

Ordinary People in Extraordinary Situations – Growing Down

Hungarian director Bálint Dániel Sós made his feature debut with *Growing Down / Minden Rendben*, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival 2025, competing for the Perspective Award. The script, written in collaboration with Gergő V. Nagy, explores the aftermath of a potentially fatal accident caused by a 12-year-old boy. His father is the sole witness of the event, being forced to choose between sheltering his son from a correctional center and telling the truth. Picking the first options will turn out to lead to more damage in the long term.

The story revolves around young Dénes, played with carefully calibrated emotions by Ágoston Sáfrány. While his mother died some time ago, he and his older brother seem to have a quiet and stable life raised by their father Sándor (actor and director Szabolcs Hajdu - present at the 31th edition of the European Palić Film Festival with the film *Power*), who is trying to move on with another woman, named Klára (Anna Háy). Her daughter Sári (Zonga Jakab-Aponyi) is getting along well with her future stepsiblings, going as far as organizing her birthday party together with Dénes. But when the three of them start to tease each other and run around the empty pool in the backyard, a darker side of the 12-year-old seems to come out. When Sándor watches as Sári smashes her head on the cold concrete, his paternal instincts kick in, prompting him to retain any information regarding the involvement of his child.

Despite a loving and attentive father, trauma cannot be buried. Past anger issues of the parent do not help in this case, as they are passed on to the kid. Deep underneath Dénes' calm surface lies a latent anger screaming to get out. He either tries to facilitate this process in a healthy way or keep everything inside, by training in boxing and listening to classical music respectively. The roughness of the sport finds itself in complete antithesis with the delicacy of the artistic endeavor – also inherited from his father, an amateur pianist. This is what makes them both such complex characters. But trying to control the symptoms of a disease does not eventually cure the root cause.

The black-and-white aesthetic of the film gives room for all the nuances of the storytelling, showing the audience how ordinary people can often find themselves in extraordinary situations, where nothing is actually black and white. Kristóf Deák's image is accompanied by the sometimes intentionally overwhelming soundtrack featuring pieces by Bach and Debussy, but also original music composed by Máriusz Fodor and Ambrus Tövisházi. They intersect harmoniously in the one-cut sequence following the accident, with the camera flying between frightened faces and restless bodies, and the music getting louder and louder until it reaches a climax point.

While the ending resembles a happy one, it reminds audiences of another Hungarian film released this year, *A Hunt for Hedgehogs* by Mihály Schwechtje, which follows a nanny who chooses not to tell the child's parents that he might have ingested two fridge magnets. Both dramas make a very clear point. Everything is not what it seems and even though the situations prove not as tragic in the end, what matters is how the characters choose to act in the face of potential danger. The truth may be hard to confess, but it also sets people free. And it can literally save lives or relationships.