

## Nancy

British actress Andrea Riseborough is hardly a household name, but she has proved in the last decade to be one of the most versatile and unpredictable performers in cinema. She came to people's attention as the young Maggie Thatcher in a 2008 TV drama but since has played, among many others, a naïve waitress in "Brighton Rock" (2010), an IRA sympathizer in "Shadow Dancer" (2012), an ambitious actress in "Birdman" (2014), and just last year, Billie Jean King's love interest in "Battle of the Sexes" as well as a feisty concert pianist in "The Death of Stalin." Now, with the new film "Nancy" she has a film to herself.

Nancy Freeman (Riseborough) is a tough nut to crack. Thirty-something, and a bit of a moper with enormous, unblinking eyes, she lives uncomfortably with her sour, disabled (with Parkinson's) mother Betty (Ann Dowd). Nancy has a temp job and a cat, but few prospects and no friends, and she fibs to enliven her life. Her literary ambitions only result in a welter of rejection slips. Still, Nancy has an itch to make some connection, evidence of which is her attempt to reach out online to a despondent man (John Leguizamo) who has read her blog. But Nancy cannot be straight with him as she pretends to a fake pregnancy that alienates him.

Then a break in her fortunes comes. A TV report tells of a five-year-old girl, Brook Lynch, kidnapped exactly 30 years before, whose parents are marking the anniversary by announcing a scholarship fund in her name. The story shows a prospective image of how the young Brook might appear at 35...and Nancy is captured by what she thinks is her own image. Surely she is *this* Brook, stolen away and mired in a family not good enough for her.

When her mother suddenly dies, Nancy calls the Lynches to tell them she believes she is their long-lost daughter. After some initial reluctance, Ellen Lynch (J. Smith Cameron) invites her to their home, where Nancy is smitten by their academic lifestyle. To heighten the effect of her life opening up, director Christine Choe films the opening section of the film in a 4x3 aspect ratio to further Nancy's sense of being trapped and alienated, then she stretches the image to widescreen 16x9, as Nancy's world is expanded, both literally and emotionally.

Ellen, a comparative literature professor, welcomes Nancy, finds ways to connect with her (they are both writers), and is filled with hope that her child has been found. She wants so to believe. Husband Leo (Steve Buscemi), a psychologist, is more skeptical of Nancy, starting with an online check of her, but he treats her decently and agrees with Ellen to let her stay with them until her identity can be verified. He calls the authorities to perform a DNA test for all three, and they await the results anxiously.

The above plot outline reads like a surefire downer, and the film could be viewed that way. Still, there is much that is poignant and moving once Nancy moves in with the couple. Director Choe (in her first feature) generates wonderful, pitch-perfect performances from Smith and Buscemi as the touching Lynches, with Smith particularly affecting as a long-grieving mother whose guarded stance stands ready to melt with the chance to thoroughly embrace what could be her long-lost child.

And what of the chameleon Riseborough? The actress's performance is mostly one-note, a sulking woman, mumbling in a hushed voice, often with a spaced look; a woman that no one would likely notice, which may be the point of the character. Her

smiles are few, as when she feels she is being accepted by the Lynches, and her emotions are ever in check, except for one episode of genuine panic when she thinks her cat Paul is lost in the woods. This dour stance is a choice that her director and she have made, and, for this reviewer, it appears the right one for this movie.

*(The film, which opened June 29, is not rated and runs 87 minutes.)*

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