

Never Take Sweets from a Stranger

UK : 1960 : dir. Cyril Frankel : Hammer / Columbia : 81 min
 prod: Anthony Hinds : scr: John Hunter : dir.ph.: Freddie Francis

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 Gwen Watford; Patrick Allen; Felix Aylmer; Niall MacGinnis; Alison Leggatt; Bill Nagy;
 Janina Faye; Michael Gwynn

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	€	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Halliwell's Film Guide review

"In a Canadian town, a respected elderly man is accused of improper sexual advances to a child. In the awful warning category, and rather predictable. Shot in Megascopes."

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"Titillatory exercise in child molesting [sic], naturally pretending to be a Solemn Warning and Plea for Medical Treatment of criminally insane Gwen Watford, Patrick Allen, Felix Aylmer hammered it home in 1960, under Cyril Frankel's opportunistic direction. 777 "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"The yarn is set in Canada. Though filmed in Britain, the Canadian atmosphere is remarkably well conveyed. It deals with a senile, psychopathic pervert [sic] (Felix Aylmer) with a yen for little girls. When he persuades two innocent little girls to dance naked in front of him in exchange for candy, the English parents of one of them decide to take him to court.

Unfortunately, they do not realise that he is the local big shot, the man who has helped to build the Canadian town to its prosperity and power.

Gwen Watford and Patrick Allen, as the distraught parents, and Alison Leggatt, as a wise, understanding grandmother, lead a cast which is directed with complete sensitivity by Cyril Frankel. Both Watford and Allen are completely credible while Leggatt, well served by John Hunter's script, is outstanding.

Aylmer, who doesn't utter a word throughout the film, gives a terrifying acute study of crumbling evil, while Bill Nagy, as his son, is equally effective."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. From a play called "The Pony Cart " by Roger Garis. Exploitation though it almost certainly was (given the studio who made it) this would still hold a quaint fascination today, now that the witchhunting of paedophiles has become a blood sport for all the family, and suspects are being beaten to death in their homes by lynch mobs while the media exhort politicians to ever fiercer and indiscriminating purges. In 1960 "child molesting" (as it was then called) was assumed to be a rare, even freakish, occurrence.

For all the rolling acres of newsprint that have been generated on the subject in recent years, and despite a sea-change in public perceptions of other abominable “perversions” – homosexuality, lesbianism, transvestitism – understanding of this particular sexuality has not advanced an inch. Indeed, the “senile psychopathic perverts” of the 1960s can have little suspected they were living in a golden age of tolerance, by comparison to the climate forty years on.

The paranoia in the general population which has been whipped up by all of this feverish finger-pointing (who could forget the Satanic Abuse scares – given real credence at the time) has, among other effects, drastically curtailed the independence and freedom of children themselves. The public parks stand empty, kids are chaperoned to and from school, and the abiding fear at the front of every parent’s mind is not that their child will be killed in traffic, or be drawn into narcotics through their schoolfriends, or become enmeshed in neighbourhood racial gang wars, but that they will be abducted and “interfered with” by Strangers. Society has always sought for “aliens” in its midst to act as lightning rods, distracting attention from more intractable problems. It has simply moved on from the Jews, blacks and communists to identify a new “enemy within”, but the McCarthyist tactics and language remain the same. It’s deeply worrying to observe how blithely we ignore those immediate parallels. The persecuted groups of a generation ago now happily clamber onto the bandwagon to throw rocks at the next minority in the firing line.

The title of this film is cue enough that it sets out purposely to endorse the prevailing bogeyman myths and folk wisdoms, rather than apply any informed analysis: a “dirty old man” inveigling little girls with sweets rather than a young, popular soccer coach inviting his favourites home after the match. The accused is not suffered to speak in his own defense, but must remain a silent target on whom we can pin all our prejudice and suspicions. Even Fritz Lang’s seminal “**M**”, back in 1931, permitted the hated child-killer to blurt out a plea for understanding of the compulsions that drove him. By 2001, child-killers and paedophiles have become completely merged in the public mind, as though sexual attraction is self-evidently a prelude to murder. It is a trend other minorities would do well to watch with alarm.

See subject index under **SEX & SEXUALITY**, which necessarily must embrace sexual crimes, as well as relationships society would prefer to repudiate.