

Lobster in the Bath

NO MINOR VICES

(M.G.M.-Enterprise)

WHEN Ortavio Qualini, surrealist painter and super-neurotic, enters the placidly normal life of a prosperous New York physician, the result, for the doctor, is practically mental mayhem. Dr. Aswell, as played by Dana Andrews, is a dull dog in private life, despite his brilliant reputation as a child specialist. He has reduced his existence to a meaningless routine of efficiency, with every day thoroughly organised for him by a devoted wife and an equally devoted assistant doctor and nurse. When clients bring their impossibly ill-mannered children to him for treatment he never fails to effect a cure until Qualini comes into the picture.

The doctor makes only two mistakes with Qualini, the first being to visit him at all. When he insults one of his paintings, however, he arouses such thoughts of revenge in the mind of this *enfant terrible* that he comes to the doctor's consulting rooms, ostensibly to find some real people to paint instead of the morbidly introspective doodlings he has been indulging in before, but in reality as the cunning tormentor who nearly drives Aswell crazy with the ideas he puts into his head. Qualini finds Mrs. Aswell cooking lobsters for dinner. He falls in love with her at sight, tearfully saves one lobster from its fate (he deposits it in the bath-tub), and tries to persuade the doctor's wife that she loves him in return. But if he can't quite persuade her he just about succeeds in convincing the husband, and in the ensuing mix-up the poor fellow goes through such mental torment that

BAROMETER
FAIR TO FINE: "No Minor Vices."
MAINLY FAIR: "That Wonderful Urge."

he can never get back into his routine again, even when he succeeds in getting rid of the interloper and his wife back into her normal state of mind.

This might have been just another triangular bedroom farce, but for Louis Jourdan. Ably assisted by Lilli Palmer as the attractive wife, he gives a scintillating performance as a kind of psychological lobster in this bath-tub of connubial bliss, and he cuts such a dash in his accurate lampooning of the petulant, self-indulgent artist who is always pretending to emotions he doesn't really experience, that he lifts the film to a high level of sophisticated comedy. He has lean sardonic features and a talent for drollery that fit the part exactly, while his neat sense of timing and a knack of rousing the sympathy of the audience make Dana Andrews's solid, unpretentious acting seem rather colourless by comparison.

Altogether this is a slickly-produced picture. The pace never slackens, the intellectual level is always fairly high, and the dialogue always worth listening to. When Dr. Aswell suggests, for instance, that Qualini might cure his neuroses if he visited a psycho-analyst, the painter replies that he has "lain and freely associated" on the couches of every analyst in town, and that they have all pronounced him a hopeless case. The film also makes good comic use of the device in which you hear the character thinking aloud and battling with different sides of his nature (id versus super-ego sort of thing) and the changes are rung on one or two other hackneyed tricks in a refreshing manner. *No Minor Vices* was produced and directed by Lewis Milestone.

THAT WONDERFUL URGE

(20th Century-Fox)

TYRONE POWER as a hard-boiled journalist who does a series of scurrilous articles about Gene Tierney, an heiress, and finally falls in love with her, sounds almost possible, for romantic Hollywood. But this picture is neither as romantic—nor as humorous—as it might be. The fault doesn't altogether lie with the actors, who do the best they can with inferior material; in fact, at first the picture seems to have possibilities. But the things that happen gradually get so banal that although you keep on laughing at most of the jokes and the ludicrous situations, you can't help thinking that the whole affair is just becoming ridiculous. A comedy has to retain at least the illusion of reality if it's to come off at all, and this one doesn't. To get revenge on the unprincipled journalist, Miss Tierney pretends she's gone off somewhere and married him (everyone believes this, of course) and when he tries to assert his conjugal rights some rather tasteless boudoir humour results. The picture ends with the two of them billing and cooing beside her bed and saying, Well, if everybody else thinks we're married, why don't we do something about it too?—or words to that effect.



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