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La Nana (The Maid)

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Reviewed by **Alexis Madden**
(Sundance 2009)

Director: [Sebastián Silva](#)

Written by: [Sebastián Silva](#) and [Pedro Peirano](#)

Starring: [Catalina Saavedra](#), [Claudia Celedón](#), [Mariana Loyola](#), [Andrea García-Huidobro](#), [Alejandro Goic](#), [Agustín Silva](#)

Confirming that the fêted festival still recognizes groundbreaking independent cinema, this year's Sundance Film Festival conferred two awards on Sebastián Silva's second feature, *The Maid*: the film's Grand Jury Prize in World Cinema and Catalina Saavedra's Special Jury Prize in Acting. In the midst of adequate films full of named faces, *The Maid* stood out as a well-crafted and intimate portrait of a domestic servant who's allowed her employment to gradually consume her identity. Has she become a member of the family or is she just hired help?

The film opens with a static shot of a seemingly deserted kitchen and an offscreen conversation between family members having dinner. Raquel (Catalina Saavedra), the family's maid, enters the frame, eating alone and silently listening to the family to whom she has devoted the past 23 years of her life. Immediately, isolation and loneliness envelop this main character. Though her need to belong with them (and not to them) is strong, it can't go against the ingrained role she has learned to play. Even when the family surprises her with a birthday cake and asks her to sit down with them, there's an awkward discomfort. She quickly removes herself from the table to resume her duties, before even finishing the dessert.

On the surface, Raquel is the epitome of the perfect maid: seamlessly juggling caretaking, housekeeping and gratifying her family's whims and needs. However, her fatigue and inability to keep up with the needs of her charges begin to become evident to the family and causes her to resent these people who have stripped away her vitality and stolen her youth. The main recipient of Raquel's resentment is the eldest daughter, Camilia (Andrea García-Huidobro), a youthful, good-natured girl who is, perhaps, targeted particularly for those traits. The family's matriarch, Pilar (Claudia Celedón - who was also in Sebastián Silva's debut feature, *La Vide me mata*), decides that Raquel isn't able to continue performing her duties, but instead of firing the woman who has helped raise her children, Pilar decides to hire another maid to split the workload. With territorial jealousy, and fearing she's to be replaced, Raquel resorts to destructive measures to rid "her family" of this interloper.



At first glance, viewers might find the video appearance of the film unsettling, but that's quickly abated after mere moments, and the characters draw the viewer into the story unfolding. Cinematography becomes more than just a vehicle to propel the plot; it becomes integral to the tale itself as [Sergio Armstrong's](#) camerawork evolves into an essential layer in the slowly waning exploration of Raquel's life of servitude. The hand-held shots within the family's house only intensify the oppressive solitude bearing down on Raquel within its walls. The final shot of the film (reminiscent of a cherished moment from John Carney's Oscar-winning musical, *Once*) is one that will etch its way into your memory.

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Saavedra is precise in handling the character's haunting neurosis. She carefully crafts the unraveling of a tortured, desperate and unpredictable woman. Saavedra's character remains odd and internal throughout most of the film, until a new maid, Lucy (played by the charming Mariana Loyola), is hired. It is then that a glimpse is given of the woman Raquel once was and perhaps could again be.

An unforgettable screenplay from Pedro Peirano and Sebastián Silva - the pair of writers who also co-wrote *La Vida me mata* in 2007 - at its core, this film masterfully captures the mechanics of an upper-class family told through the eyes of a woman who longs to belong yet would never relinquish her position as subordinate. *La Nana* sets the bar high for 2009. -MPM

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