

## There is Little Beauty to Be Found in ‘Collateral Beauty’

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on December 17, 2016 - 6:33am

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Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Charles Dickens once said, “Reflect upon your present blessings — of which every man has many — not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.” Seeing the trailer for “Collateral Beauty,” it’s obvious this is the theme of the film, but it is also the theme of this review. My “blessing” to you is the foresight not to waste your time with this film.

It becomes painfully apparent that this film’s goal is to make you cry. It doesn’t care when it happens or how frequently it happens, but its sole mission is to get you to shed some tears. How does it do it early on? By introducing one of the saddest things that can happen to a person, more specifically a parent. The slow, painful death of a child is a probably the worst experience anyone can imagine having to go through, so empathy’s abound for Will Smith’s character. This is the cheesiest and most sentimentally cheapening film Allan Loeb has made, and he’s made a couple of films with Kevin James as the protagonist so that bar was already pretty high to begin with.



Michael Peña and Kate Winslet both star alongside Will Smith in ‘Collateral Beauty’

*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

As the story progresses, we are given very little to latch on to aside from being repeatedly reminded that Smith’s character, Howard, lost a daughter to an illness. We are then shown how much of an understandable wreck Howard is years later, having fallen into a deep spiral of depression. We are continually bombarded with images of Howard and reminded that his daughter died, but it never develops beyond the surface. We aren’t shown the true complexity of grief or even shown how to cope with it. Instead, we have a story where three “friends” want to make Howard look like he is going insane so that they can take control of the company away from him. Loeb even goes so far as to try to paint them in a sympathetic light, trying to wash over the fact that what they are doing is one of the most despicable things anyone can do to someone they consider a friend.

In an obvious Dickensian twist, this “A Christmas Carol” riff has three wise visitors used to convince Howard of his insanity, but somehow also are perfectly assigned to his three friends so that the visitors’ roles serve a dual purpose. The entire time, these actors paid to play the roles of Love, Time and Death visit Howard and throw around meaningless platitudes that inexplicably cause some sort of catharsis in Howard even though they are akin to the inside of most Hallmark sympathy cards. The paid actors then give their employers the same treatment, giving them advice that comes off as some sort of revelation in the film, but is so painfully obvious to us that we can’t help but roll our eyes out of our skull, down the aisle, outside the door and inside of our cars waiting for this to be over.



Helen Mirren, Kiera Knightley and Jacob Latimore play Death, Love and Time in ‘Collateral Beauty’

*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

You may be wondering what tricks this film has left to deliver. Some kind of deep moment of epiphany brought on by the after school special-type lessons we’ve been give on the obvious nature of time, death and love? Perhaps an explanation of why Howard’s “friends” are justifiable in their actions? This is not that kind of film. Your patience does not get rewarded and all of the film’s emotional terrorism never adds up to a satisfying pay-off. Instead, we are given two attempts at story twists and told to feel surprised when they happen. One of the twists is so obvious that when the truth about some characters is revealed in the end, the film feels like a surprise birthday party you knew about in advance, but are still forced to show up to and feign shock. The second twist feels like it was put in the film as a contingency, just in case the first one fails, because it makes no sense at all since there was no satisfying build up to it.

By the end of the film, we’ve developed emotional callouses so big that when we do finally reach the film’s climax, that well that may have held water at the beginning of the film has run dry out of frustration. The only good thing to come from the film is director David Frankel’s cinematic tour of New York City. The film is about the beauty in everyday life and Frankel captures the superficial aspect of it well enough. The sets created are beautifully staged and shining. We even get several visually satisfying scenes of elaborate domino built structures collapsing. If the film has any catharsis to offer, it will likely be in the metaphoric and literal domino effect we witness. What it doesn’t have, but tries really hard to grasp with its long close-up shots of the characters in pain and facially expressing sadness, is the sentimental spark that Frankel had in “Marley & Me.”





Will Smith explores the metaphoric meaning behind dominoes in ‘Collateral Beauty’  
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

The entirety of “Collateral Beauty” feels like a missed opportunity to explore the complexity of grief and loss, but it instead takes the easy route and, like the characters, takes advantage of the grief in a cheap and profitable way. With the amount of Oscar-winning and nominated actors in the cast, you would think that there would have been at least one person to at least pull off some genuine emotion. Will Smith, Kate Winslet, Edward Norton, Kiera Knightley, Michael Peña and especially Helen Mirren all deserved so much better than the stock roles they were given. That is one of the true losses felt after watching this film, the loss of potential. If you ended up paying to see this film, you will instantly feel grief also, realizing your financial loss.

*“Collateral Beauty” opens everywhere on December 16th. Featuring Will Smith, Kate Winslet, Edward Norton, Kiera Knightley, Michael Peña, Helen Mirren, Naomie Harris and Jacob Latimore. Screenplay by Allan Loeb. Directed by David Frankel. Rated “PG-13”*



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**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 23 2024 - 5:27am):**  
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