



# The Blonde on the Street Corner

*David Goodis*

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She took a final drag at the cigarette, flipped it away, and said, *I don't get this line of talk. It's way over my head...Maybe you're waiting for some dream girl to come along in a coach drawn by six white horses, and she'll pick you up and haul you away to the clouds, where it's all milk and honey and springtime all year around. Maybe that's what you're waiting for. That dream girl.*

Maybe, he murmured.

And then he looked at the blonde. His smile was soft and friendly and he said, *I guess that's why I can't start with you. I'm waiting for the dream girl.*

But the dream girl does not come. In the meantime Ralph must deal with the yearnings of everyday life and take what he is offered.

Written in 1954, **The Blonde on the Street Corner** is full of the passions and desires that are the hallmarks of a David Goodis novel.

*His books are a lethally potent cocktail of surreal description, brilliant language, cracker barrel philosophy and gripping obsession.* - **Adrian Wootton**

## The Blonde on the Street Corner Details

Date : Published January 15th 1998 by Serpent's Tail (first published 1954)

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Author : David Goodis

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# From Reader Review *The Blonde on the Street Corner* for online ebook

## Andy says

As disappointing as David Goodis gets, this is one of the most un-noir offerings he's ever written. Some parts of this reminded me of John Fante and other parts reminded of Fellini's "I Vitelloni", but there's nothing here that'll have Goodis' finest crime writing chops on display. The main theme here is despair, a familiar theme in his works. If this is your first Goodis novel (big mistake) you'll never read him again. Yeah, it's that bad!

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## David says

Not much happens in *The Blonde on the Street Corner*, which, I suppose, is part of the point. Empty characters with empty lives. Sometimes they strive for something better, but most of the time it's not worth the trouble. After all, it won't ever amount to much. Goodis does his job by staying out of the way. Prone to overwriting himself into a mess, he keeps it simple this time.

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## Robin Friedman says

David Goodis' pulp, noir novel "The Blonde on the Street Corner" (1954) is set in the rowhouses and streets of Philadelphia in the midst of the Depression in a cold 1936 December. The novel is distinctively noir in tone, but crime plays no part in it.

Most of this novel offers a portrayal of four unemployed young men in their early 30's and their families. The men, Ralph, Ken, Dippy, and George, hang around together on a street corner, in front of a candy store and in each others' homes. Goodis individualizes each character, as Ken is a failed would-be songwriter, Dippy a part-time laborer who calls women at random from the phone book in search of dates, and George, a failed baseball player in the lowest level of the minor leagues and on the sandlot. Ralph Creel, 30, the primary character of the book has the heart of a romantic. Unemployed and unwilling even to look for work, Ralph describes himself as "hoping for a cleaner better life." Ralph lives with his family, including his working class father and his wife and two younger sisters.

The four young men loaf on street corners, bum cigarettes, chew on nuts, try to meet women, and occasionally secure menial jobs. Goodis portrays something of the family lives of each of his characters in addition to Ralph. Dippy lives with his mother, his brother, a lawyer, and his brother's wife Leonore in a house full of quarreling. In the thin plot line of the book, Leonore eyes Ralph on a street corner winter night and determines to seduce him. Ralph has another potential romantic interest in a young woman, Edna Daly, recently arrived in Philadelphia as her family searches for work.

Goodis' writing in the novel changes with his scenes and characters. When the book describes Ralph's inner life, his dreams and his fears, the writing takes on a stream of conscious, surrealistic and extensively descriptive quality. Ralph spends a good deal of time alone, away from his companions and his family, on the streets and walking restlessly around a small city lake. When the characters talk or interact with each other, the sentences are short and clipped.

In one scene, the four men on the street corner have a discussion late one night about going to downtown Philadelphia on Market Street to look for work. They talk about the many people on the busy street and speculate on their motives for going downtown. One of the characters says:

"All right, so maybe a lot of them were there for the same reason. Or they were going into stores to buy things. Do you think people are crazy" Do you think they come in town, from all parts of the city, just to walk up and down Market Street?"

And one of the friends responds:

"I think a lot of those people come in town and walk up and down because they're lonesome."

"The Blonde on the Street Corner" is a deeply pessimistic novel about people in large cities without prospects leading desperately lonely lives. The book offers a failed, gritty romantic vision. Readers who become fascinated with the Library of America volume of Goodis novels and want more of Goodis will enjoy this book. As do the novels included in the LOA, this book transcends the pulp genre in which it is written.

Robin Friedman

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### **Wendy Crittenden says**

okay, so i started reading goodis because i am a huge admirer of truffaut's film shoot the piano player, which was adapted from one of goodis' novels. blonde is good. i really got into it. i love that nothing ever really good comes to his characters. i just think he is great at writing dysfunctional people.

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### **Daniel Polansky says**

Goodis was a crime writer, I think, at least that's what I was thinking when I got this from the library, but this isn't a crime novel, rather a slice of life thing about an unemployed young man towards the end of the great depression, and the hopelessness which overcomes him, embodied here in the eponymous blonde woman. There's not a ton here, and what plot there is is a little...on the nose, I guess? But a lot of the small interactions between the protagonist and his friends and family ring true, Goodis has the good noir writer's gift of relaying accurate sounding dialogue between uneducated individuals, as well as an affection for his characters which gives the narrative a proper feeling of tragedy. Library, but I guess gun to my head I'd probably keep it.

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### **Zoe says**

sledding down a long icy hill for eternity, a ferris wheel that never stops. used to symbolise their situation. I love the relationship between the four friends. and dippy, "what is this?". The fight scene in the factory with Christmas carollers outside and Santa Claus, everything supposed to be joyous. the workers getting back at "the man" and the unfairness. the anger built up, released. it's good. Ralph having no desire to do anything at all, I get it. His body working against him, walking places he doesn't really want to go. And I like the

boisterous females too. I like it. In the beginning he rejects Lenore, perhaps he has bigger dreams of better things but as the book progresses and his complete lack of confidence getting Edna and the violence inside him. It ends where it began, Lenore offering herself and trying to seduce him. And this time he lets go of all dreams and hope and he ends up with Lenore, no strings secret affair deal. I liked it it felt real and depressing. A good book to read in December

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### **Adam says**

You're 30 years old, live with your parents, don't have a job, and it's the middle of the Great Depression. Hope has become a very brittle thing, and you spend your days hanging around the street corner with friends in the same predicament, talking, endlessly talking, and trying to scrounge up a few cents for cigarettes. In time any change, no matter how awful and sordid, begins to look good.

Goodis's 1954 novel is set almost 20 years earlier and is a very vivid, wry chronicle of blossoming despair. Goodis, here, demonstrates a keen ear for dialogue and a knack for street-level psychology. This novel belongs in the estimable company of John Fante's *Ask the Dusk* and Edward Anderson's *Hungry Men*.

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### **Graham P says**

One of the lesser novels in the Goodis canon. Not much happens here, and while I was frustrated with its bare-boned approach, I soon realized that is the point. It's a book about stasis, boredom, big dreams gone to shit. Set in the usually downtrodden Philadelphia, four layabouts try to find work during the hard times of the Depression. But instead of writing the epic narrative, Ayn Rand's rags-to-riches, Goodis weeps out this little novel (at 150 pages) that reads like a minimal discourse in loser-speak & failure. Poorly-written at points, dare I say, lazy. But in free-wheeling spurts, there is the usual brilliance associated with Goodis. I imagined this as a black & white sitcom about depression-era losers, ghost-written by Sam Beckett, staged by a young John Frankenheimer, and designed by a skid-row misanthrope born & bred in the tenement burbs outside of Philly. Floors are bare, walls are cracked, jackets are torn and pockets are weighed down with a penny and not much more. In the end, the cast of character's dreams skitter and twitch, and then resume their static state. Sex-starved blondes even hang their heads in shame. It's a dismal world not worth taking advantage of - the message, just give up now so it hurts less later. Read the other Goodis novels before this one, and then give it a chance. It'll cement your view that Goodis is one of the most misanthropic authors out there this side of Selby Jr. and H.P. Lovecraft.

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### **Chris Shaffer says**

My first Goodis...not quite what I was expecting. I heard that he was an excellent writer of noir mysteries, which I'm sure he is, but this book had a lot of the noir without any mystery. However, it was an intimate portrayal of unemployed thirty-somethings in the mid thirties, capturing the anxiety, violence, and hopelessness of the era. No plot really-- rather character driven, and the ending just kind of arrives without much of a climax. There are a few touching moments between several of the main characters--writing a song together for lack of anything better to do, talking, in a very 'Waiting For Godot' kind of way, about moving to Florida, and dancing in the late night hours to jazz on the radio. I'm looking forward to his mysteries.

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## Steven says

I know it's a "pulp" noir novel from the '50s about the '30s, but I think this one works on a number of levels that I didn't completely pick up on. It was a fast read - I read it in less than a day, but it was certainly a page-turner. I have another Goodis on loan from a friend and I'm excited to see how that one compares to this. All in all, a good, short, compelling read.

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## Toby says

David Goodis deserves to be remembered much more than he is. When he is good he is incredible and even when he is not so good, as here with *The Blonde*, he is still a remarkable writer.

This downbeat noir is so literary that it does threaten to be an inferior clone of a John Steinbeck or Nathanael West at times but the Goodis outlook on life shines through, dragging these people down in to the gutter to keep him company in true noir fashion.

The similarities with the group of friends found in *Tortilla Flat* is quite obvious and the overall feel of the time and place is clearly influenced by these great depression era novels; sure Goodis lived through that period but this novel was written nearly 20 years later and I think he allowed himself to borrow from his peers. He has a unique voice as a writer and that is watered down in this book by incorporating his influences so obviously.

As with the lovable rogues of *Tortilla Flat* you can't help but love this downtrodden group of friends who dream of escaping the winter of Philadelphia for the sun of Florida, of leaving the poverty row lifestyle they lead behind in return for glitz and glamour, yet never quite make it past the dreaming stage. I think it would be easy to pity these people or to think less of them for their slothly ways and in lesser hands you would but Goodis doesn't allow you to opt for the easy dismissal of these people, his honesty in portraying them and their milieu the key to this response.

I'll add one more comparison, something that stuck with me from start to finish; Hubert Selby Jr. wrote the incredible *Last Exit to Brooklyn* ten years after this piece was published and if it didn't influence him I'd be quite surprised, they share the bleak outlook and the same love of these dispossessed people and they portray them with the same honesty, Selby simply crafted something better with it.

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## Craven says

According to reviews on Goodreads, this is not the best Goodis work. It was my first one, though, and whether or not it was the best place to start, it was a good read. It's about a bunch of jobless ne'er-do-wells during the Depression. Folks in their thirties with nothing to show for it, due to the Depression and lack of employment. There is very little plot, the book is basically held together by the characters looking for ways to waste their time. A lot of this book is dialogue, which, is funny and tragic, but also making for a quick read. The people in this book remind me a lot of characters you might find in a Thom Jones story only a lot more sympathetic or a Nelson Algren story only with a lot less nobility. Fans of those authors will definitely

enjoy.

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## **Dale says**

This is a very short novel written in 1954 and set in December 1936. The main characters are four men in their early thirties, unemployed and living with their parents in a working class neighborhood in an unnamed small city in Pennsylvania. The novel is structured as a sequence of vignettes, and it is not until the third chapter that you realize that it is actually a novel and not simply a set of related short stories.

I really don't know what to think about this book. The characters are definitely not likable or inspiring in any way. The female characters seem pretty two-dimensional and the male characters have more than their share of character flaws: laziness, craftiness, alcohol abuse, self-delusion, self-absorption. Perhaps we are meant to understand that these flaws are simply artifacts of the terrible economic conditions of the time. The book has the kind of grittiness that you would associate with social realism, but the overall feel of the novel is almost surreal, or at least fuzzy around the edges.

It reminded me of Nathanael West's "Day of the Locust", but was not nearly as interesting.

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## **Bert says**

A bit of an oddity this one. A tale about a group of unemployed misfits, who spend their time doing nothing - gabbing, chewing Indian Nuts and standing on the street corner dreaming of sunny Miami. Set in 30s skidrow Philadelphia, this was less noir than the other Goodis' I've read, but still infused with his brilliantly skewed way with a line, and a real compassion for the disenfranchised losers of this world. Didn't quite reach the heights it tried for, but had moments of real beauty and a startling, poignant, yet unexpectedly satisfying ending.

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## **Jay Gertzman says**

David Goodis, who lived most of his life in Philadelphia, was a very popular writer of mystery pulp novels in the 1950s and 60s. In 1954, he wrote a novel set in 1936, on a North Philly street corner: *The Blonde on the Street Corner*. "Men and Women on the skids," blurbbed Lion Library's come-on. The book was a rumination on foggy horizons and psychological entrapment. When it (but not the future of a young protagonist) is finished, the demon despair has come around the street corner and erased the warm memory of the young woman who loves the anti-hero. *Blonde* has page-turning intensity.

The hero, Ralph Creel, meets a young woman, Edna, who understands his sense of failure at starting a career. He likes her too. But the blonde, Lenore, wants Ralph as her toy-boy, just once or twice a week. She is irresistible to him. He actually takes walks to Edna's street and has a conversation with her, and he knows her qualities. But Lenore, for her part, is not about to let Ralph get away. "He had a terrific grip," and "he gave it like a beast." He has made himself her plaything. If this sounds superficial, it is not. The confusion in a young man's mind, and how his own sense of failure and shame influence his decision, is treated as representative as not only a sexual quandary, but a test of selfhood. The theme of good girl vs femme fatale is a universal one in popular films and novels.

The novel is written in intensely wrenching language depicting inner confusion and looming despair. The

imagery of snow and darkness, and the hard-bitten colloquialisms, are wonderful evocations of how Philly men and women thought and spoke in the 1950s. It is available in libraries and on used book sites on the web.

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