

**This book is
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Tarantino
screenplay**

Everything to Gain in Poorman's Mystery

by Paul McDonald
Macky Dunn's Got Nothing to Lose
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Fairdale, Kentucky native D.S. Poorman's first novel is not shy about pushing the envelope, particularly in its portrayal of the Bluegrass state.

Set in Louisville, *Macky Dunn's Got Nothing to Lose* has enough action, scandal, twists, and turns to keep the reader engrossed in a story of deceit, mystery, and renewal. There is a murder at the Brown Hotel, car chases through the Highlands and the Belvedere Parking Garage, Batman-like leaps through the Galt House Hotel's glass windows, outdoor sex along I-64, and a couple of cops so corrupt that they make the LAPD look like the Peace Corps.

Macky Dunn is a 22-year-old ex-con trying to go straight after a lifetime of foster homes, juvenile hall, and jail. He was taken in by a "strong, proud Irish woman" named Linda Dunn when he was 13. Linda gives young Macky her last name and a sense of identity, although he grows up angry and bigoted. Through it all, Linda remains steadfast in her belief that a wild animal like Macky can be tamed. After Macky spends four years in the Jefferson County Jail for his part in a cross-burning incident, Ms. Dunn's persistence finally begins to pay off.

Macky moves into a room in downtown Louisville and gets a job as a cook at the Brown Hotel. He settles into a routine of "work, sleep, whisky, women, and thought," as he painstakingly begins to chart a sense of direction for himself. All that changes one night when one of the African-American waiters at the Brown is killed,

and, with his fingerprints on the murder weapon and a rap sheet a mile long, Macky becomes the prime suspect.

Back in the familiar surroundings of the Jefferson County Jail, Macky fiercely maintains his innocence. After a few days, Rachel Walker, a mysterious heiress from Lexington, puts up his bail and confirms his alibi. Thanks to some expert detective work, Macky is cleared of all the charges, but Rachel is kidnapped, leaving behind a million dollars in cash that Macky manages to confiscate before her kidnapers track it down. Macky's determination to find her captors and who framed him—and why—becomes an all-consuming passion in his personal search for redemption.

The book is paced like a Quentin Tarantino screenplay, with its chapters, including "The Frame," "The Mystery," and "The Challenge," reading like episodic sequences reminiscent of "Reservoir Dogs" or "Jackie Brown." Like Tarantino, sex, violence, drug use, and corruption are not held back, but neither do they take the focus away from the

plot. Poorman's prose, mostly direct and energetic, frequently shifts into a poetic mode. Here's how he describes the culture of Louisville:

Louisville is a cool town busy trying to be North while a Southern rumble sounds in its belly ... when you break the barriers with luck and persistence, like irises in the thickets, you find beautiful people ... Incredible musicians with souls thick as the sounds they create. Painters with minds as delicate as their finest brush. Photographers, poets, dancers and those who make themselves into art ...

If anything could be said to be overindulgence, it might be Poorman's constant references to local landmarks and institutions. While these allusions can be entertaining, it simply isn't necessary after the book has been given a sense of place. But despite running the risk of distraction through detail, Poorman's first novel is a worthy achievement.