

Pretty Girl in a Quandary

PICNIC

(Columbia)

A Cert.

A SUMMER romance is what William Inge called his play *Picnic*, but as you might expect of the author of *Come Back, Little Sheba*, it's something more than a "romantic" story as generally understood. Superficially about a holiday outing and its aftermath, the more interesting intention of this study of American small-town life is to tell the story of a pretty girl called Madge and of the values that struggle to possess her. Is she to marry Alan, son of a wealthy capitalist, who apparently adores her? Her mother, who foresees a short season for a pretty face and doesn't let Madge forget it, thinks she should and explains why in one of the film's most significant scenes—a plea for "successful" marriage on the one hand, and on the other all the misery of a girl tired of being merely pretty. Does she love Alan? she wonders. She's even less sure after an encounter that night with Hal, an old college friend of Alan (and a bit of a vagabond with a bit of a past), who has just climbed off a freight train. Better to marry for love? But then is Hal's violent physical attraction love?

Whatever it is, Kim Novak as Madge and William Holden as Hal play some electrifying scenes. Mr. Holden we rather take for granted; Miss Novak, who impressed me in a sophisticated role in *Pushover*, gets wonderfully (and surprisingly) well inside self-conscious early womanhood. Lighting the central situation from other angles are Madge's younger, plainer, but more intelligent sister (very well played by Susan Strasberg), and a middle-aged spinster who lives with them. In the play a character who stirs our compassion, the spinster is overplayed so outrageously by Rosalind Russell that her impact is most often broadly comic. Could this be the fault of Joshua Logan, who directs *Picnic* after a long spell in the theatre? Anyway, this defect mars the film. Tailored for a wider audience than the play, the script also cuts or amends important lines and includes new scenes which, very good in their way, nevertheless obscure the significance of the essential story. What's left is still very interesting—but just slightly disappointing if you know the play. People inter-



IRENE KANE, JAMIE SMITH
Credible and ordinary, they communicate their loneliness

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 12, 1956.

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "*Picnic*."
FAIR TO FINE: "*Killer's Kiss*."
FAIR: "*The Kentuckian*."

ested in the theatre, by the way, will want to know that Jo Mielziner had a hand in the fine settings.

KILLER'S KISS

(Stanley Kubrick-United Artists) A Cert.

WRITING from London just before *Killer's Kiss* opened in Wellington, a friend told me I must not miss a new film by a brilliant new American director, Stanley Kubrick. *Killer's Kiss* is an earlier piece written, directed, shot and cut by the same hand. A modest thriller with a quite ordinary story and a conventional ending, it stands apart for a distinctive atmosphere, real people, real places. A prize-fighter (Jamie Smith) and a dance hall hostess (Irene Kane) live in a couple of shabby rooms whose windows look in on one another across a narrow way. Lonely and tired, they're thrown together and fall foul of the girl's boss (Frank Silvera), who is infatuated with her. There's a murder, a kidnapping, a chase.

Mr. Kubrick has a cunning but compassionate eye for the detail or incident that will add a dimension to a person or a place, and he has a sound ear for dialogue. Credible and ordinary people (the girl, for example, curiously attractive yet not conventionally glamorous), his boy and girl communicate their loneliness and stay vividly in the mind; and even the boss has at times an odd overtone of pathetic despair. There are some wonderfully atmospheric scenes in the shabby rooms, the streets (the two revellers are quite superb), the subway, and a boxing sequence is among the best I have seen. Here and elsewhere camera angles and cutting are often brilliant. The score also (by Gerald Fried), with its recurring dance theme and pulsating, disturbing rhythms is highly expressive. I can get somewhere near a summing-up if I say that at its best *Killer's Kiss* has the haunting poignancy of a *New Yorker* story, by John Cheever, say, or Hortense Calisher.

THE KENTUCKIAN

(Hecht-Lancaster-United Artists) G Cert.

EXPECTING action in a Western (and wanting it), I found *The Kentuckian* a little easy-going; yet its story of a backwoodsman and his small son on their way to a larger life in Texas is really very agreeable, and has its heart in the right place. What's he to do with temptation, this Kentuckian, when it turns up as worldly success and a pretty schoolteacher in the settlement where he stops to earn some money? Though the narrow life contrasts with the world he has known, he tells the boy: you've got to put some things behind you—meaning both Texas and the other pretty girl who wants to go there with them. Even their dog must get used to the chain. But youth, of course, remains clear-eyed and uncorrupted, and after a fast and exciting showdown (no lack of action here, nor in an earlier, horrifying whip sequence, for that matter) gets its way. Burt Lancaster is the Kentuckian, and this is his first film as a director. You'll probably like it.

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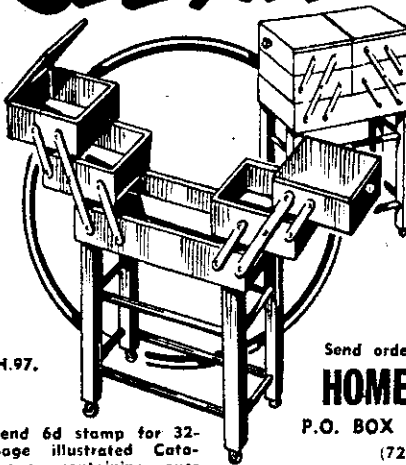


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