

“Peppermint”

By Helen Lutz

The first time I experienced the death of a family member I was five years old. My older sister, Mary Madeline, died of brain cancer on the operating table. My mother was crying on the couch when I got up for Saturday morning cartoons. I was sad remembering how funny and fun Mary was; especially when making a leaf rake talk. At five, my pain didn't last too long. Later in life I lost my grandparents, parents, friends and a grand baby; each loss tore a piece out of my heart.



In the new film “Peppermint” Jennifer Gardner plays Riley North, a lower middle class working mom. Both Riley and her husband Chris (Jeff Hephner) work hard but still live paycheck to paycheck; a fact which is thrown in her face by some of the better off stay at home moms. Wanting more for his family, Chris reluctantly agrees to a driving job to steal from a powerful drug boss Diego Garcia (Juan Pablo Raba); bad choice. Even though Chris has a change of heart before the job, he is still a marked man as far as Garcia is concerned.

When the ‘mean girl’ moms plan a spontaneous get together at the same time as Riley’s daughter Carly’s (Cailey Fleming) birthday party and no one shows for the birthday, Riley and Chris make lemonade out of lemons providing a fun night out at the Christmas carnival. While Carly enjoys her peppermint ice cream cone along with her parents, a drive by shooting with bursts aimed at the North family wrecks the evening. Chris and Carly lay dead and Riley little better in a coma.

Upon regaining consciousness Riley learns the fate of her family. It’s devastating. Although Riley identifies the shooters, the legal system has been bought and paid for by Garcia – they all walk. Angered beyond belief, Riley disappears.

On the five year anniversary of the North massacre Riley reemerges from the shadows as a smart, well-trained killing machine seeking her revenge. The streets of Skid Row her safe haven, Riley systematically hunts those who stole her family with her eyes trained on the top prize of Garcia. We can’t help but root for Riley the vigilante as she’s always one step ahead of the crime syndicate, the Los Angeles Police and the FBI cleaning up the drug fungus infecting the city. Piñatas stand no chance with Riley on the loose.

“Peppermint” is a girl power Jason Bourne or John Wick or even John McClane in “Die Hard.” She’s rough and tough and feels no pain, except for the pain she carries with her each day in her heart. At one point Riley strikes up a conversation with a young boy on a bus as his father sleeps off a hangover. The dad is less than respectful when addressing Riley and he and his son depart the bus for the closest liquor store. Bad idea as he tastes Riley’s pistol while listening to her explain how to be a good father and just what will happen should he decide to be less.

“Peppermint” is non-stop action filled violence with some creative ways to die. Even though it is predictable, we still want to see what Riley’s up to next – especially when she confronts the ‘mean mom’. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats I give “Peppermint” ... TWO 1/2 HARTS. In the final showdown with all the twists and turns it’s fun to predict the real winners and losers.