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Close Quarters (Territorio)

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Close Quarters (Territorio)

Abstract

This is a film review of *Close Quarters (Territorio)*, directed by Andres Clariond.



Close Quarters (Territorio) (2018), dir. Andres Clariond

Close Quarters is a powerful depiction of the burgeoning of vice and sin rooted in insecurity. It presents the development of a household at first full of love, then, by turns, only jealousy and spite. The film lays bare the often-unnoticed sources of sin: envy violates love and friendship. It corrupts the desire to nurture, transforming into violence and destruction. *Close Quarters* offers a chillingly intimate glimpse into this torturous transformation and invites the audience to contemplate the concerning proximity of love and sin and the fragility of sanctity.

The film portrays the story of Manuel and Lupe, a young Central American couple that tries desperately to conceive a child but continues to be unsuccessful. Testing reveals that Manuel is infertile, and a series of failed treatments shows that he is hopelessly so. In search of any

alternatives, they decide to try artificial insemination, despite their limited funds and disagreement about who the candidates should be. Manuel—middle management at a large woodworking company—had recently befriended one of his new employees, Ruben. Despite his new employment, Ruben is planning to leave the company soon in order to cross the US border in search of more lucrative prospects. In light of Ruben’s planned departure, Manuel thinks Ruben would make a good candidate for Lupe’s artificial insemination. He could pay Ruben, thereby helping in his migration. Furthermore, since Ruben will be out of the country, Manuel and Lupe would not need to worry about complications that might arise from living in the same city or country as the baby’s biological father. Manuel suggests this idea to Ruben and Lupe, and they decide to try it out. But the artificial insemination fails (which, the doctor tells them, is not very rare). To make matters worse, Ruben is scammed by the man who was facilitating his illegal border crossing. He is left homeless and broke. So, in a gesture of generosity and pity, Manuel takes Ruben into his home until Ruben can find another job and another place to stay.

This marks the beginning of the decay of Lupe and Manuel’s home and relationship. Under the influence of Ruben—who likes to smoke weed, drink beer, and play soccer—Manuel slips into a sort of bachelor mindset. He begins to shirk his responsibilities to his wife, his home, and his job. He had dreams to start his own woodworking business but begins to neglect this aspiration. Manuel, generally disenchanted with life, finds in Ruben a short-term salve for his increasing woes. But this takes a dark turn. Soon Manuel becomes suspicious of romancing between Lupe and Ruben. The two steal lusty glances and are often alone together while Manuel is at work. Ruben is strong and charismatic, and this makes Manuel insecure, especially in light of his reproductive shortcomings.

Yet, in a bitterly absurd twist, one drunken night Manuel coaxes Ruben to have sex with Lupe. This is ostensibly a noble act, a final attempt for the couple to have their child, albeit through highly unusual means. But this evening has a bleaker dimension. It signifies Manuel's resignation to hopelessness. It is the calcification of his feeling of inferiority and inadequacy. Superficially, the act is performed only in order to try once more to conceive a child and raise a family. But it fully actualizes his fears of being usurped and emasculated, and represents his surrender to self-pity.

Situational irony of the most vicious sort ensues. Ruben successfully impregnates Lupe that night. Manuel's countless attempts at making a baby (and large sums of money spent on failed treatment for his infertility) are put to shame, at least as he sees it. Ruben does in one night what Manuel never succeeds at, despite extraordinary effort. Although Manuel designed the situation, he is consumed by his envy of Ruben. He begins to act erratically, leveling paranoid accusations at Ruben of theft and deceit, and drinking excessively to cope with his frustration. This only makes matters worse, as his anger and fear of replacement make his replacement more likely. Lupe loses interest in Manuel, seeing him turn down a path of vicious and seemingly irreversible self-loathing. Out of comfort and proximity, she turns to Ruben for care and love, leaving Manuel to fester in his spite. He becomes angry, violent, delusional, a hate-filled shell of a man.

This is a tragic film, but the tragedy is informative. It is easy to see vile and corrupt acts in isolation. It is easy to see the toxic and reprehensible in a person without inquiring about its source. The film invites the audience to acknowledge that sin does not stand alone. Sin is caused; often, by small, seemingly benevolent or innocuous turns. There is an inevitability to the plot of *Close Quarters*. A loving couple with noble dreams undergoes a tragic transformation by way of choices that are made in good conscience but end up in unforeseen pain and decomposition. Lust-driven

envy and envy-driven hatred result from essentially good intentions. The film urges a candid examination of the nature of spite and sin. It leaves the impression that the corruption of love and noble values is more immanent than we would like to admit, and does so by coaxing compassion from the viewer. Instead of condemning those who act deplorably, the film forces us to understand why they act as they do, and to see that it could happen to anyone.