



MEMBER MONDAYS

# In a Lonely Place

## 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

Digital

**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 and Sound*, December 2017

## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

**Last Year in Marienbad** L'Année dernière à Marienbad

Thu 1 Aug 18:10; Wed 7 Aug 12:00; Mon 12 Aug 20:30

### Persona

Fri 2 Aug 12:20; Sat 10 Aug 20:50; Thu 15 Aug 18:30; Wed 28 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Lilia Pavin-Franks, BFI Events)

### Sebastiane

Sat 3 Aug 20:45; Sat 10 Aug 18:20; Tue 13 Aug 14:40

### Les Enfants terribles

Sun 4 Aug 18:00; Sat 17 Aug 12:50; Sat 31 Aug 20:40

### The Old Dark House

Mon 5 Aug 12:30; Sat 10 Aug 16:00; Sun 25 Aug 14:10; Thu 29 Aug 18:30

### Archipelago

Mon 5 Aug 18:00; Sun 11 Aug 13:10; Thu 22 Aug 20:30

### Woman of the Dunes

 Suna na Onna

Mon 5 Aug 20:30; Wed 21 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Tom Price, BFI Events)

### The Philadelphia Story

Tue 6 Aug 12:20; Sun 11 Aug 18:30; Mon 26 Aug 15:00

### Charulata

 The Lonely Wife

Tue 6 Aug 14:50; Sun 11 Aug 15:50; Fri 30 Aug 20:40

### Bigger Than Life

Wed 7 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sun 18 Aug 13:30; Tue 27 Aug 14:30

### 3 Women

Thu 8 Aug 12:10; Fri 16 Aug 20:30; Sat 24 Aug 17:10

### All That Heaven Allows

Fri 9 Aug 12:15; Wed 14 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions); Wed 28 Aug 20:50

### In the Realm of the Senses

 Ai no corrida

Fri 9 Aug 18:10; Mon 19 Aug 20:40

### The Shining (Extended Cut)

Fri 23 Aug 17:50; Mon 26 Aug 20:00

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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 burned-out 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 and Sound*, March 2015