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office requirements for a heroine. J. Carroll Naish would be hard to fault as the mean-spirited neighbour: I am quite happy about him. But I am not so happy about Beulah Bondi as Grandma. This portrayal of a querulous old peasant woman will probably be the most popular in the picture, but it is, I feel, too theatrical. She is too deliberately a "character"; to much the semi-comic type whom we have become accustomed to expect in this kind of picture, just as, in another kind, we have had a succession of funny negroes. In both cases there is an element, perhaps here unconscious, of patronage.

It is part of my creed as a critic that even when a film is very, very good it does it no harm to indicate, as I have just done, that it is not quite perfect. But *The Southerner* comes nearer to that desirable state than almost any other picture from America in the past two years. Don't miss it.

A STOLEN LIFE

(Warner Bros.)



THIS is a re-hash, with the accent squarely on the second syllable, of the film which in 1939 starred Elizabeth Bergner in the dual role of identical twins. It was an ingenious and effective enough romance then. It is not now. On the present occasion Bette Davis is the actress of whom we get a double dose and that might seem sufficient compensation even for muddled direction and puerile script-writing. Yet though I hate to sound lukewarm about Miss Davis, for whose artistry I have profound admiration, I could almost wish that she had had measles when this particular screenplay was being cast. Warners might then have abandoned the whole idea.

As Kate, the Good Twin (selfless, long-suffering, poetically yearning), Miss Davis strides boyishly around a New England town with her hands in the pockets of her dungarees. This is to distinguish her from Pat, the Bad Twin (selfish, predatory, spiteful), who goes in for rather more feminine ensembles, waggles her hips, and uses her hands to grab at any passing males. She grabs at Kate's boy friend, a light-house attendant with higher education and a poetic soul (Glenn Ford), and he, poor sap, succumbs without a struggle. Kate, he says, in one of his lyrical flights of fancy, is like a cake, but Pat is like a cake with frosting on it. Being fond of sugar, he marries Pat but soon finds she is both expensive and indigestible. Meanwhile jilted Kate, good plain madeira, takes seriously to Art and finds some small recompense in life by permitting herself to be insulted platonically by a Neanderthal type of painter (Dane Clark). He, too, is fond of cake and tries to take a bite of Kate the moment she admits (after a cursory glance at his paintings lasting about five seconds) that he is a true genius. "Man eats woman," he snarls. "Woman eats man. That's basic. Everything starts from that. art, music, the whole works." However, though visibly impressed, Kate manages to restrain his appetite; and pretty soon this character disappears from the story, having been introduced apparently for no other purpose than to deliver the philosophic gem recorded above and to create an impression that artists are nasty class-conscious bores. As it happens, if I felt like being a bit class-conscious myself I could find one or two sinister implications in this fairly typical example of

the way in which Hollywood likes to treat the artistic, intellectual type, presenting him with a sneer as an uncouth, amoral, politically-unbalanced parasite who batters on the nice, kind, generous people — the usually vulgar, over-dressed, over-rich, idle, patronising, and socially useless people—whom by comparison we are supposed to admire.

But *A Stolen Life* isn't really worth good honest spleen. After a lot of messing about, the story finally gets round to the situation upon which the whole thing is supposed to hang: the drowning of the Bad Twin, and the Good Twin's decision to take her place and her husband. It's a preposterous situation really, but dramatically it offers intriguing possibilities, and if I remember rightly the original Bergner film explored them to some advantage. This version simply wiggles one toe coily in the deep waters of the plot and then scuttles for the shore, wrapping itself up hastily in a happy ending which is, however, not much more phoney and contrived than most other parts of the film.

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