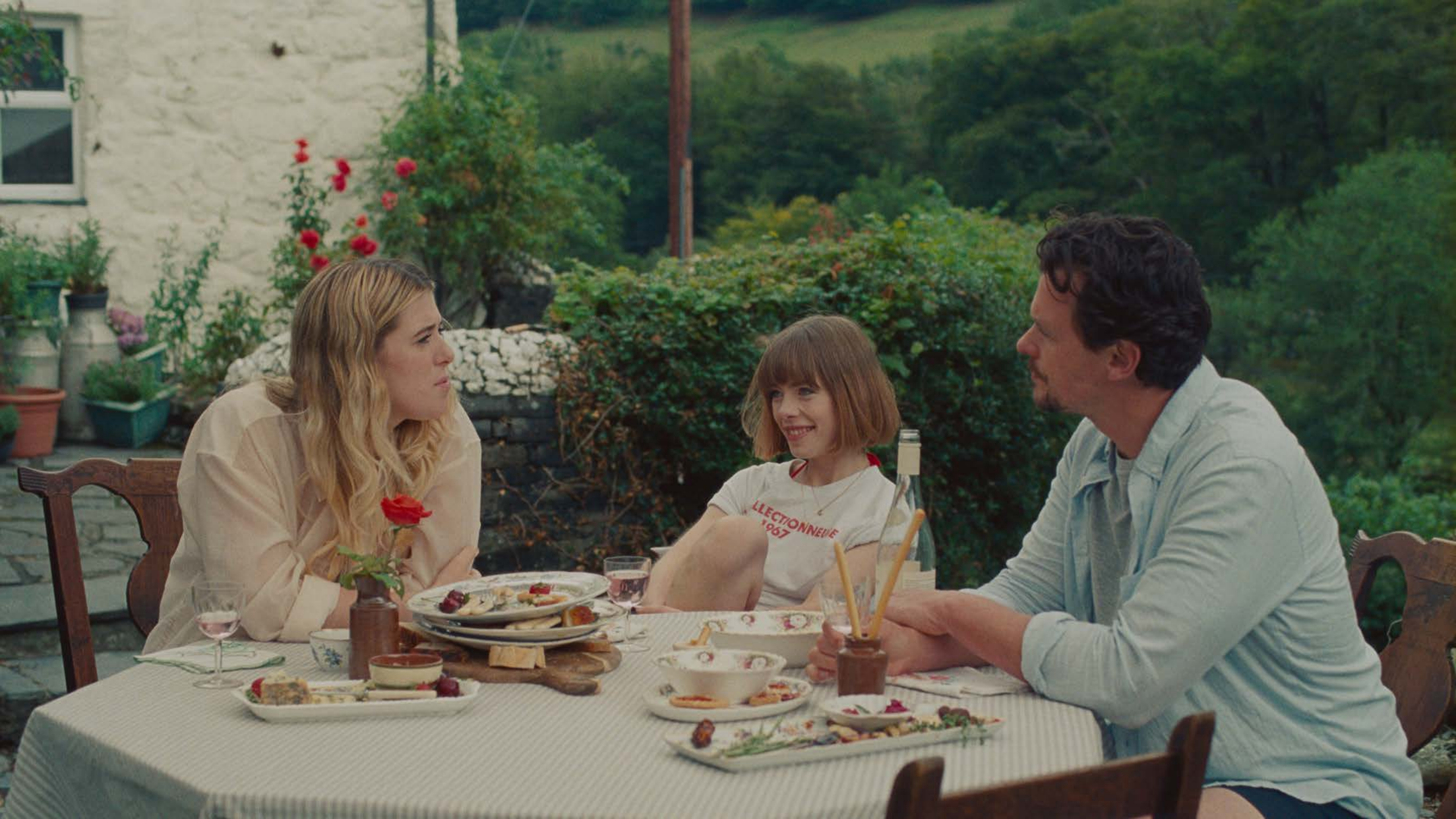




DIRECTORS STATEMENT

She Always Wins is an intimate portrait of Stella and Luke's relationship: a window to see the couple's dynamic through an apparently innocuous backgammon game. It all happens in a single afternoon during a moment of tranquility that brings the undercurrents of their relationship to the surface. Lola sees the dynamics before they do and is quietly determined to reveal them. The question posed at the start of the film is: will their relationship survive meeting Stella's family? Ultimately they stumble at the first hurdle: the game. Essential to the script is the triangle between Stella, Luke and Lola. The sisters know each other intimately and completely. Luke and Stella share a different kind of intimacy that Lola is determined to test. The characters dip in and out of the film, shifting and changing the dynamics as they do so. They behave differently depending on who else is around - listening and observing and constantly gauging each others reactions and adjusting their own. Stella is only able to be alone in the final frames of the film: once she has failed Lola's test and Luke has failed hers.

Through this film, I am looking to explore the fragility of masculinity and gendered power dynamics in relationships. Stella and Luke exist in roles that are defined by their age gap and Luke's increased level of experience in their shared industry. As they move out of their regular life and into the world of Stella's family home, these roles morph and evolve, upsetting the delicate balance that their relationship unknowingly depends upon. *She Always Wins* builds on the themes and tone that I am developing in my work; my first short film *Doublespeak* featured a woman struggling almost silently within an oppressive corporate structure built on inequity and power imbalances. I am interested in female characters who aren't able to be active and drive the story overtly, but have a quiet power over their destinies. Ultimately, I feel these smaller, subtextual dramas reveal more about the nuanced ways that humans relate to one another.



PRESS RELEASE

New short film **She Always Wins** follows Stella as she views her new relationship through her sister's eyes and, for the first time, understands that she is making herself small to accommodate her partner's ego. It is a story about the myriad ways that women diminish themselves around the men in their lives.

According to the UN, we are living in a moment where 'progress towards equal power and equal rights for women remains elusive. No country has achieved gender equality, and the COVID-19 crisis threatens to erode the limited gains that have been made.' Filmmaker Hazel McKibbin seeks to draw attention to the small ways in which women are complicit in upholding the status quo. **She Always Wins** is based on McKibbin's own experience of navigating a relationship with a significant age gap. It is a film about power: about giving it up because you know that if you don't, it will be taken by force. It's about making yourself small so that your partner feels big because that's what they need for the relationship to exist peacefully. During an ordinary afternoon, Stella analyzes every word and action exchanged with her boyfriend Luke over a game of backgammon, forcing her to realize that her relationship with him is no longer tenable. We live in this elongated moment with Stella, deeply connected to her growing observations of Luke and Luke's growing insecurities of Stella, feeling each nuanced word and threatening action.

Shot on 35mm film, the visuals of **She Always Wins** are textured, tangible and rooted in Stella's perspective. The camera is always moving until the moment the couple realize that they aren't meant to be. We freeze on Stella as she emerges from the water into a world different than when she dove beneath the surface. The backgammon board is key: the strategic maneuvers are metaphorical for the ways in which Stella and Luke are each trying to negotiate their age gap and the power and gender dynamics in their relationship.

McKibbin wrote and directed **She Always Wins**, and it was produced by Alex Polunin and Lauren Goetzman with a British/American crew. The film was shot mostly in Snowdonia in North Wales and Allison Anderson and Shane Sigler served as the directors of photography. Honor Swinton Byrne played the lead role of Stella in her first entirely scripted role. Isabella Thompson played the role of Stella's sister Lola and Mercer Boffey played Luke. The film's running time is 10 minutes.

She Always Wins will premiere at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival.



KEY BIOS

WRITER & DIRECTOR

HAZEL McKIBBIN is an award-winning British-American writer and director based between North London and Brooklyn. Hazel is a BAFTA Newcomer and pursued an MFA in Screenwriting and Directing from Columbia University. Trained as an editor, she finds herself drawn towards realism, often through a feminist lens, and the idea that compelling stories can be created from ordinary relationships and interactions. Her directorial debut **DOUBLESPEAK** is featured on Short of the Week, is a Vimeo Staff Pick Best of the Month: July 2020 and had its festival premiere at the Sundance 2021 Film Festival before screening at festivals worldwide.

LEAD

HONOR SWINTON BYRNE is a young British actress who grew up in Scotland. At the age of 13, she was directed by Luca Guadagnino in a cameo role in the feature film **I AM LOVE**. Her second foray into acting was the expansive lead role of Julie in feature film **THE SOUVENIR** which later followed the sequel. This was directed by Joanna Hogg and placed her opposite Tom Burke. The films received vast critical acclaim, and was nominated for 52 Awards in total, including 8 British Independent Film Award nominations. It won a Sundance award, two London Film Critics Circle Awards, and a National Board of Review Award.

PRODUCER

ALEX POLUNIN is the founder and managing director of the Enchanted Isles Group, a twice BAFTA-nominated film and television production outfit which has produced some of the UK's most prestigious short films of the last half decade, including: **BRITISH BY THE GRACE OF GOD** (BBC/Premiere: Locarno), **FATHER OF THE BRIDE** (BBC & Amazon/Premiere: SXSW), **KINGDOM COME** (BBC/Premiere: Venice), **EGUNGUN** (Masquerade) (Canal+/Premiere: TIFF & Sundance) and **SHE ALWAYS WINS** (Premiere: TIFF 2022). Alex currently has a slate of feature films in development with BBC Film and Film4 whilst also enjoying a first-look television deal with BBC Drama.

PRODUCER

LAUREN GOETZMAN is an Israeli-American producer based in Los Angeles. Lauren earned her BA in Economics and Creative Writing from Wesleyan University before continuing her film education at Columbia University where she received an MFA in Creative Production. Her work centers around raw, often female-driven stories, ones that address migration and cultural identity through subtle drama. She hopes to make films that move people to thought, and unify audiences of all cultures and identities. Previously, she produced **BRUISER**, which premiered at the Sundance 2021 Film Festival.

CAST

Honor Swinton Byrne
Isabella Thompson
Mercer Boffey

CREW

Writer & Director: Hazel McKibbin
Producers: Lauren Goetzman, Alex Polunin
Co-Producers: Clarissa Blau, Ailsa Vanessa Tapping
Miriam Newman
Post Production Supervisor: Stephanie Fine
Associate Producers: Crispin Spinks, AC Smallwood
Casting Director: Hannah Marie Williams
Costume Design: Hillary Sproul
Assistant Director: AC Smallwood
Script Supervisor: Dhruv Sud
Cinematography: Allison Anderson, Shane Sigler
Production Design: Julia Payne, Emma Hall-Martin
Hair & Makeup: Gracie Cox
Editors: Albert Tholen, Hazel McKibbin
Color Producer: Maria Webb at Forager Collective
Colorist: Jacob McKee
Composer: Dan Stringer

Sound Mix: Peter Russell
Hand Double - Honor Swinton Byrne: Hillary Sproul
Hand Double - Mercer Boffey: Carlos Morrow
1st AC: Oliver Pearson Pajtra, Beau Michael Grantland
Film Loader: Aida Garcia Vega, Asia Li
Sound Recordist: Tom Fischer, Rider Laskin
Lighting Design: Ariel Nehorayoff, Dino Davaros
Key Grip: Rome Petersson, Daniel Haslup
Best Boy: Thomas Caminada
Transportation: Liam Groundwater
Production Assistants: Robin Elthringham, Olivia Peralta
Ryan Levitt
Catering: Emma Parry
Deivos Films Development Executive: Miriam Newman
Deivos Films Business & Legal Affairs: Richard Mansell
Deivos Films Production Accountant: John O'Neill
Assistants to the Producer: Beth Farn, Katie Maughn

