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DARK PASSAGE (1947)

Director: Delmar Daves

Producer: Jerry Wald (Warner Brothers)

Screenplay: Delmer Daves; from the novel by David Goodis

Director of Photography: Sid Hickox

Special Effects Photography: H.F. Koenekamp

Sound: Dolph Thomas

Music Score: Franz Waxman

Music Director: Leo F. Forbstein

Orchestration: Leonid Raab

Art Director: Charles H. Clarke

Set Decoration: William Kuehl

Costumes: Bernard Newman

Assistant Director: Richard Mayberry

Film Editor: David Weisbart

CAST: Humphrey Bogart (Vincent Parry), Lauren Bacall (Irene Jansen), Bruce Bennett (Bob), Agnes Moorehead (Madge Rapf), Tom D'Andrea (Sam, Taxi Driver), Clifton Young (Baker), Douglas Kennedy (Detective), Rory

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Mallinson (George Fellsinger), Houseley Stevenson (Dr. Walter Coley). **BITS:** Bob Farber, Richard Walsh, Ian MacDonald (Policemen), Anita Sharp Bolster, Mary Fields (Women), Clancy Cooper, Dude Maschemeyer, Lennie Bremen, John Arledge (Men), Pat McVey (Taxi Driver), Tom Fadden (Waiter), Shimin Ruskin (Driver), Tom Reynolds (Hotel Clerk), Michael Daves, Deborah Daves (Children), John Alvin (Blackie), Ross Ford (Driver), Ramon Ros (Waiter), Craig Lawrence (Bartender).

Location: San Francisco, California

Filming Completed: January 30, 1947

Released: Warner Brothers, September 27, 1947

Running Time: 106 minutes

Vincent Parry, wrongly convicted of his wife's murder, escapes from San Quentin prison. He rolls down a hill and hitches a ride on the highway. The first to pick him up is Baker, with whom Vincent fights and knocks unconscious. Irene, a beautiful and wealthy San Francisco artist, seeks Vincent out and takes him home with her. While she is out buying him new clothes with which he can escape safely out of the country, her friend Madge knocks on the door and calls out for Irene. Vincent recognizes her voice because she was coincidentally a friend of his wife's, and it was her false testimony which helped to convict Vincent. Vincent tells Madge to go away, and she, puzzled, obeys. Vincent finds a newspaper clipping in Irene's room stating that her father was executed for murdering his wife, who was Irene's stepmother. Irene subsequently explains her father was innocent. Later, Vincent visits his friend George before undergoing plastic surgery. Returning to George's for rest after the operation, Vincent finds the man dead. Weak, Vincent returns to Irene's apartment and hides, but he has been followed by Baker. Madge arrives and tries to convince Irene to hide her from Vincent; but Irene is not concerned. When Vincent's bandages come off, he leaves for a hotel insisting that Irene cannot be further involved in his life. Baker trails him and attempts blackmail; But Vincent fools the punk and Baker is accidentally killed. Vincent confronts Madge with his knowledge that she is responsible for murdering his wife and George. But Madge commits suicide rather than confess to the police. Vincent prepares to leave the country; but at the last moment he reconsiders and calls Irene. They agree to meet in Peru. Later, they dance together in a South American nightclub overlooking the ocean and plan a new life.

Dark Passage is an interesting film that carries its basic visual premise too far. The exclusive use of the first person point-of-view camera for the first half of the film is unusual but also somewhat unsuccessful at invoking the physical existence of a protagonist. The film is thirty minutes old before even a shadowed glimpse of Bogart's figure, as Vincent Parry, is seen; and it is a full sixty-two minutes before his "new" face appears on the screen. However, the subjective camera is an interesting device and more integral to this film's plot than that of *Lady In The Lake*, which used the

similar camera technique a year earlier. Thirty-two pages of production notes were originally appended to *Dark Passage's* script to tackle special problems such as achieving "natural" effects of the first person point-of-view shots of walking, sitting, and lying down. Suggestions were made to accommodate set construction and enhance camera effects, including a lens mask (not used in the final film) to simulate eyelids and lashes. The initial effect of this point-of-view device actually does involve the viewer emotionally and forces an identification with Vincent while he rolls down a hill and escapes. But the device diminishes in impact as it continues beyond its novelty value. Audience identification is also weakened by the fact that Vincent's voice and narration is so easily recognizable as Bogart's; therefore the viewer knows what Vincent looks like all along. A less-well-known actor or less identifiable voice might have been better suited to this visual premise. Some low-key lighting and San Francisco fog and rain add to the noir atmosphere created by the point-of-view camera; but this film is not fully immersed in the noir style. Vincent is an innocent man framed by a villainous "spiderwoman" type, stalked by a vulturous punk, and the police, whose net is close around him. However, unlike the central figure in many noir films, Vincent is not entangled in this net through his own weakness or stubbornness; all of the causality is external. The more characteristic noir figures generate much of their own misery through misconceptions or dogged persistence; and efforts of extrication only tangle them more hopelessly into dangerous circumstances. These external pressures are further mitigated in *Dark Passage* by Irene, who generously provides Vincent with the means to escape and with whom he is reunited at the end of the film. Vincent's union with the woman in the South American resort might seem both unearned and undeserved, because he was at least the catalyst, if not the cause, of the two semiaccidental deaths of Madge and Baker, and George's murder. It is more typical for the noir protagonist to suffer some less delightful consequences of fear, guilt, and legal retribution. In spite of the attempt to exploit noir stylistic devices, this film ultimately lacks much of the internal structure of human weakness and fatalism central to the complete film noir.

—E.M.