

## Will Ferrell Seeks Recovery in ‘Everything Must Go’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 13, 2011 - 2:58pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Alcohol mixed with the American Dream sometimes becomes a destructive chemistry. With every individual’s reaction to ethyl alcohol like a fingerprint, the general image of the party animal can easily morph into what John Cheever called “The Sorrows of Gin.” These sorrows are explored through Will Ferrell in “Everything Must Go.”

Ferrell puts on his every man suit as he dies as a salesman. His performance is stoic, almost ironic, and the rest of his character’s world catches up to it in various reactive ways. The wonder of the film is that it has a marquee star demonstrating the wages of excessive sin, a subject that is not usually explored in the context of the half-million-per-home suburban streets.

Nick (Will Ferrell) is fired from his lucrative sales job because he has fallen off the wagon and embarrassed himself at a company celebration. He reacts to this firing by immediately turning to destruction (tire slashing) and drinking. As he seeks refuge at home, he arrives to find his locks have been changed and his possessions strewn upon the yard. His wife has left him.

Faced with the total bottom of his life, he oddly stakes a claim in a big leather chair on the lawn. This draws attention from his Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, Frank (Michael Peña), a cop who helps him get a summons for a yard sale, meaning he has three days to figure out what to do. The African American son of a neighborhood caregiver, Kenny (Christopher Jordan Wallace), also comes into Nick’s radar, and he hires the 13-year old to help him sort out the yard sale.



He Can Help: Will Ferrell (Nick) and Christopher Jordan Wallace (Kenny) in ‘Everything Must Go’  
*Photo credit: Roadside Attractions*

This begins a series of events that may or may not lead to Nick’s redemption. Along the way he will encounter a new person on his block (Rebecca Hall), which will remind him of what he hadn’t faced up to with his own wife. He also explores his past by visiting an old high school classmate (Laura Dern) and exposing the hypocrisy of a hated neighbor (Stephen Root). But primarily, the yard sale beckons and his burden has the potential to be lightened.

Will Ferrell uses his box office credibility to expand his acting chops a bit. Between this role and his recent turn on TV’s “The Office,” he is showing a side to his acting that is a bit more challenging and vulnerable. However, his approach to it lacks a bit of energy. The interpretation of Nick is one of resigned lethargy, until it isn’t. The pattern of his addiction to alcohol doesn’t reveal as much when matched against the three days of the yard sale. He is a man who has hit bottom, but it’s unclear how he attaches himself to the first rung of the ladder out.

The supporting cast is an interesting mix. Christopher Jordan Wallace, playing his young helpmate, is a natural sad sack. His eventual adaptation into the sales world – his religiously reads one of Nick’s sales self-help books and works the yard sale – feels more romantic than it should be, but somehow works. Rebecca Hall as new neighbor Samantha represents human kindness, but gets kicked around almost unfairly when invading Nick’s territory. Her final denouement with him is inconsistent to a previous put-down, and although the character is sweet it doesn’t jibe naturally in her role as the light in the darkness.

One of the best performances in the film is Michael Peña as the AA sponsor. He plays a cop, which means he has seen the worst of human nature from both sides of the psychological ledger. He is also the sponsor of Nick’s wife, so he involves himself so deeply that there seems no way out. But he soldiers on, with a flat, understated portrayal that speaks of an underlying switch of addictions, from alcohol to meddling in other people’s lives. Yet, he is a savior.

The sorrow of alcoholism is not so much realized through physical downturn (although Ferrell doesn’t look too good throughout the journey) but more as a desperate character flaw, the unyielding need to fill a gap that is infinite. In a depressing scene, Nick is reduced to begging for a very cheap beer, which simply would be put into the void. The strength of the film lies in this type of exposition and not so much in the clean wrapping up of events towards the end.



As Can She: Rebecca Hall (Samantha) in ‘Everything Must Go’  
*Photo credit: Roadside Attractions*

It’s not that Nick doesn’t deserve that type of ending, but there is a wonder that in a more real scenario, which has had some moments in the film, wouldn’t be a little more complicated given Nick’s sudden trap at the bottom of his own pit. Maybe it is just the first step in the miles he has to go before the eternal sleep.

Not to get too deep, but is this Ferrell’s “Frank the Tank” character from the film “Old School” seeking redemption for his extreme (albeit comic) behavior? Aren’t all drunks just one pratfall away from becoming Nick, searching in the dark for the first rung of the ladder out the bottom? And then what happens?

*“Everything Must Go” has a limited release in Chicago and elsewhere on May 13th. See local listings for show times and theaters. Featuring Will Ferrell, Rebecca Hall, Laura Dern, Michael Peña, Stephen Root and Christopher Jordan Wallace. Written and directed by Dan Rush. Rated “R”*

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