

# Shielding Sheila

## Critical Analysis

★★★★★

Joyce Grey-Carter's newest film *Shielding Sheila* begins with a protective barrier over the audience's eyes, and thus the film touches on every feeling imaginable, including those that the audience can very immediately understand are particularly close to the filmmaker.

As the film begins, we are shocked and disheartened to see Richard Bobb-Semple (played superbly by himself) suffer violence at the hands of our protagonist, Joyce Ann Grey-Carter, whom we initially don't know and are wary of at first due to the bullying tactics she employs against Richard. However, we are still very interested in learning why, as Sheila's internal voice tells us that this isn't typical of her.

This, along with the fact that it's all happening in the midst of the pandemic serves as a warning to not plan too far ahead as the second half of *Shielding Sheila* takes us on an emotional rollercoaster and showcases everything that meaningful relationships and friendships have to offer.



In an effort to celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary, Sheila's husband Richard gives her flowers. Ambiguous about what is to come, and as a very important gift to open us through the marriage of our two main characters, this gesture should symbolize our love for nature and its innate importance to what keeps us happy and content despite all that is wrong in the world.

We are almost immediately taken back into the world of COVID 19, the world of beauty we so desperately yearned for at this time, and thus the place that Sheila and Richard are both searching for, as Sheila throws these out of his face because she is preoccupied with the TV.

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Richard is physically abused by Sheila through the first stages of the film, which saddens and shocks us and tells us there is a deeper embodiment of evil to search for and watch out for. This is obviously not merely just COVID haunting our protagonist, and as viewers, we can only first sympathize with Richard, who doesn't appear to have much of a reaction to the fact that nearly every kind deed he performs in the beginning of the film goes unnoticed.

Sheila's inner voice serves as the film's narrator, and what makes it even more interesting is that it is a direct antithesis to her real-life behavior. We know Sheila is fundamentally good deep down and that she loves her husband a great deal, and we're eager to see this in its purest form.

The plot thickens as *Shielding Sheila* progresses, and the 'shield' begins to unveil itself. We're profoundly upset to learn that Sheila's actions and attitude can be linked to the fact that she has meningioma, a brain tumor that corners our couple with despair and noticeable symptoms that the viewer can now see. When

Semple's friends come to visit him, we can see how the secrecy of the situation hardens.

Richard's friends are on their way, and one close friend in particular, a well-known artist, Sonny, with whom we can tell the two have a close relationship, suspects that something is wrong with Sheila. He finds it suspicious that there's a mark on Richard's head, as well as Richard slipping in conversation about needing his job especially because of what's going on with her.

Again, one of the most important aspects of *Shielding Sheila* (aside from the fact that it's based on a true story, and we can only imagine how strong director Joyce Grey-Carter had to stay during production of the film) is the unveiling of the shield, and how often we need a little bit of a push from our friends and relationships to help us.

Sheila has made some attempts to talk about how she feels, and it's clear that she wants to get a lot off her chest. However, it isn't until she's immersed in musical therapy and part of a supportive group that she begins to see a glimmer of hope amid what we can only assume is an otherwise hopeless situation.

Sheila is reminded to be gentle with the drums, and the therapy sessions depict many people who express their own story and reason for being there. Through a push from those around her we can see a light begin to shine. Richard's buddies are joking and conversing like typical men, but a ray of hope has pierced through their banter as we watch Richard finally express himself to Sonny.

Shots of the couple laughing and smiling together, as well as the hospital where Sheila has her procedure are shown towards the end

of Shielding Sheila. This serves as a timely reminder that the people we hold dear in our lives are what really count, regardless of the symptoms we may be experiencing as a result of the underlying theme of something else within us wanting to grasp and drag us down.

*Shielding Sheila is a compelling film that raises conversation about what barriers to entry we place in front of ourselves in the roughest of circumstances, and who will be there at the end of the day to help us break through.*

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