

Review #43 : *Woman on the Run* (1950)

Ann Sheridan and Dennis O'Keefe



SYNOPSIS

Frank Johnson (Ross Elliott), department store window trimmer and failed artist, is walking his dog, Rembrandt, on a dark, cold San Francisco night. There he witnesses the murder of a potential grand jury witness. Learning that his life will be in danger, Johnson eludes the police and takes it on the lam. The police, represented by Inspector Ferris (Robert Keith), grills his apparently uncaring wife Eleanor (Ann Sheridan), as to his whereabouts. She is uncooperative and so they have her followed. **The Johnsons are in a loveless marriage but Eleanor wants to help Frank escape.** She is approached by a charming reporter, Danny Leggett (Dennis O'Keefe), who offers to help her find her husband and offers her \$3,000.00 for an exclusive interview. Unknown to Eleanor, Leggett is *** **SPOILER** *** the killer and is using Eleanor to find her husband so that he can kill him, thus eliminating the only witness to the murder...

Most of the film follows these two as they search the City for Frank. Meanwhile, Frank has sent a letter to Eleanor with a cryptic clue as to his whereabouts. As they roam the City, Leggett begins to fall for Eleanor. At a Chinese bar, which Frank had visited the previous evening, a dancer privately tells Leggett that he looks familiar to the drawing of a man that Frank had drawn and given to her. Leggett leaves with Eleanor but returns to kill the dancer and destroy the drawing, which would have identified him as the killer.

Eleanor finally solves the riddle and takes Leggett to an amusement park where Frank is hiding. Leggett convinces her to lead Frank to a secluded spot under the rollercoaster so that he can interview him 'in private'. This is where Leggett slips, betraying facts about the murder that only the police, Frank, Eleanor and the killer would know. Eleanor, stuck on the coaster, frantically tries to signal Frank who is about to meet with Leggett as the camera pans to a raucously-laughing harlequin...



WATCH HERE

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP17gzfzO5M>

REVIEW

1950 was a good year for Noirs. Records indicate that more Noirs were released during that year than in any other single year. The merits of *Woman on the Run* are its **strong cast** (led by one of the best Noir actors, Dennis O’Keefe) and a **good script containing several good plot twists and surprises**. This film could be placed in the Noir subcategory of *police thriller*. It also seems to fit Spicer’s definition of a *Homme Fatal* Noir (in opposition to the *Femme Fatale* genre). Compared to *The Sniper*, *Woman on the Run* seems almost light-hearted at times. Nevertheless, the dark and violent opening scene and the finale in the amusement park by night provide the viewer with some **shocking and exciting moments**. The film’s pacing is **fast and furious** as wife, police and killer scour the City for the husband...

The **San Francisco** locale is used to great effect by cinematographer Hal Mohr. As a matter of fact, the middle part of the film details the City on the way where Mohr’s skill gives a **menacing look even to the daytime shots** once the viewer realizes that Eleanor Johnson is unwittingly touring the city with the killer.

The best part of the film for me is the dialogue. Ann Sheridan has some wonderfully acerbic, wisecracking lines that she uses to skewer Inspector Ferris and anyone else who comes in range ! Dennis O’Keefe has his share of good lines as well including a particularly perceptive comment near the end of the film : Danny and Eleanor are standing in the dark under the park rollercoaster, the place where Danny is to meet Frank. Danny tells her that he used to bring girls there for romantic dates when he was younger. Eleanor remarks that the dark, remote spot is more frightening than romantic to which Danny rejoins : ‘*That’s how love is when you’re young ... and life is when you’re older.*’

This is definitely a minor Noir and one that would probably not score high on the Noir elements rankings. But I find it to be an **enjoyable, exciting and engaging movie**. The noir elements are there in the characters – the immoral, violent Leggett inexorably hunting his victim; the hard, pessimistic Eleanor, trapped in a loveless marriage to a man she doesn’t understand; the hapless Frank, a frustrated failure at love, art and life; and the hard Inspector Ferris, concerned only with solving the case and not with the welfare of the human people he supposedly serves... **A forgotten little jewel of the genre +++**