

# 'Runaway Bride' would have been better as drama

By **SAMUEL MCKEWON**  
Editor

If "Runaway Bride" is a signal of anything, it's probably this: Julia Roberts has hit the end of the road in terms of romantic comedies.

If you like Roberts, in general, you'll like her newest movie. It's largely a reread of "Pretty Woman," and not just because it co-stars Richard Gere and Garry Marshall again directs. Even her hair is the same in "Runaway Bride."

In a way, this story about Maggie Carpenter (Roberts), a woman who consistently gets cold feet on wedding day, has a certain charm. And it's likely that a reporter like Ike Graham (Gere) could exploit her situation. But as it moves into its second hour, I got the feeling I'd appreciate the movie a whole lot more had it been a drama than the loopy comedy it is.

Because "Runaway Bride" has a greater share of pathos in it than it does black humor. There's nothing particularly funny about Maggie, for instance, a basically decent woman who doesn't know what she wants and flirts with her best friend's husband. There's nothing funny about her fall-down drunk dad (Paul Dooley). And there's nothing funny about Ike getting fired for writing a false column, something every citizen (and every reporter) fears.

But a comedy this movie must be, and it suffers because of it. After Ike hears of Maggie, tucked away in tiny Hale, Md., slashes her in his column and gets the boot, he treks off to way-too-small town to get the real story, and, you know, fall in love with Julia all over again.

Maggie has a fourth groom-to-be (we see how she ran out on the previous three through a nice video collage), is a football coach who tells her to "be the ball." Ike sees through that, though it takes an arduous 90 minutes to finally

get there, and another 30 minutes for whole thing to wind up.

There's a usual small town cast of characters: the best friend (Joan Cusack), the hokey shop owner (Laurie Metcalf) the wise Grandma (Jean Schertler). "Runaway Bride" even decides to recycle that old shopping scene from "Pretty Woman" in a different way.

What sinks a movie like this isn't lack of chemistry. Gere and Roberts have enough. No, in truth, neither are particularly funny individuals, especially Gere, who plays the ham. His act gets as old as he's starting to look. Roberts has usual array of funny faces and witty repartee, but lacks a cohesive character; Roberts seems as unsure on how to play Maggie as Maggie is on weddings.

As long as it is, it wouldn't have been a nightmare had the movie eschewed all the humor and went straight dramatic. Gere's better suited anyway.

For Roberts, after the success of "Notting Hill," her romantic comedy career comes to an end for awhile. She's back next in a Terrance Malick movie "The Moviegoer" and then two self-exploration films in "Alice From to Ocean" and "Erin Bradovich." That's good. Roberts, at 31, needs to move on now; hell one of these days she'll play a character who has a child of her own.

## The Facts

**Title:** "Runaway Bride"  
**Stars:** Julia Roberts, Richard Gere  
**Director:** Garry Marshall  
**Rating:** PG-13  
**Grade:** C  
**Five Words:** Julia needs to move on



MATT HANEY/DN