

MOVIES

'Hard Truths' star Marianne Jean-Baptiste breaks down the film's cryptic ending

The Mike Leigh-directed film does not provide easy answers.

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By Randee Dawn and Candice Williams

If you're paying attention to this year's film awards season, you've probably heard of Mike Leigh's new British drama called "Hard Truths."

Set in London, the 97-minute film centers on Pansy (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), a woman deeply unhappy with the world and takes it out on everyone around her, including her long-suffering husband Curtley (David Webber), her adult son Moses (Tuwaine Barrett) who lives at home, and even her seemingly happy sister Chantelle

(Michele Austin).



Marianne Jean-Baptiste as Pansy in "Hard Truths." **BFA/Simon Mein / Alamy Stock Photo**

"Hard Truths" is somewhat of a reunion for director Mike Leigh and Jean-Baptiste who worked together nearly 30 years ago on his Oscar-nominated film "Secrets & Lies." The two also teamed up the following year when he used some of her music in his film "Career Girls."

Similar to his latest film, "Secrets & Lies" also centered on Jean-Baptiste, but as an adopted Black woman who traces her family history and discovers her biological mother is white. It also generated much critical-acclaim, including five Oscar nominations.

"Hard Truths" appears to be following suit; it has already received early award season

buzz — and accolades. It won a National Board of Review award, and Jean-Baptiste has won awards from critics organizations in New York, San Diego, Toronto, Chicago and Los Angeles.

With the film's release in theaters on Jan. 10, there will be many who see the film who'll likely have a slew of questions as the final credits roll. Namely, happened to Pansy and Curtley and what is the takeaway?

Let's dive a little deeper, and hear from the film's star, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, and director to understand the film's cryptic ending.

Note: Spoilers about the end of "Hard Truths" ahead.

What is 'Hard Truths' about?

"Hard Truths" is a small independent film that focuses on Pansy, the matriarch of a small family living in London. Pansy is deeply unhappy with the world, and takes it

out on everyone around her, including her husband Curtley, son Moses, and sister Chantelle.

As Jean-Baptiste tells TODAY.com, “(Pansy) is somebody who has a lot of anxiety and fear... She’s someone who doesn’t enjoy life and doesn’t quite understand why, and blames other people for it.... I’ve seen people that are quite similar to her, and observed that way they present in the world.”



Curtley (David Webber), Pansy, and Moses (Tuwaine Barrett). **Alamy Stock Photo**

But, as viewers soon learn, Pansy's temperament isn't solely based on her interactions with others; her frustration also comes from unresolved grief. There's an important scene in the film where Pansy and Chantelle go to their mother's gravesite; Pansy is abrasive and dismissive at first, but the sisters end up talking about their mother, Pearl's, death.

"Your memory of Pearl is not the same as mine," insists Pansy. She is resentful that she had to be the one who found their mother "lying stiff in the bed" with her eyes still open, "Accusing. Disappointed."



Pansy with her sister Chantelle (Michele Austin) tearfully embrace at the site of their mother's grave.

Bleecker Street via YouTube

One of the film's critical moment comes when Pansy reveals that she thinks everyone hates her, to which Chantelle responds that she loves her "but I don't understand you."

Pansy's revelation helps shed insight on her complicated relationship with the world, and how she's surrounded herself with people she can barely stand. Chantelle offers Pansy an opportunity for respite amid her suffering: she tells her to simply walk away. But Pansy doesn't seem ready to do that.

Leigh said he used locations, like Pansy's house, as way to highlight and reflect her inner mental health struggles.

"The choice of locations is critical... In this film, most obviously, you can see that Pansy's house is a function of her paranoia, her fear of stuff and things and plants and insects and all the rest of it, whereas (her sister) Chantal's flat is a celebration of color and light and plants and joy," he told [Film Comment](#) in Oct. 2024. "For me, that's

what it's always been about. "

What happens at the end of 'Hard Truths'?

Don't expect some big twist or denouement at the end of the film. It seems to just ... end. But "Hard Truths" isn't a movie that's going to give easy answers or wrap things in a bow.

The last twenty minutes or so of "Hard Truths" stops being about Pansy taking everything out on the world, and becomes a bit more of the world reacting to her. Following a series of increasingly tense moments — a meltdown at her Mother's Day gathering, throwing her husband's clothes out of their bedroom, calling him "disgusting" — Curtley is injured while at work.



Marianne Jean-Baptiste delivers a stunning portrayal of Pansy. **Bleecker Street via YouTube**

His co-worker brings him home and tells Pansy what's going on, but she doesn't appear to want to leave the bedroom after being woken up — instead she quietly sits in a chair by the bed.

The final scenes are close-ups of Curtley, a single tear running down his face as he waits for his wife to come down and comfort him; and Pansy, also in a close-up, her expression almost unreadable. She's not happy or sad. She lets out a small breath. And then the film ends.

So what does the ending of 'Hard Truths' mean?

Leigh is not going to do your homework for you. He's been open about working with a very loose script, and has said his actors do a certain amount of improvisation.

"For me, every film is a learning curve. And the great thing about being able to work, in this particular case, with actors with this particular background, is they're able to come up with what this character would say," Leigh said during a tastemakers screening attending by TODAY.com. "I'm there to learn from and to take from (them). And if you like to put it more crudely, to exploit their experience, their knowledge and understanding."

Jean-Baptiste also shared her thoughts on the significance of the ending, telling TODAY.com that they "leave it to the audience" to figure out.

"It's intentional on Mike Leigh's part (to keep things ambiguous). As far as I was concerned, I didn't know it was the ending when we were doing that scene, because you don't know what the film's about or what's happening. You don't know whether he's going to film stuff after that," she says.



Chantelle offers Pansy a way out of her misery. **Bleecker Street via YouTube**

In fact, the first time she saw the ending was when she saw the completed film. As Jean-Baptiste explains, until the end of the film you've been watching a woman who "is unable to help themselves." So when she has an injured husband downstairs, "How is she going to help anyone else? And that's as much as I can give you. The rest is for the audience to take in, to argue about with their friends and come up with whatever ending they want to put on it."

What did you think of the ending of "Hard Truths"?

"Hard Truths," a Bleecker Street film, is now available in theaters.

Randee Dawn

Randee Dawn (she/her) is an entertainment journalist and author based in Brooklyn. In addition to writing for TODAY.com, Variety and The Los Angeles Times, her debut novel, *Tune in Tomorrow*, about a reality TV show run by mythic creatures, published in 2022. She's also the co-author of *The Law & Order: SVU Unofficial Companion*. When not interviewing the stars or dabbling in speculative fiction, she dreams of the next place she can travel to, or cuddles her Westie. More at [RandeeDawn.com](https://www.randeedawn.com).



Candice Williams

Candice Williams is a Senior Editor at TODAY Digital, focusing on pop culture, trending news and diverse storytelling.