



And watch an exclusive clip of her performance as the titular Mommy of *Goodnight Mommy*



By [Clay Skipper](#)

Last month, we first caught wind of a [trailer for a movie](#) called “Goodnight Mommy”—which, in our highbrow, intellectual movie-review parlance, we deemed “straight fucked up.”

It hits theaters this Friday, September 11, and it is indeed *straight fucked up*—and then some. But, it being a horror movie, we mean that in the most complimentary way possible. It crawls to its climax, with a slow-burning tension built on beautiful shots of the Austrian/Czech countryside, tangible but unseen terrors lurking in its dimly lit corners. It’s a surprising climax, one that grows organically from the relationship between two young twin boys and the woman, played by Susanne Wuest, who was once their mother. She might still be, if only they could see beneath the bandages covering her recently reconstructed face and the strange behavior she’s brought home from the hospital. You can watch an exclusive clip below to get a glimpse of Wuest in her dark, beautiful portrayal of the mother.



We caught up with her recently while she watched the sunset in the Alps to discuss the film she says not to watch before bedtime—and ask what the hell it's like to let a live cockroach crawl into your mouth. (And she was as charming on the phone as she is sinister in the movie.)

The first thing I have to ask you: Did that cockroach really crawl into your mouth in the movie?

Yes, it did. I have to explain that a bit. I was very much aware that there would be roaches. I'm not really afraid of bugs, but I thought, "Okay, this is something different." So I asked them if I could have some of them right from the start when they were babies. They grew up with me, for two months. They were very friendly, very clean roaches. One was named Matilda. The other was Nermal. And I trained with them for quite awhile.

When you say you "trained" with them...

I had them crawling around my face. And I had a lot of funny memories about that. Because even if you know them, you do this for the first time, and you go like, "Ahhh, I have a huge bug in my face!" *[laughs]* And they didn't really appreciate it in the beginning. They gave me this "I thought we were friends" look. Like really very irritated. It's not natural for them to crawl into your mouth, because it's something close to being eaten, which they don't like. But fortunately, she did it at the second take. And when I watch it now, I think, "Oh my god, she looks huge." I didn't realize that when we were filming, but now when I watch it, I'm like, "Whoa, that's gross."

So was it Matilda or Nermal who crawled in your mouth?

It was Matilda. And if you really pay attention to the credits, they've got "Stunt Roach."

Well with the exception of the cockroaches, what was it like being out in such an isolated setting?

Frankly, it was one of the most challenging things about that whole shoot, because this was at the Austrian/Czech border. I thought that I better not leave that location for the full shoot, so I spent, I think in total, three months. And there's nothing. There's *absolutely* nothing. No cell phone reception. No Internet. For three months, I had no one—*no one*—to talk about this whole thing. I think after three weeks, I thought, "I'm going crazy."

"They were very friendly, very clean roaches. One was named Matilda."





Was it eerie?

It was. Because I grew up in the countryside, but I would consider myself a city person. There is no electricity. It is really beautiful. You can see the stars and everything. At the same time, if you're out there alone, and you're not used to that, then the silence and being isolated can be very creepy. You can have something absolutely stunning and at the same time so horrifying in front of you.

And that's true about the movie: Despite being a horror movie, it's strikingly beautiful.

The cinematographer, Martin Gschlacht, did an amazing job filming that house. There is a big calmness that exists over the whole setting, The house is a character in this film. I think the calmer and more silent something evil happens, the worse it gets. Because you can see it creeping in, but it's not really in front of your nose. But you sense it from the very first moment on. Something really horrible is going on.

Lukas and Elias Schwars play your character's twin sons. How much of that dark, twisted side of reality that you and the boys were exploring onscreen weaved its way into your off-screen reality, living out there?

The boys and I had a very playful relationship and connection so whatever was going on between us seemed very, very lighthearted. It only appeared to me what exactly what we were doing when I saw the film for the first time. I thought it was really scary—much scarier than while we were doing it.



How do you prepare for a role that dark?

I start thinking very, very little thoughts, which I allow to grow. In that case, I was thinking that this person was at a point in her life where she thought she didn't live up to her dreams. Every one of us can relate to that. You have dreams. You have hopes when you're 20. You expect your life to go a certain direction. And in her position, you might find out that nothing has worked out the way you hoped or dreamed for. And if you think about these things a longer time, then you start to do what that character does. Which means that you distance yourself from the rest of the world because you feel betrayed. I think about little things like that. And these things can grow quite heavy.

Was this sense of a crisis, or a sense of yearning for lost time something you've felt?

Thank God, no. *[laughs]* I'm far, far away from that in my personal life. And I don't have children either. But I can relate to being heartbroken. And I think that's a very similar feeling. The beautiful thing about acting also is that you can create this other person and then just relax and it's taking a life by itself. When I watch the film now, I don't recognize myself anymore. It's really creepy. I see myself moving and obviously, that's me, but it is so detached in a personal way.

So when filming's over at the end of the day, are you able to remove yourself from that character or is it something that kind of hovers right there with you?

Parts of it stay with you. If you start crying heavily in the morning, at 8:00—because this is when filming starts—and you keep doing this the whole day, of course you're exhausted in the evening. But I didn't go home and torture the kids. *[laughs]*

You talked a little bit about wanting to test your limits. What did you find, where are your limits?

Well, I certainly reached a kind of limit with this kind of isolation. But it was certainly—it was like climbing Mt. Everest in a way. You stand at the end on that mountain, and you go, "Okay, I just did it." I don't know how I really ended up there.

Was there a physical challenge to it?

It was quite a challenge physically. There was a lake which you can't see in the film and I was running around that lake twice a day, like 10 kilometers every day. And then I called a boot camp and asked one of the trainers if he would train with me everyday in the morning from 6:00 in the morning to 8:00, outside. To be really, really fit and be able to be tied to a bed.

And *how* do you train for being tied to a bed?

[*laughs*] Well, you take care of your back muscles and your abs. You train a lot.

What was it like doing a movie like this, that's so silent, so slow-building, with so few actors?

We worked without a script. They told me the story but I told them that I trust them and I don't need a script. So I spent a lot of time, talking with them, and just really getting to know each other. And that was beautiful. They did write a script but they never showed it to the kids. The kids haven't seen the movie. They still don't know what's going on. They haven't seen it yet.

How did that work, without them having a script?

It was very playful. They would be told about a certain situation but then they would be left completely alone and it was just me and them in a room. It was a lot of improvisation. Basically, playing a game about them wanting to find out if I'm their mom or not. That was *beautiful*. These kids were really *beautiful* to work with, and be with in general.

It's a movie that leaves a lot of room for interpretation. What do you think it's really about?

I think it really is about the loss of love, and it's a huge misunderstanding. It's about miscommunication, and it's about dysfunction of families too. I was really thinking about lost love. That there were two parties who would do everything to gain that back and it's just not working out, and this is really sad. And indeed I think that every good horror or genre film is in fact telling something about society, or about real people, just turned into a fairy tale in a way.

Because if you take a really, really close look at people, the closer you get, the more spooky it gets. I'm sure that there's something in your life which you do which is completely normal for you and your friends and your family, and someone else who might see that or experience it, they think it's a bit strange. I think that's really lovely. Very likely every one of us has something—a small, tiny part of horror in our own lives, which is what makes our lives more interesting, and which makes us more lovable because it makes us vulnerable and that is very, very human.

One of the things that's so horrifying lies in the fact these boys do some pretty scary things. We assume kids are so innocent but that's what makes it all the more evil.

When I think back at my own childhood, which was quite a harmless one, I think that as a child, you play games with a seriousness which is going far beyond a grown up's imagination. If you read a fairy tale and the witch is burned in the end, as a child, you'll go like, "Yes, it's a witch, of course you burn her." While as a grown-up, you would go, "Oh my god, they're burning a live person, that's horrible."

As a child, you have a very clear and innocent idea of what's good and what's bad and how bad has to be punished. We lose that way of looking at things when we grow up. Children can be so much more serious and stern about certain things—and do things which, for grown-ups, seem immensely brutal. I think children are very much capable of a lot of things we can't even imagine. Which is why, if I were a parent, I would watch out what kind of toys they have in their room. And I would certainly not allow them any roaches. [*laughs*] You never know what's happening.