

“Land”—When Grief Is a Wide Expanse

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“Land” hit the theaters in February of 2021 with essentially no fanfare. It broke no records.

A woman lawyer grieves the loss of her husband and son and decides to quit society. She appears to sell all, but we do not know, and she buys a large piece of land in the Wyoming mountains.

No electricity, running water, or phone.

Grief is a painfully wide expanse.

She seemed to come prepared, read a couple of books, and loaded down her rental trailer. She tells the man who led her to her new LAND to have someone come and get the rental and return it—money will be on porch.

He tells her what we all want to tell her: that is no place to be without transportation or communication.

We all love the mountains, seemingly eternal and always changing. Grief! Deep, heart-stabbing grief is hard to face, always changing, at times eternally chasing our hearts. Relief always beyond our reach. And, goodness, everyone wants to run from the stabbing pain in the heart.

A lawyer approaching middle age, so we know she is smart, experienced, and perhaps has seen enough of civilization. Successful lawyers know people, read people, and she does not want to see or read anyone anymore.

We do not know why she chose this place of desolation or this method of escape.

Without telling us, we see that she just wants to be alone. No people to fool with. No one to cry in front of, and no one to see her tears or depression or whatever.

Very soon, surviving is harder than her books made out.

A grizzly bear makes himself at home while she is in the outhouse. Most of her supplies are now gone or ruined. Why didn't she bring a couple of guns? Yet, “dumb woman” does not fit this determined and strong personality.

The lonely expanse of the beautiful mountains becomes snow-covered. The cold snow does not assuage her grief either. She becomes hungry and gets tired.

She wearies of the fight to be brave.

She almost commits suicide.

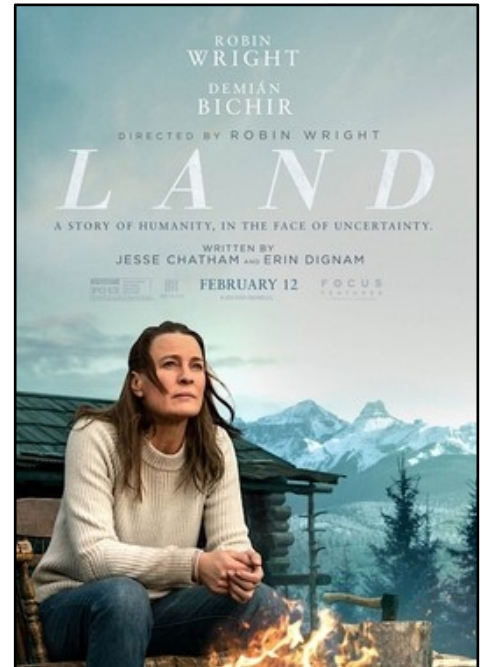
Grief—it's larger than the mountain expanse, too.

She collapses, almost dies.

A lone hunter finds her about midway into the movie, into her LAND of grief.

He and an Indian nurse help. She starts to come around, almost regretting the help, but knowing it is the humane thing to do, to help a weak innocent animal in the wilderness.

Slowly, the hunter and her become friends. They emotionally hide from each other, which suits them, and we don't know his story until the very, very end.



Here is a movie, “Land,” that must have been hard to name. “Grief” has no marketing appeal as a movie title. “Land” does not “market” much better, except perhaps by virtue of its limitlessness. There are no stars, like Meryl Streep playing the lead, or Tommy Lee Jones the lone hunter who rescues her and proctors her on hunting.

But having near strangers in this movie turned out well for me. Though not a superstar, Robin White is still known in many supporting roles and a main role in the popular series “House of Cards” (which I have not seen). So, for me, she was a veritably new actress. That is, her every nuance was fresh and unclouded from previous roles. More so for the hunter.

This is a very adult movie. No cussing or sex or bloodletting, and there is not a single special effect. Most of this, I suspect, would bore children and most young adults.

The most dazzling was the LAND, expansive, unique, beautiful, but also deceptive, dangerous, full of surprises and hard to handle—like the LAND of grief. While not taking anything away from the grief of children, the longer you love, the deeper and more expansive that you love, then the more surprisingly unpredictable and troublesome is grief. The expanse grows in love.

Hurts like hell to lose someone we love!

Small children cannot fully grasp that, not yet, though some remarkable teenagers might.

The best grief is an adults-only club. Like a parent who has lost a teenage son or daughter, upon whom nearly two decades was spent investing one’s life and heart. A husband or wife who lost their mate after 40-50-60 years of marriage—an infinite expanse of feeling.

A good friend of mine lost a teenage son. Even while 80-years old, when thoughts came of that son, a tear and choke came too. Over 50 years had passed, and the love never left. We never “recover,” though we can adapt.

I have seen grief’s terrible face and been to the LAND of expansive pain. I have found that there are usually two directions: one may focus inward and be tempted to self-destruction, even suicide—or alienation to a mountaintop cabin—or one may be focused outward and may want to destruct, even hit a wall, or at the worse hit another person. Both kinds need to express themselves, and many great organizations and works of art have arisen from the expanse.

Much has been written on grief, and there is a huge multi-volume set on bereavement. Furthermore, there are innumerable poems, songs, and most good movies have some plot of how the hero handles his or her grief. The best become better people, more sensitive, as the heart expands.

“Land” takes us on the journey of grief itself through the eyes and heart of one woman, whose grief drove her to the edge of existence, literally, and in her heart.

We join her.

How she resolves—no, no, no—she does not resolve anything. How she comes out of the wilderness, literally, and then frees herself from a few of the shackles binding her broken heart—that is the movie. She adapts to a portion of her heavy grief through the unlikely and thoroughly satisfying help of her new friend, the hunter. No counseling, thankfully, or blubber.

In fact, we never see the “help” coming. Only after the help has come and aided, and then—afterwards—when we looked back and saw, hey, what a great help he was. Just being there. The best help is often never seen in the moment by the heartbroken. What a mystery.

Yes, yes, that is the best help of all, the invisible caring, the silence shared, the wonder of the expansive mountains when shared by a kindred soul.

The hunter did not do anything, really, except respect her wishes and her pain.

There is a good ending, not to her grief, but to how she fought and rose to walk upright again, and at the very, very end—yes, she did come out of the wilderness.

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