

# What Maisie Knew

Cert 15 USA 2012 98 mins

## Crew

Directors	Scott McGehee, David Siegel
Screenplay	Nancy Doyne, Carroll Cartwright
Cinematography	Giles Nuttgens
Film Editing	Madeleine Gavin
Original music	Nick Urata

## Cast

Julianne Moore	Susanna
Steve Coogan	Beale
Onata Aprile	Maisie Elizabeth Beale
Alexander Skarsgård	Lincoln
Joanna Vanderham	Margo

## Synopsis

*New York, the present. Young Maisie is caught in the middle of divorce proceedings between her mother Suzanna, an aging rock star, and her English father, Beale, an art dealer. In a race to win the custody battle, Beale marries Maisie's nanny Margo, prompting Suzanna in turn to marry friend and local bartender, Lincoln.*

*As Maisie is shuttled back and forth between her parents, she comes to rely more and more on their new partners, new spouses, who begin to see how selfish and damaged Maisie's parents really are.*



- The film is based on Henry James's 1897 novella of the same name, set in late Victorian England. It was one of the first novels to deal with the effects of divorce on a child, a new and controversial subject at the time.
- Onata Aprile was just 6 years old when the film was made, but was already a seasoned actress, having begun publicly performing when she was not quite 4 years old. When not making films she has fun singing with Amora Opera, and has appeared in *La Boheme* and *The Pirates of Penzance*.



## Reviews

In 2001, directors Scott McGehee and David Siegel made *The Deep End*, a deeply affecting study of just how far a parent might go for their child. *What Maisie Knew*, seamlessly adapted from Henry James' 1897 novel, is the polar opposite, showing just how little a mother and father consider the feelings of their charge as they use her in an emotional tug-of-war to get back at each other.

... Anchored by a storming turn from the young Aprile, *What Maisie Knew* is a thoroughly well-acted ensemble. Moore's turn evokes her adult-movie matriarch in *Boogie Nights*, while Coogan delivers one of his best dramatic turns. As foils for these two, Scottish rising star Vanderham and *True Blood*'s Skarsgård both play down what could easily have been overly saintly roles.

Similarly, McGehee and Siegel never succumb to sentimentality, even though they dangerously skirt close to it at times – not least when Maisie grows closer to Lincoln and Margo in what, briefly, feels like a surrogate family unit ... it's filled with moments that'll make you ache; the aftershock of divorce has rarely seemed so ugly, upsetting and unsettling.

**James Mottram, Total Film, August 2013**

...Scott McGehee and David Siegel's adaptation of Henry James's 1897 novel keeps us with Maisie all the way through. The camera drifts away as a screaming match over custody starts and we'll follow Maisie's attention to a toy, a bug, a window, anything to distract from her parents having a go at each other again. The adults' behaviour is almost as confusing for us as it is for her. It's a neat trick that reminds us these weighty adult issues are both life-changing and, in the moment, somewhat insignificant to someone Maisie's age.

...You want Maisie to win, to be less insecure than her fading rock-star mum and more self-conscious than her flighty art-dealing dad. Coogan and Moore play them as compromised people, but they're not bad as such, just careless. There's room in Carroll Cartwright's screenplay for moments of tenderness between them and their child.

"I used to be like you," sobs Moore as she gives up her daughter to set off on another world tour. It's to McGehee, Siegel and even Aprile's credit that you find yourself praying this is where the similarities end.

**Henry Barnes, The Guardian, September 2012**