

## Getting It Right ★★★

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**Year of Release:** 1989

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** UK

**Verdict:** See It

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*Getting It Right* is a far cry from the teenage sex comedy you might expect from a summer movie about male virginity. The film was directed by Randal Kleiser, who brought us such bubble-gum classics as *Grease* and *The Blue Lagoon*. But thanks to Kleiser's surprisingly good direction and an intelligent script, *Getting It Right* is a pleasantly quiet, moving, and memorable film—one geared strictly toward a sophisticated, adult audience.

*Getting It Right* stars Jesse Birdsall (Emily Lloyd's boyfriend in *Wish You Were Here*) as Gavin, a painfully shy 31-year-old hairdresser who lives at home with his parents and who—gasp—is still a virgin. Gavin has no problem whatsoever making small talk with the elderly women who clamor for his services at the hair salon, but expose him to a single 30-year-old beauty and he's a mess. Much to Gavin's surprise, the woman who finally brings him out of his shell and robs him of his virginity is Joan (Lynn Redgrave), a rich, married, and lonely 45-year-old. *Getting It Right* is the simple story of Gavin's awkward and haphazard efforts to get it right; that is, to find the right woman to fulfill his life.

*Getting It Right* is one of those rare movies that devotes itself entirely to in-depth character development. Gavin's self-conscious voice-over narration of his experiences firmly thrusts us into his psyche. We observe his fascinating metamorphosis from shy and passive introversion to assertive and self-confident maturity. Birdsall's superb, understated performance as Gavin is the real backbone of the film; he seems convincing and authentic throughout.

The charm of *Getting It Right* also lies in the wide array of people who inhabit or invade Gavin's life. Despite her limited screen time, Redgrave makes quite a splash in the movie as Gavin's middle-aged seducer. For a supporting character, Joan is unusually and impressively

complex, thanks in large part to Redgrave's magnificent performance. Gavin also is pursued, or perhaps plagued, by Minnie, the totally neurotic daughter of a rich aristocrat. After Minnie and Gavin meet at a party, she takes great pleasure in disrupting his safe and simple life. Helena Bonham Carter is delightfully pathetic and kooky in the role, and Sir John Gielgud, with his tongue in his cheek, embodies the height of arrogance as her father. Gavin's eventual love-interest is Jenny, the adorable twenty-year-old single mother who assists him at the beauty salon; London stage actress Jane Horrocks' fine performance yields a touchingly sweet character. Peter Cook, the great British satirist, appears briefly in the film as Gavin's uptight employer.

The scenes of Gavin's home life with his parents are also a treat. Gavin's over-protective mother (Pat Heywood), whom even Woody Allen would find overbearing, almost steals the movie. Her life seems limited to just two activities: treating Gavin like a 10-year-old and preparing exotic but inedible meals, such as scalding hot curry and baked chicken with chocolate sauce. Gavin and his father's attempts to avoid eating her meals are extremely amusing.

*Getting It Right*, for the most part, is very well-crafted, except for two minor shortcomings. First, the movie is about 15 minutes too long, and consequently it loses momentum at times. Second, the film includes an altogether extraneous subplot about the domestic problems between Gavin's best friend, Harry, and his unfaithful lover, Winthrop. Overall, however, *Getting It Right* is quite memorable for its humor, depth, sophistication, and outstanding acting. Kleiser and screenwriter Elizabeth Jane Howard (adapting her own highly acclaimed novel) deserve praise for finding just the right tone for this tale of growth, maturation, and self-discovery.

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