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“Face Painters” – Review

From his earliest youth, the only life Buono Gravetti has been raised to know is that of an undertaker, in preparation to join his father’s business. When his father falls too ill to manage his funeral home, Buono is suddenly thrust into the role of a manager of the family business, a role which he is completely unprepared for and does not know how to handle. As troubles pile up quicker than they can be solved, the young craftsman decides to swallow his pride and turn to Michael, his highly educated but long since estranged brother. However, when the tension between the two brothers threatens to destroy both their business and their family, and their father’s condition seems to only be worsening, the only way for them to move forward seems to be to finally reconcile and, together, find the root of their father’s suffering — two tasks which might turn out to be a lot easier in theory than they are in practice.

“Face Painters” offers a raw, emotional perspective on the struggles of a family of Italian immigrants in 1960s America. The screenplay presents two discrete stories and points of view; those of Buono’s life as an American business owner and of Luca’s past as the undertaker of a small Italian community, and intertwines them into one overarching plot. This duality allows for the story to highlight previously unseen parallels between two characters who seem so very distant from each other at the start, slowly eroding the seemingly insurmountable differences between them. Each of the two storylines is portrayed with significant skill and attention to detail, keeping both of them equally engaging and vital to the plot. It is notable that despite their clear differences, the narrative switches between its two main stories with remarkable ease. As a result, the screenplay’s unique structure is a risk that pays off in full, adding to its originality and making its already evocative stories even more memorable together than they would be by themselves.

The screenplay’s main focus is on the conflict between past and future, explored in several of its many forms through the lives of the different characters. The most obvious, almost literal interpretation of this conflict can be seen in the dual story structure, which compares Luca’s past in Italy to Buono’s present in America. However, this theme is examined in many less noticeable ways. One of those is contained in Buono and Michael’s diametrically opposed approaches to their business and their irreconcilably different lifestyles, representing the clash between tradition and modern innovation. While the main theme is explored in most detail, the screenplay also offers a wealth of secondary meanings dealing with universally important issues, some of which include the importance of family and the difficulty in letting go of regret over past mistakes. The story’s complexity and scope allow it to discuss these subjects in depth, provoking analysis and self-reflection from the audience.

“Face Painters” is highly successful in its unusual approach to combining storylines, with very few noticeable flaws and a lot of promise. With its well-crafted, original structure and memorable characters, this screenplay presents a unique and emotionally impactful story that is sure to attract attention from a diverse audience.