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MOVIE REVIEW | 'WHISKY'

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A Tale of Connections, Tiny Ones Made and Far Greater Ones Lost Forever

By [MANOHLA DARGIS](#)

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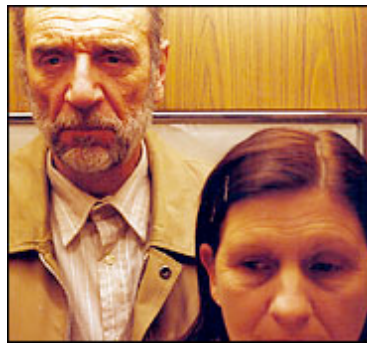
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A deadpan comedy shot through with a vein of despair, the Uruguayan film "[Whisky](#)" is a pint-size pleasure. The story of two souls seemingly stuck in neutral (with a third in relentless drive), the film is a model of both fiscal and narrative economy, and the kind of work - gleaned from the mysteries of consciousness, telling quotidian details and a sense of aesthetic proportion - that is too often missing from American independent cinema.



Global Film Initiative
Andres Pazos and Mirella Pascual in Juan Pablo Rebella's "Whisky."

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On the first anniversary of his mother's death, Jacobo Köller (Andres Pazos), the owner of a small, struggling sock factory, asks his most attentive employee, Marta Acuña (Mirella Pascual), to spend a few days at his home for a little subterfuge because his brother, Herman (Jorge

Bolani), is arriving for a visit. It takes some time to realize that Jacobo asks because there is no one else to ask; why Marta agrees is another matter.

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An exemplary employee, Marta is inevitably the first at the factory gate and the last to leave; out of loyalty, routine or character, she is faithful. The question of whether that faithfulness has anything to do with Jacobo is what makes "Whisky" somewhat of a mystery, though one of the human heart.

The film's directors, Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll, who wrote the screenplay with Gonzalo Delgado Galiana, build the story through minor gestures, shards of conversation and a modestly beautiful *mise-en-scène*. No one in the film explains how or why he or she arrived at this moment in time (we do learn that Herman arrives by plane); the important thing is that they are in the here and now. Gray and taciturn, at once recognizable and opaque, Jacobo sags as if burdened by his deteriorating factory, but he might have just been born sullen. Like Marta, with her creased face and fondness for stealing an occasional cigarette, Jacobo is a question mark of a character, one the filmmakers are in no hurry to explain.

Something happens in "Whisky"; indeed, several things happen, none really significant, but nevertheless profound. Marta and Jacobo have their photograph taken, thereby explaining the title of the film: "Say whisky," demands the photographer, coaxing smiles as rare and precious as jewels. Along with Herman, the couple travel to a resort town where they stir up memories, test loyalties and make the acquaintance of a pair of newlyweds whose intimacy is a reminder of what might have been - or not. In a series of shabby rooms, in nighttime rambles and awkward meals, Marta, Jacobo and Herman navigate around one another through silences and lurching conversation. Sometimes they connect, often they do not, and such is the story of ordinary life artfully and touchingly told.

'Whisky'

Opens today in Manhattan.

Directed by Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll; written (in Spanish, with English subtitles) by Mr. Rebella, Mr. Stoll and Gonzalo Delgado Galiana; director of photography, Bárbara Álvarez; edited by Fernando Epstein; music by Pequeña Orquesta Reincidentes; art director, Mr. Delgado Galiana; produced by Mr. Epstein; released by the Global Film Initiative. At the MoMA Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, 11 West 53rd Street, Manhattan. Running time: 94 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Andres Pazos (Jacobo Köller), Mirella Pascual (Marta Acuña), Jorge Bolani (Herman Köller) and Ana Katz and Daniel Hendler (young married couple).


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