



The Quiet Girl

94 min

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There is so much power in the understated, in the restrained. English subtitled, Irish-language film *The Quiet Girl* harnesses all that might and delivers a tender and poignant coming-of-age story about the strength of love and affection. Beautifully shot and superbly performed, its delicate story about a neglected young girl is a testament to the compassion of writer and director Colm Bairéad. He makes filmmaking seem effortless, but you know so much care and love went into this work. There's a persuasive artistry in every frame, every line of dialogue, and every word not said. Bairéad understands that sometimes it's the silences between words that speak louder. In 1981 rural Ireland, nine-year-old Cait (Catherine Clinch) is one of four children, born to a father (Michael Patric) who has gambled away the family's red heifer and a downtrodden mother (Kate Nic Chonaonaigh) pregnant with her fifth baby. Neglected, bullied at school and falling behind on her reading, the unimposing and quiet Cait is one more "problem" her parents don't want to deal with and is sent by them to live with some older relatives, Eibhlin (Carrie Crowley) and Sean (Andrew Bennett), for the summer. Her eyes downcast, confusion etched across her face at the handover, her father barely acknowledges her existence, offering no reassurances or any words about these strangers (to her) that she's been left with. When Eibhlin is kind and warm to Cait, gingerly sloughing away the dirt from her legs in a bath, cocooning her in clean clothes, or not berating her for wetting the bed, the young girl is bemused. That confusion soon morphs, but it's a subtle change. It's all the body language – a slight relaxing of her shoulders, a loosening of her steps and her eyeline is raised. Cait can now look people in the face. The emotional emergence is reflected in *The Quiet Girl's* visuals. Director of photography Kate McCullough incrementally brightens the colour palette so that everything in this idyllic rural setting takes on a different sheen. Just as Cait's world lights up, so does what the audience sees. *The Quiet Girl* is a sophisticated work with a languid intensity, for even its simple character journey is a nuanced one with layers and bumps. For Cait, that there are now people in her life who care for her isn't without complexity. And there's a repressed grief that percolates beneath Eibhlin and Sean, a secret which contextualises everything that goes on their dairy farm. *The Quiet Girl* is a film of grace and empathy, fuelled by a remarkable debut from the young Clinch, who showcases a maturity well beyond what's expected. Her performance is a real collaboration between Bairéad and her innate talent – the subtlety of her expressive eyes reminds one of Saoirse Ronan's early roles. Everything about *The Quiet Girl* lives up to Cait's sobriquet, an elegantly balanced drama that weaponises the power of what's not said.

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