Movie Review: â€˜Georgia Ruleâ€™

by David_Elliott

A bar of soap is a repeated element in "Georgia Rule," and rightly so. Suds rise in this capably acted fem-drama laced with slap-in comedy.

'GEORGIA RULE' - Felicity Huffman and Jane Fonda star in the drama 'Georgia Rule.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ron Batzdorff. It's a story of three women, plus male appendages (sometimes rather literally). Jane Fonda is Georgia, lonesome and decent widow in wholesome Hull, Idaho. She's not Mormon like most of the neighbors, but her framed motto is "Count Your Blessings" and she's ready to ram that soap bar into your mouth if you insult the Lord's name.

Her morally wayward granddaughter, Rachel (Lindsay Lohan), is sent to live with Georgia for a summer of strict straightening. Rachel has a crass mouth surrounded by what locals call a "California tan," and she causes even prim, sweet Georgia to bark, "(Bleep) you!" Arriving later is Rachel's mother, Lilly (Felicity Huffman), an alcoholic whose life is all wobble and worry (Georgia - what a dear - washes out the liquor bottles before trashing them).

It gets sticky once Rachel, mischievous to the verge of trampiness, says stepfather Arnold (Cary Elwes) used to molest her. This whopper comes soon after Rachel goes off in a rowboat with Idaho stallion and future Mormon missionary Harlan (Garrett Hedlund) and, with a naughty twinkle, eagerly tends his unexplored needs.

Much of Mark Andrus' script, which even resorts to geezer gags like "California, land of fruits and nuts," is a hectic seesaw of who's telling the truth about incest. Provocatively adorable Rachel, or slippery lawyer Arnold? Not much real tension in that, given the Hollywood rule: A radiant and bankable young star has a big home-court advantage over a slightly porky character player past his best hunk days.

Along the way, Rachel keeps sidling up to gentle, grieving widower Simon (Dermot Mulroney), yet really wants fatherly, nonsexual love from him. There are snoopy Mormon teens, some cute kids and (since Simon's a vet) animals. Bud Cort, Hector Elizondo and Laurie Metcalf slot in as trifles.

As proved so often, director Garry Marshall has zero visual sense but an old pro's expertise with product. He gets performances, though you may wonder how Fonda feels about finally inheriting the quilted endearments and crabby admonishments of Katharine Hepburn in "On Golden Pond." It's her pond now.

The top acting is by Huffman, who even has some stringy resemblance to Fonda. She's terrific as a bewildered drinker in a maze of conflicted loyalties, sometimes loving to hate her mother, daughter and boyfriend because that's the only form of love on steady tap.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) As for Lohan, her ginger zip has bite. Constantly raked over in the tabs, the former child star has become a kind of hottie fatale, her charisma odd but involving. She has moments of depth and comic verve though she can seem like a weathered teenager whose Girl Scouts merit badge was for cocktail waitressing in Monte Carlo.

The three women spin this bubbly bar of soap on their emotional tripod. Watching it foam, twirl and nearly tip over is family drama of an unusually spiced kind, for Mormon Idaho.

A Universal Pictures release. Director: Garry Marshall. Writer: Mark Andrus. Cast: Jane Fonda, Lindsay Lohan, Felicity Huffman, Dermot Mulroney, Laurie Metcalf, Cary Elwes. Running time: 1 hour, 44 minutes. Rated R. 2 stars.

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