Potter's Field

Tom Waits

Well, you can buy me a drink and I'll tell you what I've seen
And I'll give you a bargain from the edge of a maniac's dream
That buys a black widow spider with a riddle in his yarn
That's clingin' to the furrow of a blind man's brow
And I'll start talkin' from the brim of a thimble full of whiskey
On a train through the Bronx that will take you just as far
As the empty of a bottle to the highway of a scar
That stretched across the blacktop of my cheek like that
And then ducks beneath the brim of a fugitive's hat
You'll learn why liquor makes a stool pigeon rat on every face
That ever left a shadow down on Saint Mark's placeHell, I'd double-cross my mother if it was whiskey that they paid
And so an early bird says Nightstick's on the hit parade
And he ain't got a prayer and his days are numbered
And you'll track him down like a dog
But it's a tough customer you're gettin' in this trade
'Cause the Nightstick's heart pumps lemonade
And whiskey keeps a blind man talkin' all right
And I'm the only one who knows just where he stayed last nightHe was in a wreckin' yard in a switchblade storm
In a wheelbarrow with nothin' but revenge to keep him warm
And a half a million dollars in unmarked bills
Was the Nightstick's blanket in a February chill
And the buzzards drove a crooked sky beneath a black wing halo
He was dealin' high Chicago in the mud
And stackin' the deck against a dragnet's eye
And the shiverin' Nightstick in a miserable heap
With the siren for a lullaby singin' him to sleep
And bleedin' from a buttonhole, and torn by a slug
Fired from the barrel of a two dollar gun
That scorched a blister on the grip of a punk by now
Is learnin' what you have to pay to be a hero anyhowHe dressed the hole in his gut with a hundred dollar bandage
A king's ransom for a bedspread that don't amount to nothin'
Just cobweb strings on a busted ukuleleAnd the Nightstick leaned on a black shillelagh
With the poison of a junkie's broken promise on his lip
He staggered in the shadows screamin', I ain't never been afraid'
And he shot out every street light on the promenade
Past the frozen ham-and-eggers at the penny arcade

Throwin' out handfuls of a blood stained salary
They were dead in their tracks at the shootin' gallery
And they fired off a twenty-one gun salute
And from the corner of his eye he caught the alabaster orbs
Of a dime-a-dance-hall girl and stuffed a thousand dollar bill in her blouse
And caught the cruel and unusual punishment of her smile
And the Nightstick winked beneath a rain soaked brim
Ain't no one seen hide nor hair of him since
No one 'cept a spade on Riker's Island and meSo if you're mad enough to listen to a full of whiskey blind man
And you're mad enough to look beyond where the bloodhounds dare to go
And if you want to know where the Nightstick's hidin' out
You be down at the ferry landin', oh let's say 'bout half past a nightmare
When it's twisted on the clock, and you tell 'em Nickel sent you
Whiskey always makes him talk
And you ask for Captain Charon with the mud on his kicks
He's the skipper of the deadline steamer
And she sails from the Bronx across the river Styx
And a riddle's just a ticket for a dreamer'Cause when the weathervane's sleepin' and the moon turns his back
You crawl on your belly 'long the railroad tracks
And cross your heart and hope to die, and stick a needle in your eye
'Cause he'd cut my bleedin' heart out if he found out that I squealed
'Cause you see a scarecrow is just a hoodlum
Who marked the cards that he dealed
And pulled a gypsy switch
Out on the edge of Potter's Field

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