



***Bad Little Angel* is a 1939 M-G-M live action family feature starring Virginia Weidler and "Rex." As you can see in the photo above. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd, a probable upcoming entry into the Hugh Stoupe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church in Ligonier, Pennsylvania.**

8 of a possible 20 points = ** = overly sentimental film

**United States 1939 black-and-white 72 minutes Producer: Albert Levoy
live action feature drama Loew's Inc. (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 0 Direction: Wilhelm Thiele**
- 1 Editing: Frank Sullivan**
- 1 Cinematography: John Seitz**
- 1 Lighting**
- (2) Special Visual Effects* No credited individuals.**
- 1 Screenplay: Dorothy Yost, based on a book by Margaret Turnbull**
- 1 Music: Edward Ward**
- 1 Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons, Stan Rogers**
- Set Decoration: Edwin Willis**

Costume Design: Dolly Tree and Fred Valles

1 Sound: Douglas Shearer

0 Acting

1 Creativity

8 total points

Cast: Virginia Weidler (j) (Peggy), Gene Reynolds (j) (Tommy Wilks), Guy Kibbee (Luther Marvin), Ian Hunter (Jim Creighton, *Sentinel* editor), Elizabeth Patterson (Mrs. Perkins), Reginald Owen (Edwards, valet to Luther Marvin), Henry Hull (“Red” Wilks, father of Tommy), Lois Wilson (Ellen Creighton, wife of Jim), Arthur Aylesworth (orphanage supervisor), Wade Botler (policeman), Harlan Briggs (Lem Dodd), Jack Curtis (townsman), Esther Dale (Miss Brown), Jack Daley (Mr. Miller), John Dilson (Mr. Brown), Byron Foulger (new *Sentinel* editor), Harry Hayden (Mr. Simms), Edward Hearn (fireman), Russell Hicks (Major Ellwood, owner of the *Sentinel*), George Irving (Dr. Bell), Mickey Kuhn (j) (Bobby Creighton, brother to Georgie and Libbit), Mitchell Lewis (fireman), Douglas Madore (j) (Georgie Creighton, brother to Bobby and Libbit), Edward McWade (ticket seller), Milton Parsons (minister), Lee Phelps (foreman), Terry (Rex), Ann Todd (j) (Libbit Creighton, sister to Bobby and Georgie), Harry Wilson (fireman)

A typical 1939 Hollywood production awash in nostalgia for a bygone era (in this case the Victorian 1880s) and sentimental mushiness, *Bad Little Angel* is somewhat redeemed by an interesting, literate screenplay and extraordinary fire sequence. No one is officially credited with pyrotechnics, which is simply a stunning oversight. They are the movie’s most salient feature.

***Bad Little Angel*’s leading lady is youngster Virginia Weidler, seen to better advantage and unforgettably as cynical kid sister to Katherine Hepburn’s Tracy Lord in *The Philadelphia Story*. She can be forgiven for a rather subpar performance here, as MGM was working her hard in 1939. She appeared in ten different films!**

Here she's sweet-natured, pious orphan Peggy Sanderson, who zips through guardians in record time. This has led her to believe herself a jinx, sort of a junior version of Al Capp's Joe Btfsplk or a Victorian Jonah.

As the plot gets well underway, Peggy is adrift again, resolved to run away rather than spend another stretch in the local orphanage where she receives neither loving care nor adequate food. Using a verse chosen randomly from a massively thick Bible, the much-traveled urchin feels guided to "flee to Egypt" as the Holy Family once did. This movie being a low budget B picture, Egypt is thriftily discovered in New Jersey, a destination affordable even within Peggy's limited available finances. She purchases a ticket without close questioning by the seller and boards a train heading southward out of New Hampshire, taking along a mutt named "Rex."

Yes, "Rex" also answered to the name of "Toto" in 1939. No, Virginia Weidler didn't accompany him to Oz, stopping short in a more mundane locale: Egypt, New Jersey. There she's befriended by Tommy Wilks, played with pseudo Dead End Kid toughness by Gene Reynolds. Tommy has a perpetually drunken dad and a shoeshine kit, but also offers porter service for a nickel. This Peggy gratefully takes full advantage of. The two become outcast friends, with Tommy steering his foundling partner to a new set of foster parents and Peggy tirelessly interceding between boy and detractors.

No sooner does devout heroine win acceptance into the Creighton family than her new "dad" is sacked. Either for libeling a businessman who happens to be Egypt's leading factory owner or because hot-under-the-collar Tommy mouths off to entrepreneur Luther Marvin, calling him a "skinflint" and "skunk." Since Tommy short-circuits Luther's reading of a potentially damaging editorial being prepared for publication by Jim Creighton, the film leaves open whether specific actionable terms of opprobrium actually appeared in it. Nonetheless, the damage is done, Luther prevailing upon the *Sentinel's* owner, Major Ellwood, to fire his veteran editor of three years' standing.

Thus endangering continued residence of the Creighton family and its collection of dependents in Egypt. Those adjuncts include "Red" Wilks, who is being solely employed by Jim. Soon, with the latter and Mr. Wilks both fired and facing permanent eviction from their town, Peggy finds herself facing anew the prospect of homelessness.

A visit by the girl to Luther's mansion accomplishes nothing more than the offer by him of a charity food basket to tide the hungry and unemployed Creighton clan and its Wilks supercargo over for a day or so.

Then lucky tragedy results. Take your pick as to its origin: Peggy's wish for an angry God to intervene and punish paint factory owner Marvin for his lack of compassion and sympathy or employee carelessness at the paint works. Fire breaks out at Marvin's production site, as Jim had predicted it someday would. Before volunteer firefighters can even assemble at the burning premises flames are raging well beyond control, thanks to exploding vats of paint. If the conflagration spreads to an adjacent turpentine tower, a catastrophic explosion will occur.

Jim takes it upon himself to attempt daredevil passage up the ladder leading to a platform where control lever and release wheel for opening tower contents are located. Can he reach that on time? Or will he and Peggy's hopes burn up in a mini-apocalypse? This being a 1939 family-oriented release from Hollywood the outcome should not be in doubt.

More significantly, the role played by religious faith is underlined throughout *Bad Little Angel's* dialogue. The screenplay hammers home repeatedly the concept God is in control of whatever happens on earth. It's the proper task of his mortal children to recognize that. Bad things can happen but good conclusions will ultimately spring from them.

In this instance, a miser and a drunk are reformed, while an orphan finds loving acceptance in a randomly chosen community. Comforting endings for audiences confronting prospects of impending world war in 1939.

Aside from pyrotechnics and quite serviceable script, this MGM release lacks rewarding assets. Music, sound, lighting, editing, and cinematography are merely middling. Acting is often risibly hammy. Much of the blame for that must be credited to Austrian émigré director Wilhelm Thiele, who perhaps had problems communicating with his cast due to translation difficulties.

Production design is blatantly artificial, further distancing audiences from onscreen action.

Nonetheless, the picture should prove thought-provoking for children ages ten through fourteen trying to master ethical behavior in an all-too-frequently blind world where secularism reigns supreme. Or seems to.

This Zeus dvd has no special features.

