

Kate Hudson Reveals Hell in ‘A Little Bit of Heaven’

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Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Kate Hudson portrays a dying woman in “A Little Bit of Heaven,” and the film is so annoying that her extinguishment can’t come fast enough. The film insults both living and dying, and virtually everything in between, and brings along Lucy Punch, Kathy Bates, Gael García Bernal, Peter Dinklage and Whoopi Goldberg for the funeral.

Hudson plays an almost sociopathic character, who is suppose to become sympathetic just because she is diagnosed with colon cancer. Yes, that is the serious premise, but as filtered through the Hudson character it is merely a prop designed to make everyone else in the film love her. There are no redeeming qualities to her crass talking, self destructive nature in the story – ignored by those around her – but it is cancer that is suppose to make such a character noble. It’s impossible to imagine the inner turmoil of a real cancer struggle, but one minute of that courage is worth a million times of films like these.

Marley (Kate Hudson) is a blunt talking New Orleans ad executive, the youngest vice president in her firm. When her best friend Sarah (Lucy Punch) notices that her “boobs are shrinking,” Marley reluctantly visits a doctor, who diagnoses her with Stage Four colon cancer. While going through testing, she has a vision of God (Whoopi Goldberg), who gives her three wishes. The first two seem impossible, but come true, and the last comes in the form of the specialist working on her treatment, Julian Goldberg (Gael Garcia Bernal).



Marley’s condition creates unexpected situations, such as her divorced parents (Kathy Bates and Treat Williams) emerging to re-ignite old

problems. But there are some lighter moments, as when a little person male escort (Peter Dinklage) is hired to show up to Marley’s apartment and “entertain” her. Also, Dr. Goldstein is falling in love with Marley, which both complicates and fulfills her treatment cycle. As the disease progresses and hope starts to fade, Marley’s third wish may be the most important of all.

Kate Hudson has developed a movie persona that for some reason inspires the screenwriter (Gren Wells) to completely ignore reality. In trying to make Marley anti-establishment within the narrative, it only succeeded in making her somewhat repulsive. She has empty one night stands, throws condoms at a client (which gets her promoted) and has a “tough talking” attitude which is less charming than embarrassing. Her dirty-girl-ingenue schtick is fast getting tiresome and considering that the script did her no favors, she might want to think about transitioning to a “tough talking” domestic mommy role next.

The supporting cast is not much help. The two Oscar winners, Whoopi Goldberg and Kathy Bates, are doing some serious reputation damaging. The reason Goldberg is playing God is because Marley pictures the Deity to look like Whoopi Goldberg. This begs the question, is this film set in 1992? Bates is usually so good, but can’t make her dryly written character get beyond concerned looks. Peter Dinklage, who just won a Golden Globe and seems to be working to redefine the little person stereotype, takes three steps back with the “special” male prostitute scene, which comes out of nowhere.

The younger actors also have to endure career damage control by jumping on the Kate Hudson vehicle. Gael García Bernal, who is memorable in great films like “Amores Perros” and “The Motorcycle Diaries,” should think about firing his agent or perhaps getting a better script instinct. There is not much he can do with the doctor-in-love character, except moon over Kate for no apparent reason. Lucy Punch, an appealing British actress, gets the thankless “best friend” role. The banter between her and Kate’s character must have been thought of as “modern,” but is about as natural as styrofoam.



Star Crossed: Gael García Bernal (Julian) and Kate Hudson in ‘A Little Bit of Heaven’
Photo credit: Patti Perret for Millennium Films

But most egregious is the use of cancer as a prop, to allow Marley to become a secular saint, Marley to make everyone else feel better because she’s so “courageous” and most sickening, for Marley to find love. The disease only affects her when it has to, she hardly changes physically except towards the end of the film. The struggle with condition is not evident, which is a disservice as a character development device. There is a mysterious “experimental treatment” that Marley is given (which conveniently doesn’t cause hair loss) and that seems to slap the face of real cancer victims, who hope for such experiments against all odds.

This is one of those films when on your deathbed, you’ll wish you had the 106 minutes back to do something more productive. Given the standards established by “A Little Bit of Heaven,” even watching paint dry would qualify.

“A Little Bit of Heaven” opens everywhere on May 4th. Featuring Kate Hudson, Lucy Punch, Gael Garcia Bernal, Kathy Bates, Peter Dinklage, Treat Williams and Whoopi Goldberg. Screenplay by Gren Wells. Directed by Nicole Kassell. Rated “PG-13”



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