

Great Performance From Abbie Cornish Carries ‘The Girl’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 21, 2013 - 11:04am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Let’s get this out of the way first – Abbie Cornish is simply great in David Riker’s “The Girl,” opening this weekend in Chicago at the AMC River East 21. She’s genuine, believable, and emotional resonant in ways that make this critic truly wish she would get more great roles (go rent “Bright Star” for further proof of her immense talents). Having said that, “The Girl” only barely works. Too much of the dialogue feels forced and the situations purposefully manipulative for it to fall on the right side of the soap opera-drama spectrum. There’s a heartfelt tenderness for this troubled character on Riker & Cornish’s part but it comes at the expense of realism or any serious answers to the questions raised by the film.

Texan Ashley (Abbie Cornish) is going through a serious rough patch in her life. She has lost custody of her son Georgie and is facing employment and sobriety problems as she struggles to regain him from his foster family. She can’t keep a job and the social worker trying to help her happens to come on the day morning that she’s left a bottle of tequila out. It doesn’t look good for Ashley.



The Girl

Photo credit: Film Collective

Her mood does not improve when her distant father (Will Patton) drops back into her life and asks her to take a little trip across the border to Mexico in his truck. On the way back, Ashley hears something in the cab of the truck and realizes that they’re transporting illegal immigrants. At first, she’s aghast but then she sees the financial potential. Thousands of people cross the border every day. If Ashley can help a few of them, make a few grand in the process (it’s 500 bucks a head), and then call it quits, it will give her the boost to get her life back together and get her son.

Of course, Ashley is ignoring everyone involved in these situations other than herself. No, the foster mother trying to take care of Georgie is not the villain. No, the social worker trying to help is not the villain. And, no, Ashley does not have the experience needed to help people across the border. Expectedly, things go wrong and Ashley is forced to deal with an abandoned girl, her role in the abandonment, and person responsibility in general.



The Girl
Photo credit: Film Collective

At first, I was thrown by how unlikable I found Ashley. When she berates the woman taking care of her son for having a swing set, when she seems to forgo all responsibility for the fact that she's woefully underprepared for the life-and-death situation into which she throws herself for a profit – I found her kind of repugnant. And yet Cornish makes the character work. She works in that gray area of character that a lot of actors and actresses are afraid to occupy – the one in which it's OK not to like her. She's not desperately begging to be liked as so many actresses do, which makes her arc ultimately more engaging.

However, I still have issues with the way Riker handles some of the complex realities of this story. Is it Ashley who is demonizing Social Services or the film itself? And the film approaches immigration rather reductively, taking a complex issue and using it as a tool for melodrama. The plotting and dialogue of "The Girl" don't always feel genuine, more the product of a TV movie script than a story that needs to feel real to truly work. "The Girl" has an ending that is surprisingly powerful, pushing it right over that line to a recommendation. It's a rocky road to get there but Cornish carries the film across the line in a way that should leave audiences satisfied and universally agreeing that she really needs to find a breakthrough role soon. Few actresses deserve one more.

"The Girl" stars Abbie Cornish and Will Patton. It was written and directed by David Riker and opens in Chicago at the AMC River East 21 on March 22, 2013.



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