

Film review: Put-upon mother's journey of discovery is magical



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- But Juanita is the first film in this genre to have a black woman in the starring role

DUBAI: Children using emotional blackmail to manipulate their parents is an age-old theme, but for one mother it sparks a voyage of discovery.

Latest Netflix original “Juanita” tells the story of a hard-working mother, fed up with her deadbeat grown kids and marginal urban existence, who takes a bus trip to Montana where she reinvents herself.

Adapted from Sheila Williams’ novel “Dancing on the Edge of the Roof” and directed by Clark Johnson, this taut 90-minute drama follows Juanita (Alfre Woodard) as she rises above the mundane to transform her life.

The black mum works as a night nurse in a hospice for the ill and aged, while at home she has three adult children and a granddaughter to worry about.

Juanita's son, Randy (Marcus Henderson), is in jail, her other son, Rashawn (Acorye' White), is playing a cat-and-mouse game with the cops, and her daughter, Bertie (Jordan Nia Elizabeth), has little time to take care of her daughter, and pushes her mother to babysit.

To escape her oppressively boring life, Juanita fantasizes about Blair Underwood, an American television star, but when this starts to wear thin, she takes a Greyhound coach to a virtually unknown town where a meeting with uppity chef Jess Gardner (Adam Beach), sets in motion a chain of magical events.

Their first meeting is hilarious, with Juanita trying to cajole an obstinate Jess to make an American breakfast when he is bent on making it French style.

The movie has similarities with "Eat Pray Love," where after a painful divorce Julia Roberts goes on a round-the-world trip, and "Wild" in which Reese Witherspoon takes a solo hike to recover from a personal tragedy.

But Juanita is the first film in this genre to have a black woman in the starring role, and Juanita's rebellious streak injects novelty into the narrative.

The script, penned by Woodard's husband Roderick M. Spencer, has patches of unevenness, but the actress deftly pilots the film through the difficult bits to dramatize some people need to embark on adventures to rediscover themselves.

Woodard brilliantly conveys Juanita's disappointment and pain which later turns to joy and a sense of fulfilment.

Watch the trailer here:
