

Grace Is Gone--A Film Review

In this unforgettable film, John Cusack plays the part of a suburban dad [Stanley] with two young daughters and a wife in the military. He is one of the few people in his surroundings that supports the war in Iraq, but because he has bad eyes, he is unable to serve. One day he receives a visit from two Army officers who have come to inform him of his wife's death in the war. He doesn't even invite them in because he's reluctant to accept the news of his wife's death. Even though war is hell, the fact that a woman dies in it somehow makes it even more terrible. Most war-on-terror films usually deal with the consequences on a family of a man's death.

[This is a debut film from writer-director James C. Stone.]

Their girls are Heidi (Shelan O'Keefe), 12 years old, and Dawn (Gracie Bednarczyk), who is 8. He sits them down in the living room to break the news and finds that he simply cannot. Instead, in a weird evasion, he improvises on the spur of the moment and announces they will get in the car and drive to Enchanted Gardens, a Florida theme park they like. Heidi, who is very intelligent, thinks this sounds a little strange. He's pulling them out of school to go on an unannounced holiday? Dawn just seems happy and does not ask any questions.

Along the way, stopping in all places American cheesecake chain hotels and restaurants, discount shopping emporiums. Stanley finds himself constantly breaking his own rules. He buys the girls things they don't need and allows them to stay up late watching TV; because they no longer have a mother, it is Stanley who now helps them pick out dresses and lets them get their ears pierced even though their mother had insisted they wait until they were older.

Stanley even stops off at his mother's house where his brother [Alessandro Nivola] takes him to task for not telling his daughters about the death of their mother. "Grace Is Gone" gushes with emotion but little else, but the feelings are authentic and not overly dramatized. The effects of war are presented at their most basic, bringing home the anguish of family loss with terrible, unbearable rawness.

This earnest film received the Audience Award for Best Drama. The conclusion of this film is inevitable, but the performance by John Cusack shows us another side of this talented actor. It's a stirring restrained performance as a husband in denial over the death of his wife in Iraq.

About the Author

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