Cultural Daily

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They Write by Night, Episode 2

Suzanne Lummis · Wednesday, November 14th, 2018

Mood Sultry

The scholars like to say film noir's imbued with a sense of menace and dread. Yeah, yeah, we know—sure. But not always. Sometimes it's imbued with something else. People forget that the most famous line in those movies came out of the mouth of "Slim" to "Steve" in Howard Hawk's *To Have and Have Not*.

> *You know you don't have to act with me, Steve. You don't have to say anything, and you don't have to do anything. Not a thing. Oh, maybe just whistle. You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve? You just put your lips together and . . . blow.*

If a man ever hears a woman say that to him with the mood Lauren Bacall brought to it, maybe he'd best marry her. Humphrey Bogart did.

And then there's the magnificent, hot-breeze-blown Katherine Turner, "Maggie" to William Hurt's aroused and criminally inclined second-rate attorney in *Body Heat*. That'd be the 1981 movie Lawrence Kasdan wrote and directed, his witty tribute to classic film noir. Ned Racine gets to stave off that sense of dread till the last third.

Only one poet has ever connected these two movies and captured that sense of heat, languor. Maybe any number of folks could pull off an armed car heist—well, if they put their minds to it. But try braiding two movie plots together with elements of your own life, invoke that atmosphere, and do it in a sestina. For that we'd have to turn to the late Diann Blakely.

One more element comes up, fair warning. This episode also deals with—that *thing* again. Sure, you can put your lips together and blow, but ya can't blow away death.

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