

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

GUEST IN THE HOUSE

(United Artists)



IT might almost appear as if there were something in the suggestion (made about *Lady in the Dark*) that the psychiatrists have shares in Hollywood studios, for their science has certainly been given a thrashing (or should one say an airing?) in recent movies. Whether this interest in minds instead of bodies is to be regarded as an indication of Hollywood's belated approach to maturity may well be a matter for argument—especially as *Guest in the House*, though heavily psychological, does not entirely neglect the physical side, in the shape of a comely artist's model—but it does at least give audiences a chance to vary their entertainment diet.

Guest in the House is intended to be a study in neurotic invalidism. I say "intended to be" because the director's habit of putting his foot down on the melodramatic loud pedal at crucial moments, particularly in the finale, tends to obscure the central theme. What with thunderstorms and shots of Aline MacMahon standing like one of the Furies on a cliff against a menacing sky, with the waves breaking on the rocks beneath, you sometimes cannot be quite sure whether you are supposed to be watching an eerie thriller or simply an unusual drama about the effect of abnormality on the lives of normal people.

Its menace is a slight, chocolate-box-pretty girl named Evelyn Heath (Anne Baxter), who suffers from a weak heart, a highly neurotic temperament which includes an obsession about birds, and a lust to dominate and disrupt the lives of those who are stronger and happier than she is. Sickness, which turns some persons into saints, has turned her into a subtle tyrant, ruthlessly exploiting the kindness and sympathy which her condition arouses. When she enters the household of Douglas Proctor (Ralph Bellamy) and his wife, Ann (Ruth Warwick), for the purpose of convalescing, she has the effect of a spiritual atomic bomb on the domestic harmony that prevails before her entry. Within a week she has set wife against husband, and the servants against both, by contriving to let drop a few nasty innuendos about the relationship of the husband, a commercial artist,

towards his shapely model; she poisons her little niece's mind with a premature and unpleasant introduction to the facts of life; and with studied cruelty she drives her lovesick fiancé to distraction. Even good old Aunt Martha (Aline MacMahon) is taken in at first; but it is Aunt Martha who finally exorcises the fiend in the Proctor household.

In spite of the defect I have mentioned, which is simply another example of the cinema's common reluctance to tackle a tricky and unorthodox subject in a simple and straightforward manner, *Guest in the House* is a picture which I can recommend. The pill would be better without the gilding, but it is still palatable.

SALOME, WHERE SHE DANCED

(Universal)



WHILE I ordinarily do not believe in reviewing films simply by telling their stories, in the present case I think a bare recital of this production's extraordinary plot will be sufficient to indicate its merits (if one may be excused for using that term in this context).

It begins with General Robert E. Lee, on the point of surrendering to General Grant, telling a young Confederate soldier (David Bruce) that "we must move with the ages." This injunction is apparently misunderstood, for it has the effect of turning the young man into a two-gun bandit who terrorises the Wild West. The surrender is also witnessed by Count von Bohlen, an early example of a Beast of Berlin, who is picking up hints on how not to fight a war on behalf of Chancellor von Bismarck, as well as by an American journalist (Rod Cameron) who is picking up titbits for his column in *Leslie's Weekly*. From here we go to Berlin, where the American journalist, in an effort to "scoop" the news of the opening of the Austro-Prussian war, is busy insulting Bismarck and von Bohlen. He also persuades Anna Maria (Yvonne de Carlo) to turn spy and worm State Secrets out of von Bohlen. Anna Maria is a ballet-dancer (of sorts) who emerges, all radiant in Technicolour, from a sea-shell to the strains of "The Blue Danube." She agrees to become a spy because she has given her

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SHORT STORY

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"What a strange idea. Did you find your parents dull company?"

I didn't know. I don't think the idea of their being company for us had ever arisen, so I suppose we had made some progress.

"It's nice to have them both home," said Maude. "Let's hope we'll have many more Christmases just as good."

THAT was just an ordinary sort of picnic before the war, and a very ordinary Christmas, but we'll never see another like it.

Never again.

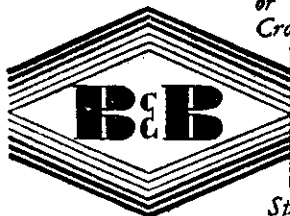
Les is back home with us now after three years as P.O.W. He has an injured leg and hardly ever talks. We reach out to him, but he seems to live in a world of his own where we have no place. And Syd was shot down over the North Sea two years ago. At least, they think that's what must have happened. They can't say for sure. Wherever he is we'll be thinking of him this Christmas. That's what I mean when I say that Christmas won't be the same. None of us are the same.

Naturally it has all made a great difference to Maude, and to me too. That's why, just now, I was thinking back over those Christmases before the war.



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