

Review #64 : *The Swan* (1956)

Louis Jourdan and Grace Kelly – Alex Guinness

TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-0Aljoi6VI>



SYNOPSIS

Grace Kelly plays Princess Alexandra, a member of a dethroned royal family in some mythical country before World War I. Predictably, Alexandra's mother hopes her beautiful daughter will marry the Crown Prince Albert (excellent **Alec Guinness**) so they may **regain the family's prestige and financial security**. Alexandra knows this is her duty and the rest of the royal family, including the tutor, Professor Agi (**Louis Jourdan**), who happens to be secretly in love with her, understands this. But when the Prince visits the family, he is indifferent to Alexandra, finding her cold and icy. Beatrice, Alexandra's mother, desperate to snag the Prince, orders her daughter to flirt with the unsuspecting Professor in order to make the Prince jealous. **But things get complicated when real feelings are finally revealed...**

REVIEW

Much of the success of this movie can be credited to the **witty script** and **excellent performance of the cast**. **Grace Kelly** is perfect as the elegant and unattainable Princess. Part from being very beautiful she is an excellent actress. Her gradual transformation from **remote icicle to a woman deeply in love** is a marvel to watch. It is a finely shaded performance wherein she slowly peels away each layer of her **vener to reveal a very human and romantic heroine**. **Louis Jourdan** as the Professor is *at par* with Kelly. His is a very natural and open performance, perfectly in tune with the Professor's innocent character. He is **dashing and handsome, yet so vulnerable** at the same time. You can't help but root for him till the end. His chemistry with Kelly is also electric. You can feel every romantic yearning the two characters have for each other, even without any words being said. In fact, one of the most romantic scenes in this movie is one that has zero dialogue. This is the scene where the Princess and the Professor dance the waltz :

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtxlh_Aq2FA

Here, we gradually see the Princess returning the Professor's feelings as he gazes at her with all his romantic hopes. It's all so delicate and dazzling...

Alec Guinness is every inch a prince. He is **witty and gracious**, but very aware of his rank and self-importance. Guinness pulls off the role with so much **dignity and humour** that you can't help but like the guy as well.

The supporting characters are also fun to watch. **Brian Aherne** (Uncle Karl) brings in a touch of quiet humour and compassion with his wise and understanding monk, though if he does kinda help in manoeuvring the Princess to take hold of her feelings. **Jessie Royce Landis** (Beatrice) is also interesting as a frenzy yet more subdued Mrs. Bennet type of character, just as in *To Catch a Thief*, where she also played Grace Kelly's mother. Estelle Winwood is deliciously daffy as the broken-down aunt Synforosa, and the two young princes provide much of the comic relief in the movie. **Agnes Moorehead** shrills with her usual clamour as the Prince's majestic and commanding mother, and **Leo G. Carroll** is mellow as the major-domo of the princely household.



It's amazing how a film **so grounded in reality could inspire so much romance**. Despite its bittersweet flavour, you can't help but sigh when you see how beautiful Alexandra and the Professor look together. They just seem so right for each other. But then, hearing Uncle Karl's advice and Prince Albert's pragmatic statement, you find yourself sadly nodding in agreement. It reminds you once again that **love and romance are luxuries royals couldn't afford**. Nevertheless, the movie still makes the viewer root and cheer for love. For that achievement alone, this movie ought to be rendered one of the best classics in Hollywood.

Indeed, the whole production is a **masterpiece of the designers' and the costumers' work**, and is as easy to look upon for almost two hours as it is pleasant to listen to. The experience is a bit like eating at a wedding reception and sipping light champagne, and even the bitter-sweet ending should be no discouragement to Miss Kelly's vast multitude of fans. This was her last film before her marriage to a real Prince, and she never looked lovelier ! +++