

Fallen Leaves [12A]

2023 Finland 81 mins

UK released **1 December 2023**

Director **Aki Kaurismäki**

Screenplay **Aki Kaurismäki**

Cinematography **Timo Salminen**

Music

Cast **Alma Pöysti** (Ansa); **Jussi Vatanen** (Holappa); **Janne Hyytiäinen** (Huotari); **Nappu Koivu** (Liisa); **Matti Onnismaa** (iron workshop's boss); **Simon Al-Bazoon** (net café keeper); **Martti Suosalo** (Ansa's boss); **Sakari Kuosmanen** (a man in inn); **Maria Heiskanen** (high nurse); **Alina Tomnikov** (Tonja)

Aki Kaurismäki is the Finnish director who is notable for being not simply one of the directors who is always welcome in the Cannes competition, but also is one of the rarer subset who actually makes funny films; that is, actually-funny and not just arthouse-funny. *Fallen Leaves* is another of Kaurismäki's beguiling and delightful cinephile comedies, featuring foot-tapping rock'n'roll. It's romantic and sweet-natured, in a deadpan style that in no way undermines or ironises the emotions involved and with some sharp things to say about contemporary politics.

I found myself rooting for the hero and heroine here in an uncomplicated way that I hadn't for any other film at Cannes. It's something which should be adored by Finnish film fanciers – who will incidentally savour the silent cameo from Finnish director and Cannes competition veteran Juho Kuosmanen – but it's really for everyone and despite the title, this is a movie with springtime in its heart.

Ansa (Alma Pöysti) is a woman who works in a supermarket on an exploitative zero-hours contract, and resents that part of her job is to throw away perfectly good food at the end of the day; a sullen security guard clocks

her giving stuff like this to desperate hungry people, and she is fired for trying to take home an expired sandwich.

Later Ansa finds herself in a karaoke bar where she meets a construction worker called Holappa (Jussi Vatanen), and there is a heartmelting connection between these two lonely people. They go on a very successful date to the cinema, although a subsequent series of terrible mishaps means that their relationship could be doomed – and here Kaurismäki may intend us to appreciate a filmic echo with *An Affair to Remember* with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr. Moreover, Holappa is a drinker, perhaps an alcoholic, and the booze brings out a nasty side. Idiotically, he doesn't quite appreciate that drink is imperilling his chance at happiness with his soulmate.

There's something else too: periodically the characters will turn on the radio for the news (no one appears to have anything as modern as a smartphone or even a TV – the action could as well be happening in the early 60s); this is all about the Russian attack on Ukraine, which fills the listener with resentment, depression and defiance. And undoubtedly Kaurismäki intends us to realise something very specific: Finland is on the border with Russia. Fear of Putinism is not the distant matter it might be in the UK, America or even Germany: for Finland, Putin's troops are very close by. The war is clouding Finland's sense of wellbeing, but Finns are still intent on carrying on. *Fallen Leaves* is a film with a big heart, and absurd and cartoony as it may be, it fills you with a feelgood glow.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 22 May 2023

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