

IN THE DEEP SOUTH

BABY DOLL

(Elia Kazan-Warner Bros)

R: 16 years and over
"DIRTY" and "sensational" are some of the names Baby Doll has been called, but for the life of me I can't see what all the fuss is about. This Baby Doll is the immature 19-year-old wife of Archie Lee, a decaying middle-aged cotton miller, though their marriage will not be consummated till she's 20—the day after tomorrow. Business disaster and unsatisfied desire have brought Archie Lee to the end of his tether. When, in desperation, he sabotages the mill that has ruined him, its Sicilian owner, Vacarro, seeks his own rough justice and in getting it awakens the sensual woman in Baby Doll.

Apart from a touching, half-crazy old aunt (Mildred Dunnock) who lives with Baby Doll and Archie in their rotting mansion, only these three characters really matter. Karl Malden's Archie Lee is a part in little more than one key, very well done, though in this company less memorable than it otherwise might have seemed, for alone or together Baby Doll and Vacarro are the film's real triumph. We've all met Baby Doll before, and here an extraordinarily perceptive script by Tennessee Williams, playing by Carroll Baker that gets (as they say) inside the part, and fine direction by Elia Kazan have captured her for all time. Played with great subtlety by Eli Wallach, the cunning, ruthless Vacarro is no less memorable—his long scenes with Baby Doll in the yard of the mansion, now bullying, now tender, are among the best in the film: sensuous and finely detailed, as indeed the whole film is. Here (and elsewhere) it's interesting to compare the finished film with the original script—now, by the way, available (N.Z. price 3/3) in Penguin Books.

"I did the best I could to get on film what I felt about the South," Mr Kazan has said. "I wasn't trying to be moral or immoral, only truthful." In the Mississippi delta lands he has captured unforgettablely an atmosphere of decay that has infected the people. You might find the film shocking, but it's never gratuitously so—the action springs from some of the most completely realised and convincing movie characters I have seen—and it's not nearly as violent as Mr Kazan's earlier films, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *On the Waterfront*. Five years ago when I reviewed the first of these I suggested that Stanley Kowalski's behaviour was only an exaggeration of what seems normal to many people—that in the suburbs each morning his face looks out of many mirrors. You might like to try this mirror game again with *Baby Doll*.

YIELD TO THE NIGHT

(Associated British-Warner Bros.) A Cert.

WHAT is it like to wait in the condemned cell for the footsteps that may bring reprieve when you know that if they bring instead

BAROMETER

FINE: "Baby Doll."
FINE: "Yield to the Night."

the end of hope you will go to bed one night soon for the last time and rise on a morning when your life will be taken at a known hour? *Yield to the Night* attempts to show us. It isn't a plea either for or against hanging—it's the story of what happened to one woman who shot and killed another in a love triangle. But it is, all the same, the sort of film that in referendum year might help New Zealanders to decide whether the death penalty is right or wrong.

There was nothing to admire in Mary Hilton's love affair: she had a husband, her murder was premeditated, she didn't regret what she had done—and the film makes no special plea for her. Yet as I got to know her day by day in the condemned cell, my own emotions were pity and a growing horror that a fellow human was being watched and cared for only against the day when she would be taken next door and hanged. You may see it differently.

Based on Joan Henry's novel—whose story seems to echo in some respects the Ruth Ellis case—this extraordinarily brave, honest, unsensational film was made by J. Lee Thompson, whose earlier prison story, *The Weak and the Wicked*, didn't quite come off. It's surprise is a remarkable performance by Diana Dors as the condemned woman. Apart from the startling prologue in which the murder is committed and the flashbacks which recall her love affair, she is stripped of glamour. Against the harsh background of the cell, under raw lights and in the eye of a camera which often moves into close-up, she plays with great feeling and insight. There are good performances also by Yvonne Mitchell as a sympathetic prison officer, Athene Seyler as a prison visitor, Marie Ney as the prison governor; and Michael Craig is adequate as Mary's lover.



DIANA DORS
Reprieve or the end of hope?

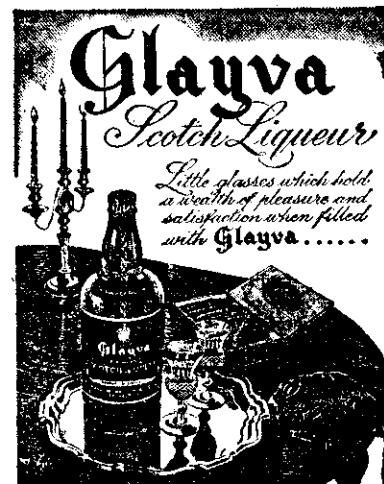
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