

Four Good Days

Addiction is a long-time Hollywood theme for built-in drama: an agonizing (sometimes excruciating) trial by the addicted character desperate for a high then going through withdrawal witnessed by family or friend as the audience, wrenched by the depiction, is in suspense whether the character will triumph or relapse. Such a set-up can be particularly touching when the action plays out between parent and child. One prominent recent example is the 2018 Julia Roberts-Lucas Hedges film, “Ben Is Back” which showed the extremes of parent paranoia and headstrong child. Now comes “Four Good Days,” a parallel story where a mother Deb (Glenn Close) must deal with her long-time junkie daughter Molly (Mila Kunis).

The struggle between the two, which is based on an article by Eli Saskow of *The Washington Post*, is fraught with mistrust and wariness and is hard to watch at times, but redeemed by the performances of the two leads who convincingly take you down the rabbit-hole of drug craving,

Deb is a masseuse in a casino hotel, married to her bemused second husband Chris (Stephen Root). She has spent 10 years trying to affect her 30-something daughter’s addiction to heroin. Nothing she has done has worked. The film opens with Molly, showing up unexpectedly back home, having run out of options where to go. Deb, who barely recognizes her, reluctantly lets her stay but urges her to get into a four-day program, after which, if she stays clean, she can qualify for a treatment which could totally inhibit her addiction. Those fraught days make up the core of the picture, with Deb having to watch and critique Molly’s every move.

Molly spends her time at home shivering for a fix, yet she also agrees to address the high-school class of an old friend and bares her addicted soul. She also insists on visiting a younger friend and ends up driven by Deb to a loathsome crack-house. She is clearly torn and aches to stay clean before attending a clinic for her anti-drug shot—and possible relief. Deb, hoping against hope, frets and yearns for “four good days.”

Mila Kunis, typically cast in sexy, slightly provocative roles, appropriately appears as a mess in this film, her big eyes enlarged by dark circles, her teeth gone, her frame wraith-like, her blond hair stringy (kudos to the makeup team). And her playing has a nice mix of languorous boredom and hair-trigger nervousness. Her scene before the high school class is an aching, raw confession of her addiction sins and a wrenching highpoint of the film.

Close’s Deb is meant to be sympathetic, yet she keeps you at a distance with her constant worry and sour memories, yet she achieves the portrait of a woman who has a spine and can love even through constant disappointment. You want her to succeed with her daughter but are concerned she will only witness yet another dead end.

“Four Good Days” was directed by Rodrigo Garcia, a Colombian-born filmmaker with a lengthy career in American television and movies. He is known for working with strong women actors, and he has long had an association with Glenn Close, with whom he first worked with in 2000. Their most prominent collaboration was “Albert Nobbs” (2011), for which Close received an Oscar nomination. This film may be their best collaboration since.

(The film runs 100 minutes and is rated “R” for subject matter and language; it opened at area theaters on April 30).

(April 2021)