

## An American Tragedy

PITFALL  
(Regal Films)

THOSE wage-slaves who are even now trying desperately to acclimatise themselves to the idea of another eleven and a-half months of unrelieved toil would no doubt agree with me if I suggested (as one or two others have suggested before me) that the anticipation of good things is generally more satisfying than the realisation. But the film reviewer who goes to an assignment fearing the worst occasionally experiences the more lively pleasure that rewards one when the customary sequence of hope and disillusion is reversed.

*Pitfall* aroused in me no premonitory enthusiasm—I had a vague notion that I had seen a scathing notice of it somewhere or other, and in addition my own recollections of other Elizabeth Scott pictures were notably unstimulating. On paper it looked like one of the duller weekly chores. As it happened, however, I found it a most satisfying little melodrama, astringent, bitter, and bleakly uncompromising—and in essentials, believable. It's not quite good enough to be classed as tragedy—the emotional pattern is too exaggerated for that—but it did leave me with the feeling that your modern American tragedy might come closer to melodrama than any other.

*Pitfall* is the story of a dehydrated American. Johnny Forbes (Dick Powell) was Voted Most Likely to Succeed in his class at high school, but by the time the film opens he has succeeded only in conforming to type. Now in his mid-thirties, he has acquired a wife and small son, a convertible, a moderately pleasant home, and a vague internal disquiet which could be the faint intimations of a burgeoning ulcer. His wife (Jane Wyatt), who was Voted Most Beautiful Girl of her year at high school—Americans are great at finding honour in a straw-poll—is still at least attractive, but time has sowed a suggestion of grizzle in her voice, or at least honed a keener edge on her tongue. It is obvious that she is the dominant member of the household, satisfied only so long as her husband keeps on succeeding, in the manner to which she has become accustomed, at his job as claims manager of an insurance company.

By the simplest accident, little Mr. Forbes becomes involved in an intrigue with another woman (Elizabeth Scott) whom he has had to interview in the course of his work. This young woman, who is honest after her fashion, breaks off the affair when she discovers that he is married, but once embarked upon a course of deceit the husband finds it difficult to extricate himself. He falls foul of two other admirers of Miss Scott. One of them he shoots in self-defence; she shoots the other—also in self-defence. As the curtain falls Miss Scott is on her way to the penitentiary and he is on his way back to his wife. And it looks like penal servitude for him too.

### BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "*Pitfall*."  
MAINLY FAIR: "*For the Love of Mary*."  
OVERCAST: "*Tap Roots*."

*Pitfall*, as I said earlier, is a bitter little movie—certainly not one that is suitable for juveniles, or that will commend itself to those who like their films sweet and sugary. But it struck me as a fairly strenuous attempt at honesty. In one or two places there is a little more violence than one might think necessary, but I don't feel that such scenes are so far out of place in an American story. It is incontestable that Americans—of the city-bred kind at least—live at a much higher pressure than we do, and if they break down or blow up they presumably do it more noisily.

Lizabeth Scott, who played a difficult part with a competence of which I had not imagined her capable, impressed me very favourably and I thought that Powell, too, gave a remarkably good performance. But I would like to add a special word for André de Toth, whose crisp direction kept the tension on from the beginning and gathered all the threads together neatly at the end.

### FOR THE LOVE OF MARY

(Universal-International)

DEANNA DURBIN hasn't quite got a hundred men at her beck and call this time, but with three eligible young fellows, and the full bench of the U.S. Supreme Court (headed by dear old Harry Davenport C.J.), in tow she manages to maintain a fair batting average. Everyone, of course, loves Mary. When she sings *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen* at a law society conversation there isn't a dry eye in the entire Judiciary. Even the President falls for her bel canto (she is a switchboard operator at the White House), swaps hiccup remedies with her over the telephone, and sends his aides to squire her around. It is all thoroughly nonsensical, and completely harmless, but I have heard the star in better voice, and to make her sing the *Largo Al Factotum* complete with crepe moustache is perhaps carrying clowning too far.

### TAP ROOTS

(Universal-International)

IT'S curious what odd scraps of history one keeps encountering on the screen. Who'd have thought, for example, that Mississippi had a Sudeten Yankee problem in the early stages of the Civil War? *Tap Roots* tells you all about the embattled farmers of Lebanon and that daredevil editor (Van Heflin), who helped draft their Declaration of Independence. Gorgeous technicolour bathes the bayous in blood before the farmers give in and Mr. Heflin tames his fiery redhead (Susan Hayward). As you have guessed, the historical angle may be new but the curves are monotonously familiar.

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