

Wild – Review

*“You can put yourself in the way of **beauty**.”*

Reese Witherspoon has always mixed up her roles. Following her hugely impressive turn in Alexander Payne’s *Election*, the actress became famous for her *Legally Blonde* films and a string of romantic comedies. Yet she has always gravitated toward more adventurous films. In 2005 she won the Best Actress Academy Award for her **nuanced** portrayal of June Carter Cash in *Walk the Line*, and has **recently** appeared in the likes of *Mud* and *Inherent Vice*, as well as producing last year’s hugely **successful** *Gone Girl*.

With a script by novelist Nick Hornby (based on Cheryl Strayed’s **memoir** *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*), and direction from Jean-Marc Vallée (who won plaudits for 2013’s *Dallas Buyers Club*), **Wild** is a **triumph** for its star; a story of one woman’s grief, the mistakes that followed, and of **healing** - of “how to find your best self.”



Cheryl’s story is a difficult one. Raised by her mother Bobbi (a vibrant Laura Dern), she is intelligent, **compassionate** and determined, and eventually she marries a **kind**, loving man. Her mother’s **death**, however, hits her hard. She begins to find comfort in casual encounters and, eventually, heroin addiction (“I’m an experimentalist. I’m the girl who says ‘yes’ instead of ‘no,’” she tells a friend while trying to justify her behaviour). This is all presented to the viewer via a series of disjointed flashbacks as she takes on a thousand-mile hike in an attempt to regain control of her life.

With limited experience of hiking and no real idea what she is doing, Cheryl is faced with numerous difficulties. Her **bag**, for example, is bigger than she is (other hikers name it “**monster**”); her boots are too tight (as seen in the film’s excruciating opening scene), and she’s bought incompatible cooking equipment. When asked by one of the many people she meets on the **trail** whether she ever feels like quitting, she replies in the **affirmative**: “Everything hurts, all the time”.

Witherspoon is fearless in the role, presenting Cheryl as a woman who - on top of being surprisingly **funny** - is both **strong** and **vulnerable**, as caring as she can be willingly self-destructive. This film belongs to her, and to the real Cheryl Strayed, whose frank exploration of grief has **become** something genuinely **inspirational**.