

## The Mother

A new film drama with good credentials is *The Mother*, written by the gifted screenwriter Hanif Kureishi (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *My Son the Fanatic*) and directed by the versatile Roger Michell (*Persuasion*, *Notting Hill*). This is the story of an unexceptional, even thwarted life that finds new possibilities in a first-time sensuous love. It's chief merit--and it is an exalted one--is the lead performance by Anne Reid, a "mature" actress whom few Americans have ever seen (she appears principally in theater and on British television) but whom many more should get to know through this movie.

May (Ms. Reid) and her husband Toots (Peter Vaughan) are a provincial couple who come to visit their London-based children, the too-busy businessman Bobby (Steven Mackintosh) and his wife and daughter, and their at-wits-end daughter Paula (Cathryn Bradshaw), struggling about what to do with her life.

The relationships, superficially cordial, are tense underneath and, while May is both intrigued and a little scared by London, her stolid husband wants to just go home to live out his meager pleasures. Before they can return, he dies of a heart attack. May leaves to bury her husband but, now looking at a house where she had become little more than a dour servant, she decides to head back to London, less to be with her children than to discover a new place and life.

Into that life, slowly, teasingly, comes a robust new presence, Darren (Daniel Craig), a carpenter who is building an addition on her son's house and going out with her daughter. She's around the house, he works at the house--everybody else is busy... In time, in baby steps, the 60ish, dowdy widow and the 30ish, studly fellow come to share coffee, stories, laughs--finally, a bed.

May is embarrassed by her lumpy body but, amazingly, Darren isn't, and the affair blossoms, as does May's sense of things about her, including her own drawing and the city she's discovering. Her new openness even attracts another (bumbling) suitor, Bruce (Oliver Ford Davies), of her own age. New possibilities are open to her, and you see this awareness grow in Ann Reid's open face, in her ever more lively eyes. The idyll with Darren is just that, of course, and while the love affair comes crashing down, a newly-made May doesn't...

How often in motion pictures has there ever been depicted a personal and sexual awakening of a woman solidly in her sixties? In American movies, of course, a woman over 55 is *never* considered a sexual being (unless it is for coarse laughs). This is such a serious attempt, and it's Anne Reid's game to win or lose. She wins easily, with Kureishi's and Michell's sincere help. As *The Mother*, Reid as May moves so convincingly through her role, both when wounded and when stirred, that events that might appear far-fetched, even uncomfortable, unfold as naturally as a plant spreading to the sun. This is no makeover, but a woman going from dullness to the beginning of discernment. (*"The Mother"* is rated "R" for mature themes and adult sexuality.)

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