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Mildred Pierce (1945) Youâ??ve come a long way, Mother.

Description

Written and reviewed by Larry Gleeson



Mildred Pierce, directed by Michael Curtiz, is part of this yearâ??s annual TCM 31 Days of Oscar under the theme, Oscar-worthy Moms. Mildred Pierce, the filmâ??s lead character, is portrayed by Joan Crawford. Crawford came from Broadway and first distinguished herself in film as a â??flapper,â?• with notoriety on par with Greta Garbo. Crawford usually portrayed hard-working women who achieved financial success. When her films began losing money Crawford took a two-year hiatus before returning for *Mildred Pierce,* another hard-working woman achieving financial success.



The film opens with a dark establishing shot of a car, headlights on, parked in front of a beach house. Gun shots are heard. A transition is made to a gentleman in a black tuxedo receiving the bullets. He falls to the floor and before expiring utters, â??Mildred.â?• Non-diegetic music creates tension and suspense. Shadows move in the frame. A woman drives off through a wisping marine layer. A crime has been committed possibly by a woman named Mildred, a potential femme fatale. *Mildred Pierce* has all the ingredients of a tasty film noir.



Mildred is no slouch as the film shows her attempting to implicate her ex-lover, Wally, who earlier in the day took a large share of her highly successful business. After the police discover the body, the usual motive-based suspects, are brought in; Burt,the first husband, Wally, and Mildred. It seems everyone in

the police department smokes cigarettes with second-hand smoke wafting throughout the common area. Wally and Burt are questioned first. Mildred is finally brought in to talk with Inspector Peterson (Moroni Olsen). The Inspector boastfully tells Mildred he knows everything, and that Mildred is cleared. Before she leaves, Mildred asks the Inspector who the killer was.



The Inspector tells Mildred it was her first husband, Burt Pierce. Mildred says it canâ??t be Burt and tries to get Wally charged. The Inspector tells Mildred Wally had no motive. Mildred retreats and claims Burt is too kind and gentle. The Inspector jumps on this â?? questioning Mildred, â??Okay heâ??s kind and wonderfulâ?¦why did you divorce him?â?• Dejectedly, Mildred sits back done and begins with, â??Because I was wrong. Itâ??s taken me four years to realize I was wrong. But I was wrong.â?• In a close up with vignetting Mildred begins telling her story from four years ago. A dissolve transition, indicative of time passing, retreats the narrative four years prior,



Mildred details her life with Burt marrying at 17. Burt had misgivings about how Mildred was raising the children Mildred told Burt the kids come first, and he can pack his things. Mildred remarries to a high society gentleman, of reported means, to help give her surviving daughter, Veda (Ann Blyth), a better world. But Mildred canâ??t seem to do enough for Veda. Veda becomes a conniving, irascible, young woman never appreciating the sacrifices Mildred makes for her. Finally, Mildred has had enough and takes an action well overdue.



Warner Brothers produced *Mildred Pierce* as a morality story, a fable. The film came out in 1945. World War II had ended. The need for working women diminished and was seen as no longer proper. Women were expected to leave their work and return to the home. Since Mildred Pierce is very successful as a

businesswoman, the times propagate she must be punished for not being a happy homemaker. True to form, Mildred loses her hard-fought financial freedom and must confront her life choices. With a fast run time of one hour and fifty-one minutes*, Mildred Pierce* has strong production values, effective continuity editing, mesmerizing cinematography and a driving musical score. In addition, the film has a compelling narrative and an attractive, well-seasoned cast. Highly recommended.



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