

Film Notes: Season 2025–26

19th January 2026

When Autumn Falls (Quand vient l'automne)

Cert 15 | 1h 42m

Country: France, 2024

Director: François Ozon

Stars: Hélène Vincent, Josiane Balasko, Ludivine Sagnier, Pierre Lottin

Language: French



Synopsis

In a quiet Burgundy village, grandmother Michelle looks forward to time with her grandson—until an “innocent mistake” with foraged mushrooms shatters the fragile family dynamic. Is it an accident, confusion, or something darker? As Michelle’s loneliness deepens, she finds unexpected companionship when her friend Marie-Claude’s son Vincent returns after prison, drawing her into a web of affection, suspicion, and buried history.

Context and Craft

When Autumn Falls is one of Ozon’s characteristically slippery genre blends: part rural family drama, part “cosy” mystery, part psychological thriller. Tension is built less through plot mechanics than through ambiguity. Village routines turn faintly menacing as accusations and motives blur. Reviewers have remarked on its classic French suspense influences (Claude Chabrol/Georges Simenon) and on the film’s tonal tightrope: gentleness and warmth coexist with insinuation and dread. Much of the film’s power comes from performance and withholding: Michelle’s inner life is readable yet unknowable, and key events are framed to keep moral certainty just out of reach.

Critical Reception

- “The implied Chabrol-esque horror is made to coexist with an odd mood of gentleness and even sentimentality as we witness the loneliness of an ageing woman with secrets and regrets in the autumn of her life.” — *The Guardian*
- “That it is still worthwhile owes largely to the sympathetic, sinuous performance of Hélène Vincent, in the lead role of a grand-mère who may not be as simply sweet as she first appears.” — *Wall Street Journal*
- “In the great Ozon catalogue, this seems like an incidental work... [yet] fascinating and the more you think about it, the more there is to think about.” — *Mark Kermode*

Conclusion

When Autumn Falls is less a straight mystery than a study in moral fog: a portrait of ageing, family resentment, and the stories people construct to live with guilt and desire. Ozon uses the mushroom incident as a deceptively simple spark that exposes old fractures; he then lets uncertainty do the work, pushing viewers to constantly reassess Michelle, Valérie, and Vincent. Whether you read it as a tender drama with sinister undertones or a thriller disguised as village-life realism, it’s anchored by Hélène Vincent’s quietly commanding performance and Ozon’s knack for making the ordinary feel menacing