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SCREENDAILY

Code Blue

17 May, 2011 | By Dan Fainaru



Dir: Urszula Antoniak. Netherlands-Denmark. 2011. 81mins

In Urszula Antoniak's promising debut *Nothing Personal*, a couple of solitary people find solace in each other's company, on the windswept coast of Ireland. For her second effort, Antoniak resorted to a short Polish story *Woods*, whose topic is still loneliness, but this time, there is no solace or relief in sight.

The title, *Code Blue*, refers to a hospital code indicating a patient is in immediate need of reanimation.

The main character, Marian (Bien de Moor), gradually sinks in the course of the film into the most abject solitude, by the end of which even self-immolation is suggested as preferable to her kind of existence. It is difficult to imagine what kind of audience would willingly submit itself to this kind of cheerless punishment, unfolding on screen at an incredibly slow pace and unflinchingly turning its screws just a little bit more with every passing minute.

Marian, an ascetic fortyish hospital nurse, is fully dedicated to her patients who appear to be, without exception, terminal cases, so much so that at times she even helps put an end to their miseries. As long as she is in the hospital, dressed in her white uniform, gently floating from one patient to another, she looks and acts like an angel of mercy.

Yearning for human companionship and terrified of it at the same time, she invents a lover and later a daughter, to populate the emptiness around her for the benefit of those who might threaten to invade her privacy. She walks around desolately in her spotlessly clean flat that no one enters, occasionally watches a film on television or masturbates out of desperation. One night she watches, almost enviously, a woman being raped under her window and later retrieves the semen filled condom to spread its contents between her legs.

Almost unwillingly dragged to a party, she makes the acquaintance of a male neighbour, takes him home but the predictable love scene that was supposed to ensue turns into a brutal encounter that sums up their mutual frustration at

being unable to reach into each other's loneliness.

The title, *Code Blue*, refers to a hospital code indicating a patient is in immediate need of reanimation. Which is most certainly the case of Marian, a kind of walking dead eventually capable of helping others but unable to resuscitate herself to life. Bien de Moor plays her with tremendously soulful sympathy, compassion and hopelessness deeply etched into her facial expressions.

Even her emaciated physique, revealed in the last scene in all its nakedness, a skeletal, tortured body, fits in with her part. The dark, foreboding, steely images provided by Jasper Wolf's camera, Vincent de Pater's spare, economical sets and the slow, insistent, often repetitive montage generate a brooding, doomed type of atmosphere, out of which the viewer has no reprieve.

If there is a religious message in all this, and there probably is, not much of it will find its way to an audience pushed into such excesses of depression that they might not care any longer whether Marian represents some kind of unredeemable redeemer or is just a flawed human being, deeply hurt because of her incapacity to establish any kind of contact with her own kind. The second option makes much more sense.

Production companies: IDTV Film, Family Affair Films
Producers: Frans van Gestel, Arnold Heslenfeld, Floor Onrust
International sales: Bavaria Film International, www.bavaria-film.de
Screenplay: Urszula Antoniak, based on short story Woods by Jacek Luter Lenartowicz
Cinematography: Jasper Wolf
Editor: Nathalie Alonso Casales
Production designer: Vincent de Pater
Music: Ethan Rose
Main cast: Bein de Moor, Lars Eidinger, Annemarie Prins, Sophie van Winden, Christine Byvanck, Hans Kesting

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