

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

I SEE A DARK STRANGER

(Rank: Individual Pictures)

FOR about three-quarters of its two-hour length, this British film is a smooth and exciting spy-thriller with a pronounced undercurrent of agreeable comedy. Its pert heroine, Bridie Quilty (delightfully played by Deborah Kerr), is a romantic Irish girl who has been so well nourished on hatred of the English that she grows up determined to get her own back on the descendants of Cromwell and, immediately on reaching the age of 21, sets out for Dublin to join the Irish Republican Army. Disappointed in this, she nevertheless finds an outlet for her anglo-phobia in the fact that Britain is at war. ("The Irish are neutral of course; but it's a question entirely of which side you're neutral on.") When next we see her she has linked up with a bunch of Nazi agents operating in England and is engaged in a desperate plot to rescue one of their members from the firing-squad.

All this, of course, is highly reprehensible, even for a citizen of Eire; but the heroine is so charming and so obviously misguided, and the film goes to such amusing lengths to excuse and explain her Irishness, that one is left in no doubt that her heart is in the right place even though its affections are temporarily bestowed on the wrong people. Eventually, of course, she sees the error of her ways, being romantically encouraged to do so by a pleasant English officer (Trevor Howard), but not before she has landed him and herself in some very dangerous and treasonable situations, involving not merely the plot to rescue the Nazi spy but also secret plans for the D-Day invasion. The story moves from England to the Isle of Man and thence back again to Ireland.

In addition to its good performances (Deborah Kerr, though scarcely plausible, is particularly engaging), the film has the advantage of convincing backgrounds and witty dialogue, and there are several situations worthy of Hitchcock at his best. In one such sequence, the heroine has to push a corpse in a wheel-chair through a busy street; in another the spies are cornered in a tunnel; and in a third there is a fantastic encounter with an Irish funeral party which turns out to be composed of smugglers.

Rightly or wrongly, one gets an impression of improvisation in the unfolding of the narrative, and for a good deal of the time the producer-directors (Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat) bring it off expertly. But the film as a whole is marred by the fact that they didn't know where or how to end it, the result being that after a succession of anti-climaxes in the last half-hour, the story just peters out. This is a great pity, particularly because the fault could, I think, have been easily enough avoided.



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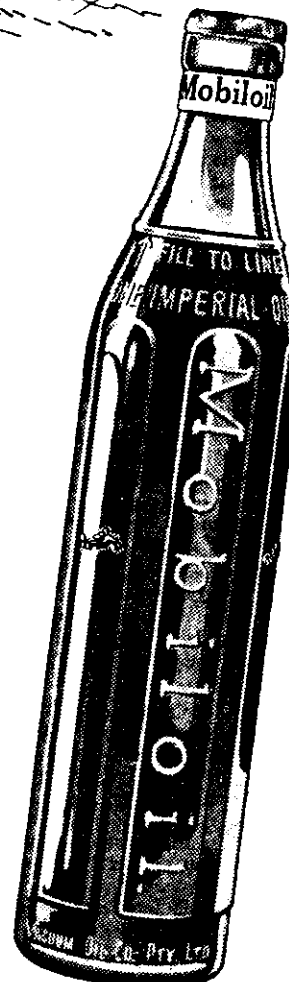
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