




‘The Chambermaid’ (‘La Camarista’): Film Review

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Courtesy of Alpha Violet

THE BOTTOM LINE

The inhospitality of the hospitality industry. 

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Lila Aviles’ debut portrays the daily grind of a worker in a luxury Mexico City hotel.



that make up the life of its protagonist, superbly played by Gabriela Cartol, is always balanced by compassion, perhaps making it more effective than any impassioned rant.

Sureness of touch and a sometimes asphyxiating intensity are the hallmarks of a relentlessly low-key first outing that has been garnering plaudits on its travels, most recently at Spain's Lleida Latin-American Film Festival. A U.S. release is scheduled for June 26.

The opening scene neatly sets things up as chambermaid Evelia (Cartol), known as Eve, tidying up a disgusting mess of a room, discovers a naked, old and presumably wealthy man under the bed. This suggests him as human trash, but as the film goes on to show, it is the power of people like him who define the parameters of Eve's life.

A single mother, Eve has a child whom she phones regularly but rarely sees, obliged as she is to work long hours to be able to raise said child. Working on the 23rd floor, she aspires to move to the newly reopened 42nd floor, which is more prestigious. Occasionally, in miniature acts of private defiance, she will pick up and pocket small items of trash she finds.

Eve is also in daily contact with a range of people. Among them are an elevator operator who reads romantic novels as a way of escaping (Eve herself ends up reading *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*); an attendant who keeps trying to sell her kitchenware; and her boss, who promises Eve time and time again that eventually she will receive an unclaimed red dress that has been found. There are a surprising number of these people, and it is testimony to the balance and efficiency of the script that neither they nor their storylines feel underdeveloped.

The closest to love that exists for Eve inside the hotel is a window cleaner who draws a heart in soap for her, a sequence ending in a scene that may be the film's single concession to fantasy. And the closest thing to friendship comes via the bubbly, motherly Minitoy (Teresa Sanchez), who takes Eve under her wing. But the demands of her job have made Eve too wary to fully give herself to any of these experiences.

Under the unflinching, steady gaze of Carlos F. Rossini's carefully positioned camera (one key scene apart, we never leave the hotel), a wheel of relationships is therefore built up with Eve at its center. As it turns, it opens up to us a devastating if unemphatic portrait of a highly controlled,



stifled spontaneous human interaction.

If this sounds political, then it is, as with Sophie Calle's book of photographs, *Hotel*, that partly inspired it — but *The Chambermaid's* quietness, subtlety and modesty of style always keep it dramatically engaging. On the downside, there's a tendency to break the flow by somewhat brusque fades to black.

Cartol plays Eve with trembling sensitivity: Experience has taught the character that for survival, self-effacement to the point of self-erasure may be the best strategy. Eve's sometimes exasperating self-control is perhaps Aviles' way of showing how internalized her suffering has become; her voice rises above a whisper only twice, once in laughter and the other in protest, when she's alone.

Another of the pic's multiple threads has Eve looking after the child of Romina (strikingly played by Agustina Quinci), an effervescent, oblivious Argentinian guest. In its treatment of the broken relationships between mothers and children, and in the not dissimilar, buttoned-down approaches to their roles taken by Cartol and by Yalitza Aparicio, comparisons will be made between Eve and the maid Cleo in Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*, but there's one key difference: In *The Chambermaid*, Eve is rewarded with no opportunity for heroism.

Production companies: Bad Boy Billy, La Panda

Cast: Gabriela Cartol, Teresa Sanchez, Agustina Quinci

Director: Lila Aviles

Screenwriters: Lila Aviles, Juan Marquez

Producers: Tatiana Graullera, Lila Aviles

Executive producers: Jana Diaz-Juhl, Pau Brunet, Axel Shalson, Carlos F. Rossini, Emiliano Altuna

Director of photography: Carlos F. Rossini

Production designer: Vika Fleitas

Costume designer: Nora Solis Zepeda

Editor: Omar Guzman

Casting director: Lucia Uribe

Sales: Alpha Violet

