

Poem Noir



David Jibson

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Introduction:

“It was a dark and stormy night,” as cartoonist Charles Schultz’s *Snoopy* began each of his fictional crime novels. *Poem Noir* is a labor of love that reflects my affinity for this uniquely American genre of film, perhaps the only truly organic Hollywood artistic movement.

Inside this book you will find many of the characters, plot devices, twists and turns of noir films, both real and imagined, – all expressed as poetry. Hard boiled detectives, seductive sirens, mugs, thugs, gangsters and crooked cops populate the pages of a dark and mysterious city.

Buy yourself a popcorn, sit back in your chair and claim the arm rests on both sides of your seat. The newsreel, the cartoons and the previews of coming attractions have been shown. It’s time for our main feature.

David Jibson

Dark City

Dark City is a mighty beast,
a sprawling monster
with a skeleton of steel
covered in a concrete overcoat.

In Dark City laws and souls
are trampled in the street.
The strong eat the weak.
Lives dangle from dangerous heights.

Living here is a fevered dream.
A man can go off his nut on these streets
among the jaundiced cops,
corrupt politicians, psychotic crooks.

In the city's tenderloin the seedy rooms
are clammy with the residue
of spoiled hopes, abandoned dreams,
wallpaper that sweats fear.

Everywhere is the crackle and buzz
of neon signs that stare each other down
across dirty streets
and grimy infected avenues.

Dark City is a mighty beast
with a taste for human flesh,
your flesh if you make a wrong turn.
That bullet in your forehead
was meant to slow you down.

Mr. Big

Harry the Horse says,
"The Boss wants to see you."
Ordinarily I'd decline his invitation
but he's got his hand in his coat pocket
and something in it is pointed at my chest.

Everybody wants to see Mr. Big
when they want to see him.
Nobody wants to see Mr. Big
when he wants to see them.

He's the pope of the city.
Everybody kisses the big diamond he wears
on the manicured pinky of his right hand.

From his office in the back of the nightclub
Mr. Big runs the dark side of the city.
He owns the mayor, the chief of police,
most of the city council,
even fifty percent of the governor.

He understands that anyone
who is his friend is also his enemy,
that loyalty walks a tight-wire
stretched between greed and fear.

He's Genghis Khan, Alexander,
Napoleon, Caesar, and Ivan The Terrible
ground up and rolled into one fat little sausage.
Just one of those gigantic cigars that he smokes
is worth more than your life.

Don't Forget Your Hat

When you need to know who's who and what's what
in this town, get to know the hat check girl at Mr. Big's.
She rubs elbows with the best and the worst:
the millionaire bankers and street thugs,
the gamblers, gangsters and high society wags,
the artsy set, the Hollywood stars,
the phony tipsters and juggernauts of Wall Street.
She knows them all and she knows their business.

She's a friendly small town girl
from one of those states that begins with an *I*.
She came to the city to be a dancer.
but all she found were a lot of bright lights
and empty promises. She took the only work she could get.
It barely pays the bills but she'll be okay
because surviving here is all about what you know
and, believe me, she knows plenty.

Don't fall for that simple country girl act.
That's just her way of seeming harmless.
And don't ever give her the double-cross.
The dame's got friends - if you know what I mean.

Her

*I didn't want any part of her
but I kept smelling that jasmine in her hair.*
- Humphrey Bogart in *Dead Reckoning* (1947)

Money's not the root of all evil.
She is. I would kill for her,
me, an easy going guy all my life
but not anymore. Not since I met her.

I said I would kill for her and I know I would
because I already have;
I have and I will again if I have to
and it looks as though I will.

I hate her more than I hate myself
and, believe me, that's plenty.
I guess this'll be the end of us both
and it'll be her fault:
Her and that damned smell of jasmine.

Gorillas

We don't know what their mother's called them.
We know them by handles like Whitey,
Slim, Shorty, Bugs, Mugsy and Rocky.

Two of them are permanently on guard
outside Mr. Big's office door
in the back of the night club.

One of them chews on a toothpick.
The other tosses a silver dollar
over and over, always coming up heads.

They're mugs, henchmen, hoodlums,
goons, gorillas, muscle,
hoods in black fedoras.

They want to take you for a ride
but not before they've broken
a few of your ribs.

They're a couple of empty suits,
afraid of nothing except for their
hat-check-girl and dime-a-dance girlfriends.

Wrong Turn on Scarlet Street

It's easy in a strange neighborhood
in the night city to make that one wrong turn
onto a narrow street
you've never been down before.

Life is like that sometimes.
One minute you're at a party
honoring your twenty-five years of service
to mediocrity and boredom.

The next minute you're lost
and looking for a way back home.
But there is no way back home
once you've made that wrong turn.

You realize somewhere along the way
you've grown old and ugly,
that your life is a prison,
your own conscience, the warden.

Then comes that one night
you see a chance to bust out
so you take it and from there
fate drags you down that evil street.

Once you've sold your life and your soul
you can never buy them back
even if you can steal enough to afford them.
All sales are final on Scarlet Street.

Death by Poison

I love the way this poem starts out
at the farthest end of a long curving gravel drive
lined with ancient elms that leads to a manor house.
And I especially love that no rain is expected
before the fourth stanza.

The Edwardians were so refined,
unlike like the Victorians for whom the sun
never seemed to shine
and who took everything so seriously.

And unlike the Elizabethans
in their oh so uncomfortable clothes,
and those smirky looks about what really
lay underneath all those codpieces.

I prefer the Edwardians in their formal gardens,
playing croquet on manicured lawns,
gin and tonics in their hands.
Now comes that rain, right on schedule,
meaning old Lord Carrington is about to die
a horrible death by poison.

The Mad Scientist's Daughter

I once fell for the daughter of a mad scientist.
It seems all mad scientists have a daughter;
a beautiful daughter with pointed breasts,
a tight sweater and no mother.

If the daughters are beautiful
chances are their mothers were beautiful too,
but we will never know for sure
because nobody has ever seen one.

To Have and Have Not

In the balcony rows where the lovers sit
it's not so far from heaven
where the beam from a projector
slices the darkness and we,
playing at Bogie and Bacall,
splash ourselves up on the screen,
an etching of a former world,
where we wish we could
live out our lives in two dimensions
in the deep shadows of a darkened theater,
the objects of every envy.