

# Grandma (2015)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 29 min.

Our content ratings (1-10); Violence 2; Language 4; Sex 6/Nudity 0.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

*But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."*

*Matthew 15:25*

Sage (Julia Garner) needs help but, unlike the Syro-Phonician woman, she would not think of going to a religious leader, even if he were named Jesus. Her problem is quite different, too—it is not her child she is concerned about, but a potential one that she wants to abort. She goes to her grandmother Elle (Lili Tomlin), asking her for \$630 dollars, the cost of an abortion. And she needs it now, because the desperate girl has made a 5:45 PM appointment at the women's health center that day. Neither Elle nor Sage are on good terms with daughter/mother Judy (Marcia Gay Harden), hence the girl's appeal to Grandma—indeed, Sage has not even told her mom about her condition.

Appearing so suddenly out of the blue, the girl has not chosen the best time to make her pitch. Elle has not had a good day, the lesbian woman having just broken up with her partner of four months, Olivia (Judy Greer). Informing Sage that she is temporarily broke, she suggests that they go to the public clinic where the service is free. However, it has been over ten years since she had been to the place, and they discover that it has closed and been replaced by an upscale coffee shop. Grandma not only loudly disses the coffee, but discusses Sage's problem so openly that the manager asks them to leave, resulting in the funny situation revealed in the trailer.

Sage's uncaring boyfriend claims to have no money, responding so insultingly to them that Elle beats him up, the two leaving with the \$50 he did have plus a bag of weed. Various other attempts fail, including an appeal to an old flame from over thirty years ago (wonderfully played by Sam Shepard) when she participated in heterosexual affairs. This leads the women to their mutually arrived at conclusion that they have but one choice left. Looking like residents of a homeless shelter, they show up at mother Judy's swank office where she, a senior executive, is awash in meetings and calls.

Director-screenwriter Paul Weitz provides a highly enjoyable vehicle for Lili Tomlin to show both her acting chops and comedic skills. A published poet, Tomlin's Elle is a brash, tart tongued hellion who will do virtually anything to support her grand-daughter. Still grieving over the death of her partner of almost three decades, her temper and sharp tongue has led to the premature break-up with Olivia. (And yet note what she has tattooed on her arm in one scene.) Thus, although some viewers will see only abortion as the main issue, the real theme of the film is reconciliation. (Abortion is not dealt with lightly, and though I had for a while wished that Sage would reach a different decision, the film is clearly a pro-choice one.)

For a proud woman like Elle, reconciliation, which always requires owning up to guilt by both parties, does not come easily. Also, in the case with her daughter Judy, Elle arrives at a measure of self-understanding by recognizing how similar in character they both are. The film can also be seen as another good character study of an older person, with the moral that as long as there is life, there is the hope and possibility for change for the better. The last long, lingering shot shows Elle walking away from the camera down a street lined by lampposts. She has been abandoned by the taxi driver whom she had asked to wait for her, but she has just made up for her earlier mistake at the beginning of the film,

so we can assume that she is walking toward a better future.

*This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the October issue of VP.*

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