

“Thriller night”

Depending on how Guy looks at it, could be a good old fashioned thriller, or a Michael Jackson themed piece!

“You wanna be startin' somethin'?”

Michael looked at Paul and thought he was backing off even as he was trying to sound tough. An Englishman abroad, Paul had his arms up as if he were following Queensberry rules. Michael didn't want to fight. He was a lover not a fighter, and he didn't want to spoil his new threads.

“Don't be a macho man, Paul. Just beat it.”

Paul stood his ground, almost, and looked at Michael just below the eyes, at his nose in fact. A lot of people who knew Michael tended to find themselves looking at his nose. Its tendency to mutate attracted attention. Paul noticed that it had become a little more pointed. He was fed up being bossed around by this freak. He was fed up, period. He closed his eyes for a second.

“Sometimes you just want to lift your head up high and scream out to the world”, he thought, not realising that he was translating his thoughts into actions and howling at the sky. His cry, initially inarticulate, coalesced into words, words of pain that he threw towards the moon and then, opening his eyes and lowering his head, at his arch foe.

“The kid is not my son!”

Michael tipped his hat over his forehead so that Paul could not see his eyes and said in a measured tone and with an air of finality.

“We're not going to fight about this”.

Paul, having worked himself up into a passion, forgot his fear of violence and lunged at Michael. He found himself grasping at air as Michael seemed to be moving towards him but then slipped backwards out of his reach. Paul watched in growing confusion as Michael kept on apparently walking towards him only to be pulled backwards as if by some unseen hand. He seemed to be defying the laws of gravity, as if he was walking on the moon or something.

As he was sliding further away Michael called out.

“Paul, we both cannot have her so it's one or the other and one day you'll discover that she's my girl forever and ever. The girl is mine”.

Hearing Michael taunt him, Paul's rage grew and he shouted at the slim figure sliding into the shade.

“The doggone girl is mine!”

Michael though had no thought of taunting Paul. He was trying to help him. Paul had to accept that he and the girl were over.

“Don't waste your time”, he shouted, but he was now too far away and Paul did not hear him.

As he often did when he was in trouble, Paul called in to see Ben on his way home. Ben took one look at Paul, sat him down and brought him a brandy. As Paul was holding his head in his hands, Ben placed it on the floor next to him. When he looked up, Ben could see the tears running down Paul's face and heard him begin a familiar story.

“Every night she walks right in my dreams since I met her from the start”.

Ben sat back and made himself comfortable. He knew there was no stopping Paul when he was in this mood.

“She called me to her room”.

Ben did not like to see Paul like this.

“Man, you should do like me. I look straight ahead, like an arrow. No use looking back like this, man.”

“Ben, she was more like a beauty queen from a movie scene”.

The encounter with Michael, the night-time, the brandy and the attentiveness of his old friend had turned Paul into a poet.

“I hear her voice shake my window, and her sweet seducing sighs, as the city winks a sleepless eye.”

Ben closed his eyes. Paul, sitting forwards on the edge of his chair, stared into his glass, turning it round and round in his hands.

“We'd dance until three. We danced on the floor, in the round”.

“That was then, man. You haven't danced in a long time”.

“I smelled a sweet perfume”.

“Paul, my mother always told me be careful who you love”.

“She was more like a beauty queen from a movie scene”.

Ben knew that what he was saying was not going to make any difference but he felt he had a duty to perform.

“Take my strong advice, just remember to always think twice... be careful of what you do”.

“Her name was Billie Jean.”

“I know, man, I know. She was like a beauty queen, from a movie scene. I'm going to call you a taxi, Paul. Time you were home”.

“Let me stay a little while longer, Ben. It's close to midnight and something evil's lurking in the dark”.

The way Ben saw it, there was something evil lurking in the dark in Paul's head. That something he put down to the girl that Paul saw as a beauty queen, but who Ben saw very differently. He had always been suspicious of her schemes and plans. As far as he was concerned she was off the wall, bad, dangerous and Paul was better off now that she was with Michael.

“Come on Paul, you need some sleep.”

But Paul had started on another of his refrains. She had been ill and he had done everything he could to help her.

“She had a breakdown. She had a breakdown and I took my baby to the doctor.”

“You did all you could, man. She didn't deserve you. And now I'm going to call you a cab.”

As Ben went to find his phone, Paul suddenly remembered something that Ben had told him, about a time when he'd thought he had an intruder in his flat. He'd been in bed and

he had told Paul how he'd reached into the drawer in his bedside cabinet for his Ruger. It had been a false alarm, but Ben said he had been relieved that he always kept his Ruger by his bed. Paul heard him now, speaking to the taxi office. He walked past him, gesturing up the stairs and mouthing that he was going to the lavatory. Berry nodded, then went back to giving the taxi office directions to his place. When Paul returned downstairs he grabbed his jacket and made himself ready to go.

"Thanks for the drink, Ben. Thanks for everything, man."

The cab driver tried to make conversation with Paul on the way home, but gave up after a couple of blocks. He looked in his rearview mirror and could see that his passenger was a million miles away.

"Got things on your mind, man. That's ok, you can work it out boy."

Paul was looking through the window at the white lines of the freeway as they rushed past. He knew he had got to a certain point, where he was not going to allow himself to be pushed around anymore. No one wants to be defeated. Before going to sleep that night he made a promise to himself and spoke out loud.

"The dawn will be different".

The next day, Paul woke with a brandy-dry mouth and felt the grief that had now become routine as he realised, once again, that there was an empty space where Billie Jean should have been. Waking up in the morning had been his favourite time of day, as he had been fond of telling Ben.

"Looking out across the morning, reaching out, I touch her shoulder".

Now it couldn't be any more different.

"Ben, the pain is thunder".

Billie Jean had been gone for forty days and forty nights and as Paul stretched his arm across the bed he found her absence just about unbearable. But he was not going to be defeated. He remembered that he had a plan. He was going to bring their two hearts together again. He just had to remove the barrier that was stuck in the middle between them. He got up and stood in front of the window, surveying the city which lay in front of him, quiet and still in the early morning half-light. Looking out across the morning, the city's heart begins to beat.

"I'm gonna thrill ya tonight, oh darlin'".

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On the other side of the city, a couple were slowly waking up together, each enjoying the sensation of finding themselves next to another body as they returned back to life. The woman opened her eyes first and ran her fingers slowly and lightly up and down the man's back. He opened his eyes, saw her looking at him and smiled.

"Hey".

"Good morning, Michael".

He detected a question, in the touch of her fingers, or in her eyes, or her voice, or maybe in all three.

"You ok? You sleep ok?", he asked.

"Fine, honey. Did you have sweet dreams?"

"I don't need no dreams when I'm by your side."

It was her eyes, definitely her eyes, which became suddenly imploring.

"Michael, you know I had dreamed of being the one."

"You are the one, Billie Jean. The only one".

"Just don't go around breaking young girls' hearts. That's all I'm saying to you. That's all I'm saying".

"Billie Jean, just remember to always think, you know you ah make me feel so good inside. Always wanted a girl just like you, such a pretty young thing."

Half-believing, she melted into him, thinking to herself as she often did, "Why, why does he do me that way?" Then she smiled, she thought, what the hell, and murmured her next thoughts out loud.

"I like lovin' this way".

Michael knew that now was the perfect time to hit the loving spot. He whispered into his girl's ear.

“Let me take you to the max, baby. I’ll take you there. I’ll give you all that I’ve got.”

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As the day wore on and became evening, Paul, standing in front of the mirror in the bathroom, found his resolve tested. He saw a creature creeping up behind him and recognised it straightaway. It was fear. He spoke to it as firmly as he could.

“Don’t waste your time”.

He put on the Charles Manson mask he had bought earlier that day from the Halloween costumes shop and all of a sudden he saw a different man in the mirror. He smiled and the effect was gruesome.

“You’re fighting for your life inside a killer, thriller tonight”.

It was Saturday night and he was confident that he knew where they would be. There was a new horror movie on at the Roxy, and Billie Jean hardly ever missed the first night at her favourite cinema, of a film she thought she would like. And she especially liked horror movies. Well, after the terror on the screen she was going to be faced with some real-life terror tonight. Paul drove off in his rented Lexus, his mask on the seat next to him.

Remembering how they had called her mouth a motor, he wondered what she would say if she could see him now. He put on the mask and Charles Manson spat at the oncoming traffic.

“Billie Jean is not my lover”.

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Meanwhile she was dancing around Michael’s apartment.

“Get me out into the night-time! Four walls won’t hold me tonight”.

Michael walked in, an apple in his hand. He looked appreciatively at his dancing girl.

“She knows I’m watching, she likes the way I stare”, he thought.

“What’s on at the Roxy tonight?” he asked.

“You know it’s thriller, thriller night”, Billie Jean replied.

“Ok, lets go and hit the city lights.”

Billie Jean looked at Michael and danced over to him. She took the apple from him.

“Let me take a bite”.

She took the first bite of the apple and handed it back to Michael.

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Paul drives through the shadows of the night. His windows are closed and the cd player turned up loud. He is trying to drown out the sound of his fear, the night creatures calling, and to keep out the rancid smell, as the foulest stench is in the air tonight.

He arrives at the Roxy and starts to shiver. He parks on the other side of the road where he can see people arriving from either direction. After a few minutes, he sees them walking along the sidewalk, Michael, in his black shoes and white socks, red trousers and red leather jacket, Billie Jean, glamorous in electric blue. They go in to the movie-house and the evil of the thriller starts.

Paul settles back to wait.

“No one's gonna save you from the beast about to strike”, whispers Charles.

He feels in his pocket for the Ruger then leans back against the headrest. Paul drifts off into sleep while Charles stares straight ahead, eyes wide open.

Michael and Billie Jean leave the cinema early as Billie Jean does not feel well. They cross the road to take the cab that Michael thinks he sees waiting there. They don't see the strange-looking figures in the distance, slowly walking towards them. They open the back door of the car and get in. Michael tells the driver his address but the driver does not respond. Michael taps the driver on his shoulder but the driver does not appear to move.

While Michael is doing this Paul is looking at him in the rearview mirror.

“What the hell is going on?”

There's demons closing in on every side.

You hear the door slam and realize there's nowhere left to run.

The doors lock. Paul takes his hand from his pocket and turns and Charles Manson is pointing a gun at them.

“Billie Jean is always talking when nobody else is talking, but she’s not talking now.”

Billie Jean recognises the voice before Michael.

“Paul, what are you doing? Please, don’t!”

“Shut your pretty little mouth. You love to pretend that you’re good when you’re always up to no good”.

He cocks the trigger. Billie Jean cries out in desperation.

“Think about the kid. You’ll be always trying to stop that child from crying”.

It was the worse thing she could have said. Paul’s howl can be heard across the street at the picture-house.

“The kid is not my son!”

He turns and points the gun at Michael. He does not know who to shoot first. He does not know whether he can shoot at all. He looks at Michael, then he looks at Billie Jean.

Michael tries it his way.

“Paul, I think I told you, I’m a lover not a fighter”.

Another poor choice. Paul’s voice trembles, the hand holding the gun too. Charles Manson’s deadpan expression is incongruous.

“Oh yes, I know you’re a lover alright Michael. That’s the problem.”

He points the gun at Billie Jean.

“She told me that I’m her forever lover, you know.”

He turns to her and his voice rises.

“Don’t you remember?”

The next person who speaks may force the trigger finger. Billie Jean and Michael know this instinctively and become silent.

Paul’s voice breaks into the quiet and it’s the voice of a broken man.

“I want you back!”

He screams and he sobs and he is now focused just on Billie Jean, so Michael takes his chance. He darts forward and reaches out at the hand that is holding the gun. As he knocks Paul's wrist, Paul simultaneously squeezes the trigger. There is a deafening report and the bullet ricochets around the car like a pinball. It rips through Charles Manson's face and into Paul, who slumps forward against the steering wheel. The airbag releases and thumps against Paul's chest. Paul's left arm springs forward and his hand catches the start button of the CD player, while his right hand hits the door-locking control. From the CD player comes the voice of Vincent Price.

"Though you fight to stay alive
Your body starts to shiver
For no mere mortal can resist
The evil of the thriller".

Michael and Billie Jean cling to each other in the back seat and can't tell whether or not Paul is still breathing over the squelchy funk coming from the cd player.

"The funk of forty thousand years..."

They try to open the doors but there are child locks in the back.

"...and grizzly ghouls from every tomb are closing in to seal your doom".

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