

# Cold Comfort *bogs down in psycho-drama*

**Cold Comfort**  
Phoenix Theatre at the Kaasa  
through April 16

review by Mike Spindloe

In Jim Garrard's update of the farmer's daughter tale, now playing at the Phoenix at the Kaasa, things get very, very weird. But then, what else would you expect to happen when a psychopathic tow truck driver named Floyd, his 15-going-on-10 year old daughter and a worldly salesman of diamonds and perfume

Floyd... may be psychopathic but is nowhere near as stupid as he looks.

are stuck in a one room gas station-cum-living quarters in the middle of a spring blizzard?

As the play begins, Floyd has just brought home Stephen, the salesman, who got caught in the blizzard and is half dead. Floyd could have dropped Stephen off at a shelter along with the rest of the refugees from the storm, but his daughter Dolores' fifteenth birthday is coming up and Floyd figures she's ready for some male companionship. Thus, Stephen becomes an early birthday present for the nubile and naive but also lonely and curious Dolores.

While Floyd leaves them alone to go out and rescue more victims of the storm, Stephen and Dolores hit it off, especially after Dolores takes her bath in the living room in full view of the now fully recovered salesman. Meanwhile, Floyd keeps popping

in and out, checking up on his little arrangement. All goes well until Stephen convinces Dolores she should leave her father; Floyd finds out and things start to get ugly.

Unfortunately, that's also where the fun ends. The second half of the play degenerates into a mundane psycho-drama played out between Floyd and Stephen, who is now chained to the living room floor with his and Dolores' escape plans thwarted by Floyd, who may be psychopathic but is nowhere near as stupid as he looks.

The problem is not really one of production, but rather one of scripting. Tension is built up through the first half of the play, but by the end not much else has happened. In fact, the end itself is unsatisfying and incomplete.

Among the characters, Dolores, in par-

Stephen and Dolores hit it off, especially after Dolores takes her bath in the living room...

ticular, is unbelievable. Kate Newby obviously struggles with the part; it's hard to tell whether Dolores is supposed to be 10, 15 or 20 years old. Newby brings out Dolores' love/hate relationship with Floyd well, but seems less sure of how to deal with Stephen.

Robert Koons does an admirable job with Floyd, who is alternately hulking redneck and menacing captor, with a bit of perversely tender father figure thrown in

for good measure. You've met him before: he's in every seedy bar in the province, and no-one is going to take his pickup keys away when he's had half a dozen too many.

William Davidson as Stephen has the easiest role to play. Once he gets by his embarrassment of playing involuntary gigolo to Dolores, all he has to do is look alternately righteously indignant and panic-stricken in his confrontations with Floyd.

The set is a marvel of paraphernalia, featuring grease-stained furniture, used

car tires, cases of motor oil and various auto parts scattered about on and above the stage.

To be fair, *Cold Comfort* has many genuinely funny scenes, but the whole ends up being considerably less than the sum of its parts.

When Stephen, somewhere in the second half, says to Floyd, "This is stupid," he's referring to his captivity but it could just as easily apply to at least the second half of the play. There's just very little comfort here for the characters or the audience.

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