

MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING

Directed by P.J. Hogan
Produced by Ronald Bass and Jerry Zucker
Distributed by Tri-Star Pictures
Released in 1997

A man can get straightforward advice when he's talking romance with a friend, assuming the friend has no designs on the woman in question. But if that friend is a woman, particularly a woman who doesn't want to be just a friend, don't expect anything but two-faced subterfuge. At her worst a woman will do anything necessary, as long as nobody knows about it. Such is the basis for *My Best Friend's Wedding*. A twenty-something confronting the impending marriage of a long-time friend/ex-lover decides to sabotage the nuptials with underhanded tactics more suitable for a backstabbing high schooler than a successful career woman. She's just deluding herself. Even when she finally says how she feels, her friend won't return to her. She doesn't really want him, but if she can just keep him from getting away she'd still feel in control. But time is passing her by. She's getting old.

Dermot Mulroney is the friend. Julia Roberts is the bitter girl staring at the hourglass. Neither is very effective. Cameron Diaz, in her breakout role, is the naive fiancée. In a convincing transformation, she finally enjoys a verbal slugfest with the star at the tail end.

Far and away, the only character that makes this picture tolerable is Rupert Everett's. He's a friend to Julia Roberts, a friend who has reservations from the very beginning, both practical and moral, to her devious plans. He takes it upon himself to fly to Chicago and help out. Instead of suggesting how to torpedo the wedding, he embarrasses her before the assembled guests—he refuses to slink away quietly after she co-opts him as a fiancée of her own. The highlight is an improvised account of their meeting—in a mental institution—culminating in a banquet-wide rendition of "I Say A Little Prayer." But then he leaves.

There isn't much left to the movie. The two old friends reconsider; he doesn't change his mind, but she realizes she loves him, to no avail. She's able to (temporarily) turn him against his fiancée, but she can't take her place. (And that's no surprise considering her wildly unattractive behavior.)

The primary reason the film fails is because the main character garners little sympathy. She's a conniving wench. We want her to fail as she blazes a path of disillusion and heartache. Finally her plans are thwarted and she emerges, herself, burned. Thankfully, she has learned something.

As much of the movie is humorous, it is by equal turns cringe-worthy. Some of it is disgusting. And the idea fundamental to it, that Julia Roberts would be welcomed not only as a friend, but as a maid of honor, is preposterous, regardless of the capacity for goodwill demonstrated by Cameron Diaz. Late in the film the Diaz character admits her objective was to keep her rival close, to watch out for any lingering attraction between the old lovers. But if we

are to buy that admission, then she's just as unsympathetically manipulative as the star, so who has been fooling who? The real victim is the audience.