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Film Reviews by G.M.

BEDTIME STORIES FOR GROWN-UPS

BEDTIME STORY

(Columbia)

SNUGGLE up, little ones, and Uncle Gordon will tell you a bedtime story all about a very beautiful young woman named Loretta Young and a good-looking (but rather middle-aged) man named Frederic March. And she was a famous actress and was married to the man, who wrote and produced plays for her to appear in, but he was what they call married to the theatre. She wanted to give up being an actress and instead have babies, and live on a farm and keep chickens, but he wanted just to keep on writing successful plays and producing them. So of course they couldn't stay married—though, of course, they were still in love—and so she went away to a place called Reno to get what they call a divorce, and he went to a place that they used to call a speakeasy to get what they still call a hangover. Because he had just written one very special play called "Bedtime Story," but he knew that it would never be as successful as the others unless she appeared in it, but if she did, he knew that it would be what they call a wow. So even though she wasn't any longer his wife and was even going to get married again, he did everything he could think of to get her into this play of his. And he was so upset about his beautiful play being spoilt, that I'm afraid he even told a dreadful lot of fibs and did a lot of other things that were really rather funny, but just as deceitful as telling fibs. But perhaps it wasn't so dreadful, because, you see, he was beginning to realise that he loved her just about as much as he loved writing plays and producing them.

And so it went on and on and on and on, with the poor man getting more and more upset and having more and more hangovers and being more and more of a worry to a funny friend of his called Robert Benchley. Because, you see, it was getting very near the time for the play

to open, and, almost as important, it was getting very near the time for her to be married again. And she was just as miserable as he was, because although she wanted to live in a house in the country and have babies and keep chickens, she still loved the man, and would have liked being married to him if only he had liked babies and chickens, too. And I think it must just have been because she wanted to Teach Him a Lesson that she really did get married to another man. But not for long, because that very night after the wedding she sent a message to her first husband, and he came along to the hotel and did the most surprising things. I'm sure you'd laugh if I told you about them, or better still if you could see them for yourselves. Anyway, it turned out that there hadn't been a divorce at all, and so she wasn't married to the other man. And then she did appear in the play, and it was indeed a wow, but while it was still running, she told everybody that they were going to have a baby. And I expect they had some chickens, too. And that is the end of this bedtime story, and this is Uncle Gordon signing off. Bye-byes now, and perhaps you'll dream about how nice it would be if you were like Loretta Young and Frederic March in the story and were famous people and could have lots of money and nice clothes and divorces.

(In fairness, let me add that, in spite of its thin and well-worn theme, "Bedtime Story" isn't by any means likely to put you to sleep, though in parts it may make you drowsy with repetition. But the wedding-night interruptions in the finale will almost certainly wake you up. In fact, within its own inconsequential sphere the film, as you see, rates a handclap).

SMILIN' THROUGH

(M-G-M)

A GREAT deal, including a technicolour and Jeanette Macdonald, has been added to *Smiling Through* since I last saw it in 1932, and a great deal, including Norma Shearer and the "g," has been taken away. And the technicolour and Miss Macdonald aren't adequate compensation for the loss of the latter two. Not that we intend any disrespect to Miss Macdonald, whose songs provide the brightest spots in the film (apart from the technicoloured 1847 port). But she isn't allowed to sing all the time, and there's such an awful lot of plot to be worked in that it's a wonder she's able to do so at all.

The story, as you will probably remember, concerns the wraith-like Mooneyan Clare who, shot at the altar by a wicked rival for her hand, dies in her almost-husband's arms in the year 1868, and thereafter keeps coming back in bridal veil to remind him that she is waiting for him on the Other Side. Meanwhile, bridegroom Brian Aherne lives solely on his memories, sparing the time, however, to watch the growth to beautiful womanhood of his ward Kathleen, Mooneyan's niece. And Kathleen's

golden hair and golden voice ("The Kerry Dance," "Drink to Me Only"), are doing a good job of brightening Uncle John's declining years when Kathleen goes and falls in love with ("Can this be romance?", "I'll say it is") Wicked Rival's son Kenneth (Gene Raymond again), newly come from the U.S. to fight for England in the Great War. Uncle John puts his foot down very firmly considering his age and general woodenness, and we go right back to 1868.

And here we meet all the old faces surmounted by hair several shades darker than in 1916, an interesting sidelight on the evolutionary process. An auburn-haired Jeanette sings "Smilin' Through" to a black-haired Brian Aherne, and a brown-haired Gene Raymond shoots her through the heart.

After this, back to 1916, and Kathleen's renunciation of Kenneth. He goes to the Front; she goes the rounds of the local canteens singing "Tipperary" very slowly and very emotionally.

Meanwhile, the shade of Mooneyan has been applying a little gentle emotional blackmail to Uncle John, who finally agrees to accept Kenneth as his almost-son-in-law. By this time, however, Kenneth has got in first by jilting Kathleen (from the highest possible motives), and even her singing of "Land of Hope and Glory" in the church choir with brass band accompaniment fails to alter his resolve. Ultimately, everything gets straightened out. Uncle John, restored to eternal youth ("But I'm old and bent, Mooneyan." "You are straight and tall as a young poplar, John") elopes in the bridal carriage with Mooneyan, leaving the really important part of the marriage service still unsaid, and the film gradually fades out with Mr. and Mrs. Raymond gazing swimmingly into each other's technicolour eyes.

Definitely not a film for smilin' through: you just have to grin and bear it.

UNDERGROUND

(Warner Brothers)

LEST any others are tempted, as I was, to trade a quiet evening by the fire for a mess of sabotage, let me say that *Underground* is not a picture about oppressed Europe biting the heels of the conquering *herrenvolk*. There are a lot of other things it is not, and the most important of these negatives is that it is not topical. For *Underground* is just another (and lesser) *Freedom Radio*, a film about the dauntless German social-democrats (and others), who bring their fellow-countrymen news behind the news—"in spite of the Gestapo." That phrase, which is used once or twice in the dialogue, unquestionably dates the film. Now if it were a story about a French freedom radio or a Greek or a Yugoslavian one, the propaganda would at least be nearer the mark.

I'd like to be able to say that, topicality and propaganda apart, and viewed simply as entertainment, the film is good enough to compensate for the time-lag between production and screening. But it isn't. The acting of Jeffrey Lynn, Kaaren Verne, and Philip Dorn is only passable, and direction which, to arouse our horror of Nazi tyranny, requires shots of Gestapo beatings and an execution scene with only the most unkindly cut cut out, is surely inadequate.