

ALLURE: A Disturbing Story But An Impressive Debut

Lead by a powerhouse cast and brilliant directorial debut, *Allure* challenges and leaves a significant trail of destruction in its wake....



As a directorial debut from photographers **Carlos and Jason Sanchez**, *Allure* is an auspicious first project. This drama/thriller is an intricate emotional machine, touching on abuse and delusion, the prey and the attacker. It is a film that pins you down and is captivating even in its ugliest moments.

A lonely teenager is befriended by a young woman, both desperately yearning for meaningful interaction. The two begin a destructive relationship, and what plays out between them is alarming, portrayed in *Allure* with sharp performances.

Troubled And Alone

Laura (**Evan Rachel Wood**) is a wreck.

She says so herself mid-way through *Allure*, but it's gathered from even the opening scene. We meet Laura in a hotel room, blindfolding and commandeering a stranger for aggressive sex. She works for her creepy father William's (**Denis O' Hare**) cleaning company, and their relationship is tense, subduing a dormant but still very inflicting, wound. She's an alcoholic, who seems to get herself in trouble repeatedly, especially concerning clients of her fathers.



source: Films Seville

Young and impressionable, sixteen-year-old Eva (**Julia Sarah Stone**) is floundering. Frustrated with her mother and her mother's new boyfriend, she's looking for an escape.

When Laura begins cleaning their home, sniffing Eva's fragility out, she has a few brief exchanges with the girl, giving Eva exactly what she desires: attention. Laura compliments her classical piano talents, and they share a joint together. Laura, craving human interaction more substantial than her father or that of a loveless exchange, is enamored.

When Eva discovers that her mother intends to move, she finally decides to run away from her problems, Laura offering up her home as refuge. At first, the two have a lot of fun together, drinking and dancing, and Eva gets a taste of the freedom she's been longing for. In her wild abandonment, she is still besotted by Laura, who always seems to be cooing her, and playing the happy buoyant young woman.

Then her nails begin to show.

A Fine Line Between Love And Hate

After Laura receives a visit from police and Eva proposes calling her mother, a more sinister side comes out. She proceeds to lock Eva in a closet, which is just the tip of her possessive nature. Laura is consistently on edge, drowning herself with alcohol, and hanging on a thin thread of stability, which is more a facade than anything else. After a while her mask begins to fall. Her past catches up to her on more than one account, as she perpetuates lies and continues to manipulate Eva into thinking they are “soulmates”.



source: Films Seville

Allure works mainly because of its two lead women, who manage to fill the limited sets with their big performances. This is a tour de force from **Evan Rachel Wood**, who succeeds in delivering a fiery, unhinged character with absolute ease. She's had several roles over the years that have showed her range, but as Laura, she is an exposed live wire. **Wood** tackles all of Laura, from her sexuality to her anguish, and she's completely fearless, no matter how murky things get.

As Eva, **Julia Sarah Stone** manages to keep up with **Wood**, not buckling under her intense prowess. **Stone** is gentle and innocent, and her gullibility makes her both curious and irresponsible. Both perspectives are explored, as we go from **Stone's** fear to her pity for **Wood**. Laura's anger threads into a sort of self-deprecating scolding, managing to trick Eva into submission once more. There is a constant struggle for Eva, a bit of Stockholm syndrome, warring between her mind and heart. Laura is a very convincing sociopath, who gives her just enough affection, that her violent and jealous outbursts are overlooked.

Conclusion: *Allure*

It is a sophisticated debut, taut and melancholy, that is effectually distinguished by the powerhouse performance of **Evan Rachel Wood**. Her character will floor you.

This sort of film, in all its troubling attire, might not be for everyone. *Allure* challenges and leaves a significant trail of destruction in its wake. If you give it a chance, it'll ensnare you into a dizzy submission, just as Laura lures Eva.

The story is cyclical on abuse, and despite Laura's horrific obsessive behavior, there is an understanding by film's end, that she is also a victim. **Wood** portrays Laura in every light, even when the character is at her darkest. **O'Hare**, who is always excellent, does a fantastic job as Laura's father. His actions and reactions, give us brief respites for our dislike of Laura, seeing her as a scared child in a thirty-year old's body.

Some of the directions throughout the film work excellently to magnify emotions. One such choice is to muffle everything but **Denis O Hare's** point of view when the police interview Laura. Or from Laura's perspective, when he sobs outside her car window. The artistic flair of **Carlos and Jason Sanchez** shows, with the use of certain visuals and the choice of settings. Each add to the trepidation of the film. For much of it our cast sticks to the shadows, with occasional neon and reds, or strips of light bleeding through the curtains. It illuminates their hide out, and early on shows the frayed edges of this supposed haven, as reality peak its head out.



The two also wrote *Allure* and the dialogue is as unnerving as the subject matter. I think the film could have benefited from more, especially on the front-end, but the arc of the characters, while keeping with the heavy narrative, is implemented sufficiently.