



# Everybody knows

**Director:** Asghar Farhadi

**Country:** Spain

**Date:** 2018

A review by Anthony Lane for *The New Yorker*.

It seems like only yesterday that Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem were wrestling a pig on a highway and making love beneath a cutout of a giant bull. Such were the joys of “Jamón, Jamón” (1992), the first of nine films on which they have collaborated. Bardem and Cruz married in 2010, and one clever touch in “Everybody Knows,” their latest movie, is that they do not play impassioned lovers. They play ex-lovers, Paco and Laura, who were together in their youth but have since married other people. Old flames have a habit, though, of refusing to be snuffed out. Ex appeal is real.

The setting is a Spanish village, and, if you’re expecting it to be dozy, the first half of the film is designed to prove you wrong. The place is a hive, and trying to understand who is who feels like part of the buzz. Slowly, things become clearer. Laura lives in Argentina with her husband, Alejandro (Ricardo Darín), although, for whatever reason, he hasn’t made the trip. Together with their children, teen-aged Irene (Carla Campa) and her younger brother, Diego (Iván Chavero), Laura has flown to Spain to attend the wedding of her sister Ana (Inma Cuesta), and to catch up with their aging father. The family used to own some local land, which was sold to Paco. With his wife, Bea (Bárbara Lennie), he has toiled to turn it into a flourishing vineyard.



All of the above, plus a busload of additional guests, show up for the wedding, which kicks off with a cheerful church ceremony and continues, as night descends, with a wine-fuelled wingding. Paco, ever the party boy, leads the revelry, while Irene, something of a wild child, who has spent much of the day flirting with a kid named Felipe (Sergio Castellanos), drinks too much and has to be put to bed. Later, Laura goes upstairs and checks on her. She’s not there.

The director of the movie is Asghar Farhadi, and it’s the second time that he has ventured abroad in pursuit of a theme, away from his native Iran. “The Past” (2013) was set in France, and even “The Salesman” (2016)—which, like his masterwork, “A Separation” (2011), won the Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film—felt the pressure of external influence, concerned as it was with a staging of “Death of a Salesman” in Tehran. Farhadi, whose morally searching tales are evidently matched by his diplomatic arts, has succeeded thus far in keeping the Islamic authorities on his side, but you wonder about their reaction to “Everybody Knows,” with its snatches of Catholic liturgy, its rumors of sexual indiscretion, and its merry flood of booze.

Unwarranted absences, in Farhadi’s films, are nothing new. “About Elly” (2009) tells of a woman who goes missing during a weekend gathering of law-school pals, and of the suspicions that then arise. Those are mild, however, compared with the squall of recriminations that follows the disappearance of Irene. Her mother, in Cruz’s hands, and in the teary glare of her eyes, is transformed into a mater dolorosa, and her pain appears to be harshened, not soothed, by the arrival of her husband from Argentina. A ransom of three hundred thousand euros is demanded, by text message, on the assumption that Alejandro is a wealthy man; in fact, he’s a former drunk (the film is rife with ex-somethings) who hasn’t worked in two

years. The only one who can raise the cash is Paco, but why should he be involved? After all, the gone girl is another man's child, is she not?

To a faintly embarrassing extent, what we have here are the components of a basic whodunnit: the lonely location, the clannish secrets, and the herrings that grow redder by the minute. The kidnappers, naturally, threaten to dispose of their hostage if the cops are called. At one point, with almost all the possible perpetrators corralled in one room, I prayed that Señora Marple would come bustling in and start quizzing them, over a small sherry, as to where exactly they were on the night of the vanishing. Farhadi's forte, however, is not the solving of puzzles, and his one narrative novelty—a drone that hovers over the festivities and films them, supposedly to give the family an overview as a keepsake—is largely ignored. (Imagine what Michael Haneke would do with such a device.) Mischief and miscalculation, in Farhadi's world, are far too messy to be cleaned up by a mere sleuth, and it gave me no great satisfaction to guess the guilty party with an hour to go.

Here's the thing. "A Separation," which is about divorce proceedings and the care of an elderly parent, is twice as tense as "Everybody Knows," which features a full-blown crime. Could the change of scenery, from Iran to the unfamiliar ground of Spain, be responsible for that slackening? Maybe so. No drone, however inquisitive, and no glances, however loaded, between blood relations can rival the stern gaze of a theocratic state. The first things we see in the film are the cogs of the town clock, grinding away in the belfry, and it crossed my mind that Farhadi could have planted his film in the same spot but wound the clock back by six or seven decades, to an age when Franco still ruled and the Church held solemn sway. He might then have been able to conjure, as a master of daily trepidations, a mood more suited to his skills. You never know.



Yet the movie is not to be skipped. You should sample its mixture of bacchanal and gall, and revel in Farhadi's dependable deftness, as he sketches and frames his collection of characters. Before the crisis comes, for example, we get to glimpse Paco through an open doorway—dancing in a dark street, tapping out a few steps in a downpour. He's definitely the worse for wear, and all the better for it. If "Everybody Knows" has a heart, it lies not in the veiled mystery of Irene but in the solid figure of Bardem: shaggy, noble, rooted, not entirely civilized, and still Cruz-crazy after all these years.

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