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# C R I E S   A N D   W H I S P E R S .

INGMAR BERGMAN

Produced by: Cinematograph AB and,  
The Swedish Filminstitute.

Starring: HARRIET ANDERSSON  
KARI SYLWAN  
INGRID THULIN  
LIV ULLMANN

The setting is an estate - half palace, half mansion. It was built perhaps sometime during the Eighteenth Century to serve as dumping place for the mistress of some high-born gentleman. I don't know... It's not too large, and not too small. There's an old not especially well tended park there; too, ablaze in autumn splendor. Everything is distant, still, a bit desolate at times.

The period is the turn of the century. The women's dresses are opulent, lavish, concealing and revealing. The leading characters in the drama are four in number. Four women.

AGNES (Harriet Andersson) is the contemplated owner of the estate. She has remained there since her parents died. She has never got around to moving away: she has belonged there since birth and has allowed her life to flow along quietly and indiscernibly without meaning or misfortune. She has vague artistic ambitions: she paints a little; she plays the piano a little; it's all a bit touching. No man has made his appearance in her life. For her, love has been a shut-in and never-manifested secret. At the age of 37, she has developed cancer of the uterus and is now preparing to vanish from the world as quietly and submissively as she has lived in it. She spends most of the day in her bed, her big bed in her parents' lovely but overdecorated bedroom. But she can still get up now and then, until the pains strike her to the ground. She doesn't complain much, and she doesn't think God is cruel. In her prayers, she turns to Christ in humble expectation. She is severely emaciated, but her abdomen has swelled up as though she were in an advanced state of pregnancy.



KARIN (Ingrid Thulin), her 2-years-older sister, made a wealthy marriage and moved to another part of the country. She soon recognized that her marriage was a mistake. Her husband (Georg Årlin), who is 20 years older, is physically and psychologically repulsive to her. She is mother to five children, but nevertheless seems untouched by motherhood and marital boredom. She presents an impeccable facade and is regarded as haughty, distant. Her loyalty to her marriage is unshakable. Deep beneath a veneer of self-control, she conceals an impotent hatred of her husband and a continuing rage against life. Her anxiety and desperation never come forth except in her dreams, which every now and then torment her. In the midst of this tumult of bridled fury, she carries within herself a talent -- for dedication intimacy, and longing for closeness. This enormous resource lies immovably enclosed and unused.

MARIA (Liv Ullmann) is the youngest sister; she too has a wealthy and stable marriage, to a handsome and successful man (Henning Moritzen) of suitable social standing. She has a 5-year-old daughter and is herself like a spoiled child: gentle, playful, smiling, with a constantly active curiosity and love of pleasure. She is very fixed upon her own beauty and her body's possibilities for enjoyment. She lacks all conception of the world she lives in; she is sufficient unto herself and is never tormented by her own or other's establishment of moral limits. Her only law is to be attractive.

ANNA (Kari Sylwan) is the servant in the house. She is about 30 years old. As a young girl, she gave birth to a daughter, and Agnes took care of her and the child. This resulted in Anna's tying herself to Agnes. A tacit, never-expressed friendship was established between the two lonely women. The child died at the age of 3, but the relationship between Anna and Agnes continued. Anna is very quiet, very timid, inaccessible. But she is ever-present; she sees, searches, and listens. Everything about Anna bespeaks weight: her body, her face, her mouth, her look. But she doesn't speak. Perhaps she doesn't think either.

The basic situation when the film begins is this:

Agnes' illness has suddenly worsened, and according to the doctor (Erland Josephson), she cannot live much longer. Her two sisters have come to her deathbed.