

Please Give

Cert 15 USA 2009 90 mins

Crew

Director	Nicole Holofcener
Screenplay	Nicole Holofcener
Cinematography	Yaron Orbach
Editor	Robert Frazen
Production Designer	Mark White
Music	Marcelos Zarvos

Cast

Catherine Keener	Kate
Amanda Peet	Mary
Oliver Platt	Alex
Rebecca Hall	Rebecca
Ann Guilbert	Andra
Sarah Steele	Abby
Lois Smith	Mrs Portman
Thomas Ian Nicholas	Eugene
Elizabeth Keener	Cathy

Synopsis

New York City, the present. Kate and her husband Alex run a successful used-furniture store stocked from the apartments of the recently deceased. Sisters Rebecca and Mary room together in bland digs; Rebecca regularly visits their grandmother Andra, who lives next door to Kate and Alex.

Kate, who is racked by middle-class guilt, refuses to buy daughter Abby expensive jeans. Kate and Alex want to buy Andra's apartment when she dies. In an effort to ingratiate themselves with Andra, they invite her and her granddaughters over for dinner. Their desire for her flat is brought into the open. At the doctor's office where she works, one of Rebecca's patients flogs her grandson. Later they all go, with Andra, on a trip to the country. Alex begins an affair with Mary. Rebecca goes on a date with her patient's grandson.

Abby figures out about her father's affair, and he later ends it. Mary finally visits Andra, but is especially cutting. The older woman is later found dead; and Rebecca worries whether she ate enough. There is a funeral for Andra. Kate buys Abby jeans.

Sight & Sound, July 2010



Review

Nicole Holofcener has been praised for her talky metropolitan comedies, but I've found the characters in movies such as *Lovely & Amazing* from 2001 and 2006's *Friends With Money* weirdly self-pitying and self-absorbed – and sometimes not all that funny. *Please Give* is an interesting and refreshing turn for the better. As an ensemble comedy, it has more bounce, more life and more comic oxygen.

Oliver Platt and Catherine Keener play Alex and Kate, a middle-aged couple with a teen daughter; they have shrewdly found a lucrative business in buying up furniture from the apartments of the recently deceased – whose grown-up children are only too eager to be rid of what looks like junk with painful memories – and cherry-picking the best items to sell on at a big profit in their retro-antique store.

With faintly vultureish instincts, they have also bought the neighbouring apartment belonging to their financially straitened, 90-year-old neighbour Andra (Ann Guilbert), on the understanding that she can see out of the rest of her days there rent free. This arrangement brings them into contact with Andra's granddaughters, radiology technician Rebecca, nicely played by Rebecca Hall, and tetchy cosmetologist-cum-masseuse Mary (Amanda Peet), and Holofcener shows how they have become protective about their grandma at least partly as a by-product of their need to monitor Kate and Alex, to keep an eye on them, and somehow express a tacit resentment of this exploitative business deal. It is a pairing that allows Holofcener to explore once again her preoccupation with the sister dynamic, which is further complicated by a spark of flirtation between Mary and Alex.

This situation, and the whole film, is flavoured by Kate's nagging guilt about being rich and about exploiting people's ignorance at a vulnerable time in their lives, a guilt that surfaces in agonising and futile gestures of charity, and worries about how "giving" she is personally and emotionally. I still find Holofcener basically lenient and unsatirical about these people, but her work has more dramatic interest and comic snap than before, particularly in the dialogue between Rebecca and Mary, who live together and squabble about things like how many dishes to put in the microwave at once: "They take longer to heat if you put two in together" – "This is a fascinating conversation."

Hall is likable and persuasive as the lonely Rebecca, and there is a telling poignancy in the opening sequence in a hospital as women submit their breasts – a part of themselves in which so much is invested – to the cold steel of machinery that will tell whether or not something is wrong. Holofcener's presence as a film-maker is growing all the time.

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian, June 2010