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LILIOM

Fritz Lang (France, 1934)

CAST: Liliom: Charles Boyer; Julie: Madeleine Ozeray; Alfred: Pedro Alcover; Mme. Muscat: Odette Florelle; Commissioner: Henri Richard; Marie: Mini Funes; Mme. Menous: Mme. Maximillienne; Strong Arm: Robert Arnoux; Sailor: Roland Toutain; Hollinger: Alexandre Rignault; Purgatory Cop: Richard Barency; Knife Grinder: Antonin Artaud; Detective: Raoul Marco; Clerk: Leon Arvel; Cashier: Rene Stern

CREDITS: Producer: Erich Pommer; Director: Fritz Lang; Screenplay: Robert Liebman; Dialogue: Bernard Zimmer, based on the play by Ferenc Molnar; Photography: Rudolph Mate, Louis Nee; Music: Jean Lenoir, Franz Waxman; Art Directors: Paul Colin, Rene Renoux Erich Pommer-Fox Europa

Synopsis of LILIOM

A lively amusement park. Liliom, the merry-go-round barker, is enthusiastically delivering his spiel. He competes for one last customer, a tipsy sailor, with the attendant at a rival stand. The barker, loud and cocky, notices two pretty women on the carousel and points out to them that this is going to be their fourth time around. Liliom's rival tells the merry-go-round's owner, a woman with an obvious personal relationship with her employee, that Liliom is flirting with a customer.

When Liliom's rival says Liliom pushed the sailor off the carousel, the sailor, Liliom's friend, slugs the malicious accuser who quickly finds himself in a losing scrap with Liliom. The jealous owner comes over and insults the pretty women, warning them not to come back. The blonde, Julie, says she paid for five rides and intends to use her last ticket. The owner orders Liliom to tell the girls to go but provoked by her manner he winds up telling Julie she can come back whenever she wants. The owner says she's going to fire Liliom, relents, but then Liliom demands that she apologize to the women and lifts his arm threateningly. The owner runs off and Liliom leaves with girls, saying he was tired of that place anyway. He makes a date for later that evening.

When they meet, Liliom says he only meant for one of them to show up. He selects Julie when he learns that she too had lost her job as a housemaid that afternoon because she had lingered at the carousel. She tells him she's never had a suitor and, obviously innocent and infatuated, does not resist his crude advances. The police suddenly appear on the scene, and warn Julie that Liliom is a notorious ne'er-do-well and lady-killer who will promise her marriage only to take all her savings. She declines their forceful suggestion they escort her home, and afterwards tells Liliom that she doesn't have any savings but would have gladly given them to him if she had. "Aren't you scared to be alone in the dark with a dangerous seducer of housemaids?" Liliom asks. No, she replies, nor will she be tomorrow. "If I loved somebody I would be afraid of nothing, even of dying."

He's moved in with her. He's loafing, has turned down a job as a concierge because he thought it was beneath him, and spends his nights drinking. She works at the photo studio run by her aunt, who is helping to support them. He gets angry at her for no reason at all when he finds he drank all the coffee and she didn't take any and after berating her that she was accusing him of not taking proper care of her he slaps her and storms out. Egged on by the aunt, a shopkeeper shyly attempts to court Julie.

Liliom answers a summons to go to the police station, and runs into a friend, Alfred.

It turns out punctilious bureaucracy had required that he be present when a deposition he had given was stamped. Liliom is furious to have been kept waiting just for that but he is not allowed to complain to the police chief. "Justice," he says, "is a matter of starched collars."

The aunt and the carousel owner discuss getting Liliom away from Julie and back to the carousel, where business had declined. Alfred mentions there is a paymaster they could easily waylay but Liliom is not interested. They scramble up some money at a local dive and gamble. The aunt urges Julie to take up with the shopkeeper, to no avail.

The carousel owner comes by to lure him back, offering him a raise and evoking the old atmosphere. He's concerned about abandoning Julie but ultimately gives in. Julie interrupts, refuses to leave, and very hesitantly tells him she's going to have a baby. Liliom, ecstatic, turns down the other woman's advance. "Julie's going to have a child," he keeps repeating. The aunt calls him a good-for-nothing and says Julie would starve if she counted on him. Liliom goes to see Alfred and agrees to the robbery. Liliom is to ask for the time, Alfred will come from behind, and Liliom will stab the victim, which doesn't please him.

Waiting for the paymaster they discuss what they'd say to God if they were killed. Alfred says only the rich speak to God; they can't even see the chief of police. An itinerant knife-sharpener happens to pass by. The robbery doesn't work out as planned and Liliom stabs himself rather than surrendering. Dying, a repentant Liliom tells Julie to tell the child its father was a no-account and that he's soon going to be seeing God. There are minutes of silence at the carnival, at the dive. Julie tells the dead Liliom she loved him.

The time for accounting is now, say two dark figures who identify themselves as God's police. In a celestial police station he's told he has to wait. "Naturally," he says. The knife-sharpener goes by; Liliom is told he was his guardian angel. Offered an opportunity to go back for one night to take care of unfinished business, he declines; he'd prefer to just be dead and sleep. When he doesn't give a satisfactory explanation of why he beat Julie, he's shown the filmed record of the coffee episode. He is shown the film a second time with his thoughts on the soundtrack and they indicate that he had really been angry at himself for his selfishness. His pride and violence call for a sixteen year sentence in purgatory, after which he'll be able to go back on earth for one day and see his child.

The day comes, and he's reminded to give his child, a girl, something "beautiful, very beautiful." He talks to her and she says her father, a warm and wonderful man, died in America. He tells her her father was a brute who beat her mother. She's so angry she rejects the star he'd pocketed to offer to her, and later when she tells him to leave he slaps her hand.

Apparently, sixteen years were not enough to rid him of his pride and violence. The scales of justice are weighted against people like me, he says. Back on earth, his daughter asks her mother if she's ever experienced a man hitting her very hard without it hurting at all. Yes, Julie says, a man once did; it is possible. The scales of justice shift in his favor.

Program notes by Pierre Sauvage