

The Summer Book [PG]

2024 Finland/UK/USA 90 mins

UK released **7 August 2026**

Director **Charlie McDowell**

Screenplay **Robert Jones**, (based on book by **Tove Jansson**)

Cinematography **Sturla Brandth Grøvlen**

Music **Hania Rani**

Cast Cast: **Glenn Close** (Grandmother); **Anders**

Danielsen Lie (Father); **Emily Matthews** (Sophia)

“The Summer Book” is a haiku of a movie, conveying profound thoughts about time, memory, loss, and nature through a simplified, meditative, cinematic language of exquisite images and gentle music. Most of the film is just three characters in one setting, an isolated island in the Finnish archipelago. It is based on the 1972 book of the same title by Finnish author Tove Jansson (best known for her books about the nature-loving Moomins), inspired by her own family: a series of brief vignettes about three generations over the course of one summer.

Close plays the grandmother, with tightly braided, iron-coloured hair, walking heavily with a cane. She is observant, opinionated, but affectionate, and devoted to her young granddaughter, Sophia (a lovely, wonderfully natural debut from then seven-year-old Emily Matthews).

Their moments together are the heart of the film. The third member of the family is just billed as Father (Anders Danielsen Lie), Sophia’s dad, Grandmother’s son, and, like Jansson, an artist and illustrator.

As the movie begins, the trio arrives at the island in a small boat, and we see from their easy familiarity with the cabin that it is an annual family retreat. As Father walks through the door, he sees a straw hat on the coatrack, and Grandmother sees him see it. She quietly takes it from him and says, “I’ll find somewhere.” Sophia does not notice, but it tells us that the wearer of that hat is gone, and Father is grieving. He and Sophia have a relationship of easy comfort when he has time for her, and they laugh together when she tosses seaweed at him. But he is distant, and at

one point she tells Grandmother, “He doesn’t love me since she died.” Later, Grandmother admonishes him to try harder.

The rest of the film is less direct, more elliptical, poetic, and meditative, with breathtaking images of sunrises and (very late in the evening at that latitude) sunsets, waves, sunlight dappling the water, and vegetation, including a poplar Father plants because it was his wife’s favourite. The absence of any technology other than a failing outboard motor on the boat gives the story a timelessness, as though it always was and always will be untouched by the world or even by time itself. Over the closing credits, you can see the real-life Jansson, her hair decorated with Midsummer flowers like Sophia and Grandmother in the movie, on the island that inspired the story.

Glenn Close gives one of the best performances of her career, conveying everything about the character with her eyes, her determined hobble over the rough terrain, pulling the hairpins from her braids, the touch of her hand on Sophia’s hair and then, near the end, on Father’s. The perspectives of the older woman trying to hold on to her memories and be present for her family and the child who dictates a story and then asked if she wants to hear it read back, says blithely, “Save it for my grandchildren,” evoke our own experiences of long summer days. These years go by too fast, and we never have enough time with the people we love.

Nell Minow, *Roger Ebert*, 19 September 2025, (abridged)

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