



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# In a Lonely Place

*Introduced by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large (Wednesday 14 September only)*

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away the film's ending.

'I was infatuated with her, but I didn't like her very much': so began director Nicholas Ray's relationship with Gloria Grahame, which soon led to a shotgun marriage. Their affair on the set of *A Woman's Secret* in 1948 resulted in a pregnancy while Grahame was still married to her first husband. At 1.30pm Grahame's divorce was finalised; at 6.30pm she and Ray were married; by nightfall Ray was gambling away all his money, resentful at his marriage before it had even begun. The straw that broke the camel's back was, reportedly, Ray walking in on Grahame and his 13-year-old son from a previous marriage in a compromising situation. Ain't love grand?

If Ray instantly regretted attaching himself to Grahame personally, their collaboration on *In a Lonely Place* makes clear that he at least respected her artistically, insisting that she be cast opposite Humphrey Bogart when Bogart's wife Lauren Bacall couldn't get loaned out by Warner Brothers. The role of failed actress Laurel Gray is one seemingly tailor-made for Bacall's cool spikiness and intelligence, but Grahame is flawless at conveying a woman much older and wiser than her 27 years, matching Bogart's cynical barbs beat for beat, cool enough to block his advances, though interested enough to leave the door open for something more. Two people chewed up and spat out by the post-war film industry, their connection is fuelled by a genuine desperation for a human connection rarely seen in a genre known for its double crosses and deception.

But it's also a relationship born out of violence, and though *In a Lonely Place* is often celebrated as one of the best love stories in film noir, it's less heralded as a complex look at being trapped in an abusive relationship. The entire dynamic of the film shifts at the moment Laurel realises the man she loves is also a violent threat, with Bogart's role shifting from the antihero to the antagonist, and Grahame's from the love interest to the protagonist. She poignantly captures the paralysing denial that prevents abused women from leaving, not wanting to admit her lover is someone who could hurt her, yet not quite able to ignore the red flags in front of her either. She conveys these subtleties gorgeously through the inflections in her voice, the flicker in her eyes.

Grahame claimed that all four of her husbands hit her. This makes it a sad irony that her best dramatic performances had her playing a woman in an abusive relationship. The filming couldn't have been easy for Grahame, contractually obligated to be directed by her husband, acting opposite a magnetic film star and producer who wanted his own wife in her role, not to mention the quiet separation of Grahame and Ray in the middle of filming. Likewise, it would have been easy for even the humanist filmmaker Ray to

turn his movie into a misogynist revenge fantasy against a wife he hated. In the original ending, Dixon kills Laurel in the heat of their climactic argument, turning the woman he loves into the cadaver he's often written into his scripts. It was a moment of self-awareness on Ray's part that completely changed the ending in a way that transcended both the conventions of film noir and the Production Code, where Laurel lives but her relationship to Dix is dead. It's a move that ultimately strengthens both characters, making them far more complex than mere victim and villain, and deepening Bogart and Grahame's performances into career-finest ones.

**Serena Bramble, *Sight & Sound*, December 2017**

Posters touted *In a Lonely Place* as 'the Bogart suspense picture with the surprise finish!' This was false advertising, since there is nothing in the ending that you don't see during the opening credits. It is all there in the eyes of Dixon Steele (Humphrey Bogart), reflected in a rear-view mirror as he drives the dark streets of Hollywood. His eyes are wary, hunted, glittering with seeds of rage – but above all, they are bleak. They are eyes that have already seen the end, even if Dix himself doesn't know it yet. When he meets Mildred Atkinson (Martha Stewart), a hat-check girl who is reading the trashy bestseller he's supposed to adapt for the screen, she confides: 'I already know the end. I always read that first.' The line strikes a chord you don't catch at the time. Mildred is close to her own very unexpected end, since she will be murdered the same night. Her death brings Dix together with Laurel Gray (Gloria Grahame), his alluring neighbour; but their affair, conducted under a cloud of police suspicion over Mildred's murder, is threatened from the start by Dix's unpredictable violence and Laurel's habit of running away from things. After one ugly scene, he recites to her some lines he has written for his screenplay: 'I was born when she kissed me. I died when she left me. I lived a few weeks while she loved me.' He's not sure where the lines should go. Laurel suggests, 'The farewell note?' It seems that – like Mildred – they already know the end.

There are many movies about Hollywood, many movies about movies. But *In a Lonely Place* is above all about the art of storytelling that lies at the heart of Hollywood cinema. The screenplay (credited to Andrew Solt, but heavily rewritten by director Nicholas Ray) is both a meditation on screenwriting and an example of the form at its finest. Dix constantly views life through a lens of narrative: when he tells his agent about matching wits with a police detective ('It was his story against mine – but, of course, I told mine better'); when he talks a friend and his wife through Mildred's murder as he imagines it; or when he uses an ordinary morning routine as a lesson in writing a good love scene. But Dix can't write or direct the scenes in his life: he can't control his anger or Laurel's mounting distrust of him; he can't stop driving her away with his possessiveness. That breakfast scene is not really about a couple in love but about a couple whose love is strained to breaking point. But he's right that the scene – unsettling and sad and funny all at once – is a lesson in good writing.

The original screenplay ended with Dix strangling Laurel in a jealous rage and then sitting down to type the final words of his screenplay ('I was born when she kissed me...') before the police arrive. Ray shot this contrived, heavy-

handed ending but immediately thought better of it; instead, he improvised a scene in which the attack is interrupted by a phone call from the police, who tell the couple that Dix has been cleared of suspicion. This good news comes too late and Dix walks away without a word, following a neatly landscaped path into a hopeless future.

This anticlimax, with its drained and burnedout favour, is one of the few genuinely tragic endings in film noir. With all its deaths and defeats, noir rarely breaks your heart: cynicism and fatalism are defences against heartbreak. But Ray's romantic temperament was never hardened against disillusionment. *In a Lonely Place* is about the lovers' inability to transform themselves, to escape from the fixed orbits of their barren lives. But the love that they share is so alive, so captivating in its blend of easy intimacy and appreciative surprise, that for a fleeting moment we believe it will save them both. As we watch them pull apart, we are torn by an anguished ability to see both sides – what is irresistible and what is unforgivable in this man and this woman. When Laurel recites Dix's words with one crucial change ('I lived a few weeks while you loved me'), she translates them from movie poetry into what feels almost unbearably like real life.

**Imogen Sara Smith, *Sight & Sound*, March 2015**

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#### **IN A LONELY PLACE**

*Directed by:* Nicholas Ray  
*©/Production Company:* Santana Pictures  
*Presented by:* Columbia Pictures Corporation  
*Produced by:* Robert Lord  
*Associate Producer:* Henry S. Kesler  
*Assistant Director:* Earl Bellamy  
*Screen Play by:* Andrew Solt  
*Adaptation by:* Edmund H. North  
*Based upon a story by:* Dorothy B. Hughes  
*Director of Photography:* Burnett Guffey  
*Editor:* Viola Lawrence  
*Art Director:* Robert Peterson  
*Set Decorator:* William Kiernan  
*Gowns by:* Jean Louis  
*Make-up by:* Clay Campbell  
*Hair Styles by:* Helen Hunt  
*Musical Score by:* George Antheil  
*Musical Director:* Morris Stoloff  
*Sound Engineer:* Howard Fogetti  
*Technical Adviser:* Rodney Amateau

*uncredited*

*Script Supervisor:* Charlsie Bryant  
*Camera Operator:* Gert Andersen  
*Grip:* Walter Meins  
*Gaffer:* William Johnson  
*Stills:* Irving Lippman  
*Special Effects:* Don Glouner  
*Orchestrations:* Ernest Gold

#### **Cast**

Humphrey Bogart (*Dixon 'Dix' Steele*)  
Gloria Grahame (*Laurel Gray*)  
Frank Lovejoy (*Brub Nicolai*)  
Carl Benton Reid (*Captain Lochner*)  
Art Smith (*Mel Lippman*)  
Jeff Donnell (*Sylvia Nicolai*)  
Martha Stewart (*Mildred Atkinson*)  
Robert Warwick (*Charlie Waterman*)  
Morris Ankrum (*Lloyd Barnes*)  
William Ching (*Ted Barton*)  
Steven Geray (*Paul*)  
Hadda Brooks (*singer*)

*uncredited*

Charles Cane (*irate husband in car*)  
Frank Marlowe (*Dave, car parker at Paul's*)  
Billy Gray (*young autograph hound*)  
Cosmo Sardo (*Greg, bartender*)  
Lewis Howard (*Junior*)  
Alice Talton (*Frances Randolph*)  
George Davis (*waiter at Paul's*)  
Robert Davis (*street waterer*)  
Ruth Warren (*Effie, cleaning lady*)  
Jack Reynolds (*Henry Kesler*)  
Ruth Gillette (*Martha*)  
Don Hamin (*John Mason, young driver*)  
Myron Healey (*post office clerk*)  
Robert Lowell (*airline clerk*)  
Pat Barton (*2nd hat check girl*)  
David Bond (*Dr Richards, the surgeon*)  
Guy Beach (*Swan*)  
Mike Romanoff (*Mike*)  
Arno Frey (*Joe*)  
Melinda Erickson (*tough girl*)  
Jack Jahries (*officer*)  
June Vincent (*actress*)  
Jack Santoro, Tony Layng, Laura Kasley Brooks, Evelyn Underwood, Hazel Boyne, Mike Lally, John Mitchum, Joy Hallward, Allen Pinson, Oliver Cross

USA 1950©

94 mins

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## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### **Lift to the Scaffold (Ascenseur pour l'échafaud)**

Thu 1 Sep 18:30; Thu 15 Sep 20:55; Sun 18 Sep 15:50; Wed 21 Sep 21:00; Tue 27 Sep 21:00

### **Do the Right Thing**

Fri 2 Sep 20:40; Sat 24 Sep 20:40; Wed 28 Sep 18:00 + intro by freelance writer and producer Kaleem Aftab

### **Wild Strawberries (Smultronstället)**

Sat 3 Sep 16:00; Fri 9 Sep 14:30; Tue 13 Sep 18:10; Sat 17 Sep 12:30

### **Psycho**

Sat 3 Sep 20:45; Sun 11 Sep 15:40; Thu 15 Sep 14:30; Tue 4 Oct 18:30

### **The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser (Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle)**

Sun 4 Sep 13:20; Fri 9 Sep 20:45; Tue 13 Sep 20:30

### **In a Lonely Place**

Sun 4 Sep 16:00; Wed 14 Sep 18:15 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large; Fri 23 Sep 18:00; Wed 28 Sep 20:50

### **The Bride Wore Black (La Mariée était en noir)**

Mon 5 Sep 20:50; Fri 30 Sep 18:10; Mon 3 Oct 17:50

### **Accident**

Tue 6 Sep 20:40; Sun 11 Sep 13:10; Tue 20 Sep 17:50

### **Ratcatcher**

Wed 7 Sep 18:15 + intro by Catharine Des Forges, Director of the Independent Cinema Office; Sat 17 Sep 18:00; Thu 29 Sep 21:00

### **The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg)**

Thu 8 Sep 20:45; Mon 12 Sep 14:30; Mon 19 Sep 20:45; Sun 25 Sep 15:30

### **Letter from an Unknown Woman**

Sat 10 Sep 12:30; Wed 14 Sep 14:30; Wed 21 Sep 18:00 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large

### **The Motorcycle Diaries (Diarios de motocicleta)**

Sat 10 Sep 18:00; Sat 17 Sep 14:45

### **Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)**

Tue 13 Sep 14:30; Fri 16 Sep 18:00; Tue 20 Sep 20:50; Sat 1 Oct 12:30

### **Fargo**

Thu 22 Sep 20:55; Sat 1 Oct 18:00

### **Last Year in Marienbad (L'Année dernière à Marienbad)**

Mon 26 Sep 20:50; Sun 2 Oct 12:45; Tue 4 Oct 20:40

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