

Maggie's Plan (2016)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 38 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 0; Language 2; Sex/Nudity 4.

Our star rating 4.5

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor.

Proverbs 21:21

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

We are shown immediately that Maggie (Greta Gerwig) is a kind and decent person, for we see her helping a blind man across a busy street NYC street. She then meets a former beaux, and still friend and now a married father, Tony (Bill Hader) in Washington Square Park where she talks about her plan of becoming artificially inseminated by a former college classmate. She has reached that age when her biological clock tells her it is now or never if she wants to become a mother, and she does very much. It's just that she has not been able to maintain a relationship with a guy for longer than six months, so she says that she will become a single mother. No complications with a husband.

The guy with the sperm is named Guy (Travis Fimmel). A talented math major, he has become instead a pickle entrepreneur in Brooklyn. However, something happens that will cause her to give up this plan for Plan B. At The New College where she works as a career advisor to art and design students

she reports that she has received two paychecks. There has been a mix-up because she has the same initials as an adjunct professor of ficto-critical anthropology named John Harding (Ethan Hawke). Just then he stops by to complain that he hasn't received his pay check. They leave together and talk in the park. John reveals that he is writing a novel, and, impressed with Maggie, he asks if she would be willing to read the first chapter.

Maggie likes the sample, and asks to see more. This leads to a series of meetings in the park. This is what leads to Plan B: earlier on Maggie had been in her bathtub inserting Guy's semen into herself when her buzzer sounded, interrupting the process. It is John with more of his manuscript. During their encounters he reveals he is stuck in a loveless marriage with his Danish wife Georgette (Julianne Moore), an intimidating intellectual who teaches the same subject at Columbia University. In various cuts to their apartment we see him being almost totally ignored by her and their two precocious daughters—all three of them looking down on him and able to leave him out of a conversation by speaking Danish.

Thus it is no surprise that John leaves them and marries Maggie, so enthralled is he with her supportive praise and insights. Jump ahead three years, and we see that he acts the same way toward Maggie, ignoring her while he works full time on his novel. Maggie now supports them both—the book is the same one as before, it now running onto 500 pages and showing no sign of ending. She also finds herself involved with his two snobbish daughters, plus her own infant daughter, and yes, even Georgette. This is when Maggie, sensing that John still carries a torch for his ex-wife, and realizing she no longer is in love with him, devises another, more complicated plan.

Author/writer Rebecca Miller is a gifted filmmaker, showing the crazy and humorous sides of love, marriage, parenthood, and divorce. Her Maggie is warm and compassionate, but needing to be disabused of the notion that one can plan life down to

the smallest detail—and also that you can “fix” people. She has some growing up to do, which she proceeds to do in this warm comedy. I like the hint in the script that her genuine concern for others is part of the heritage her mother left her: when she was a child her mother often took her to Quaker meetings. In one brief scene we see Maggie quietly sitting in a Meeting House, perhaps getting her bearings.

All the principal actors are engaging, and at the end we see that maybe Maggie’s Plan A went forward anyway, with Life (or God?) leading her onto an unexpected path. I prefer the second, because it bears out the Biblical perception that God loves to surprise those who think life is going one way, only to find it turning around on them.

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