



Chicago Blues

Libby Fischer Hellmann (Editor/Contributor), Rick Kogan (Introduction), Stuart M. Kaminsky (Contributor), Kevin Guilfoile (Contributor), Jack Fredrickson (Contributor), Sara Paretsky (Contributor), Kris Nelscott (Contributor), J.A. Konrath (Contributor), more... Sean Chercover (Contributor), Max Allan Collins (Contributor), Michael A. Black (Contributor), Steven B. Mandel (Contributor), David J. Walker (Contributor), Michael Allen Dymmoch (Contributor), Sam Reaves (Contributor), D.C. Brod (Contributor), Mary V. Welk (Contributor), Sam Hill (Contributor), Marcus Sakey (Contributor), Ronald Levitsky (Contributor), Brian Pinkerton (Contributor), Barbara D'Amato (Contributor), Kristine Kathryn Rusch ...less

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Dark collection of crime stories from Chicago

Chicago Blues Details

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From Reader Review Chicago Blues for online ebook

Carl Brookins says

Chicago, like most large cities anywhere in the world, is really two or more cities. It exists in different times and sometimes in different universes, even while occupying the same real estate. Daytimes the people of the upper world are there, crowds of shoppers, traffic, wheelers and dealers, the thousands or millions who go busily about their daily lives in the hard sunlight, visible to almost everybody.

Then there's the other city, the one you may encounter at night after the sun departs along with the suited workers. This city is a little less crowded, except in the sometimes stifling bars or underground caverns. In this city you'll meet good cops trying to control the violence, and you may brush up against the others, those acquiring their reputations as bad and dangerous boys and girls. In the nighttime you can meet the scufflers, the dealers, the thugs and the killers.

There are other players in Chicago. They are the makers of music, of art, of story. And while they intersect with the rest of the night crawlers, it's often the horn players in the bars and night clubs who lend texture and rhythm to the boozy, bluesy night, that night thick with desire and trepidation, with humidity and icy winds. This city is sometimes violent in places where the sun never filters in, where dark denizens shun the scrutiny of the day. The urban canyons of Chicago are often dark enough all day long to sustain the underlife, and the river runs the wrong direction.

Intermingled with the busy daytime traders and the nighttime scufflers are the watchers, the storytellers who observe and remember and write it all down. They often go down the dangerous streets and trash-strewn alleys so you don't have to. You can read all about it and experience it at a safe distance, that frisson of danger, without really getting dirty.

If that's your thing, this is a book for you. If you want to have an up-close experience of the down and dirty blues of Chicago, this is a book you really want to read. Here, collected by astute and talented storytellers who drift through this urban scene, observing, recording, writing it down, are some of the best stories. Twenty one of them, collected and shaped in a single volume aptly named "Chicago Blues." Dark stories of dark deeds, crisply written, sometimes enlightening, mostly relating tales of unregenerate and occasionally ordinary crime and criminals. Here is the corrupt politician, the vengeful ER nurse, here is history and flashback, here is skin-crawling realism. Life and death in the big city.

I have a tenuous connection with Chicago of an earlier time, of Count Basie and the old Blue Note, of North Clark Street. I have connections with several of the authors represented in this excellent anthology. That said, if you are looking for the true blue essence of the canyons of urban Chicago noir, if you want a sample of the gritty, sticky pavement of crime, of individuals pushed beyond their limits, of the grasping, panting, unredemptive jazz and jive of big city noir, here's a collection that takes hold and grasps and satisfies until the final curtain. This one is a winner, a keeper. This is the blues.

carol. says

A collection of stories set in Chicago. Many stories center on 'blues' in the musical sense. In some cases, 'blues' means the police, for better or for worse. Very few of these stories involve PIs or police solving crimes. I haven't read many crime short stories, beyond the Matt Scudder collection and Encyclopedia

Brown, Boy Detective, but this wasn't what I was expecting. Less straightforward crime, many of these stories aim for a horror feel, focusing on the emotional trauma over logistical crime-solving details.

Stories:

Blue Note by Stuart M. Kaminsky. Card talent and son of a talented blues singer with a problem gets forced into a high-stakes card game. Great atmosphere surrounding the clubs and the game, believable set-up, solid emotional tone. One of my favorites.

O Death Where Is Thy Sting? by Kevin Guilfoile. A teacher has with a passion for collecting records is on the lookout for a pre-war, American blues record sees the Holy Grail in an elderly lady's collection. The only problem is that others are after it as well. Fabulous atmosphere, but really feels more like the tone is about the emotional horror. Great line: **"See twenty years ago almost every house had dozens and sometimes hundreds of obsolete vinyl records stacked up in basement rec rooms like fossils in layers of shale."**

Your Sweet Man Calvin is bringing his dad to his home, after he's granted a medical release from his prison sentence--he's dying of cancer. Calvin's got a lot of family baggage stemming from when his mama the blues singer ran off with a two-bit promoter. Nice emotional development.

Good Evenin', Blues by Jack Fredrickson. Jim's been cut loose from his job at the screw factory and goes into business with his brother-in-law running a bar called The Crossroads. Trouble is, it's a small space right under the El with no regular business. A guy name Pearly comes in offering to start an open-mike night for the blues, for a small cut. There's something about some of those performers... It's a good story, but really, I feel like the guys from *Supernatural* should be stopping by.

Publicity Stunts by Sara Paretsky. An anti-feminist author is seeking to hire V.I. Warshawski for protection while she's in town promoting her latest book. V.I. isn't interested: **"And now someone's threatening your life?" I tried to sound more interested than hopeful.**" It goes sour when she targets V.I. as part of a publicity campaign. Most traditional of the stories, the ending was completely predictable.

Guarding Lacey by Kris Nelscott. This was one of my favorites. A kid is navigating the challenges of school with his 'cousins,' including Lacey, who just hit junior high and is ready to go big. He decides to shadow Lacey and her new guy and his cousin Keith wants to help. Also one of my favorite stories-- interestingly told, intriguing story. I'm going to try more from Nelscott, who has a series centered around the child's adopted father, Smokey.

Overproof by JA Konrath. Lt. Jack Daniels, Homicide, is on the way home from shopping for a present for the boyfriend when he runs into a man sitting in the middle of traffic on Michigan Avenue. The situation quickly escalates, evolving into the traditional exchange of confessions. Not a particularly interesting story, I spent most of my time trying to figure out the gender identity of the narrator who appears to be female with a male name.

The Non Compos Mentis Blues by Sean Cherver. It begins with a surveillance report and then goes on to the confrontation between PI and the rich woman seeking extra services. When the FBI gets involved, the PI finds himself in hot water. **He seemed tense and it was the kind of tension that can be contagious.**" Solid noir feel. A little humor from the detective yanking the FBI chain.

Scrap by Max Allan Collins. 1930s period piece about a complicated situation with a childhood friend who is now heavily involved in the unions. **"I went into one of the rackets myself, after all--known in Chicago as the police department--and I figured Jake wouldn't hold that against me, either."** Confusing, emotionally distant piece, heavily reliant on historical knowledge.

Chasing the Blues by Michael A. Black. A rookie on the Chicago Police force vice squad gets a historical lesson from his preceptor. Solid feel. Gender dynamic and prostitution angle.

Blind Man Blues by Steve Mandel. Billy Call is still hung up on the death of an old friend and trying to gather evidence against her husband. His partner Abby thinks he's making a mistake and that nothing about his 'friend' was good for him. The writing is clunky and the crime fairly obvious. Still, basically satisfying.

A Weekend in the Country by David J. Walker. A Chicago cop is developing a 'catering' business on the side that involves a house on a deserted piece of land in Wisconsin. When something goes wrong, it takes some effort to clean it up. Unfortunately, I.A. isn't long in arriving. Twist ending. Emotionally dark with a lead worth hating.

A Shade of Blue by Michael Allen Dynmoch. A man who tied one on last night want to report the murder of a blues singer to the police. When the cop investigates, it turns out it is a Cold Case with a lot of twists. **bare walls and windows with shades at half mast, unmatched furniture, wastebasket overflowing with evidence that McDonald's and Taco Bell catered most of his meals."** More ghost/gotcha story.

The Test by Sam Reaves. Gino and Terry are made men in Casalegno's crew, but now his second is approaching them for support for a change of leadership. Gino and Terry have been friends forever. It gets complicated when Gino tries to give Terry information on the down-low. Vivid, complicated, a little hair-raising.

My Heroes Have Always Been Shortstops D.C. Brod. Abby, Cubs fan extraordinaire, works for a sports agent and finds she has to reconsiders shortstops when she meets Keith. Soon after he is signed to the Cubs, they start a relationship and things get complicated. **I'd just brought Ernie back from the cat painter, and I was beginning to think that I'd gone too far this time. The cat had not asked to be a Cubs fan. Still, I sensed that he was.**

Code Blue by Mary V. Welk. Two paramedics bring a man to the E.R. with chest pain. Turns out he's the brother of a Congressman and the perpetrator of a heinous crime. An ER nurse has her own idea of justice.

The Sin Eater by Sam Hill. Horror feel. Confusing and not particularly memorial. Not sure why it's included, except it is a multi-generational history.

No One by Marcus Sakey. A man remembers his relationship with Sara, a woman he met at DePaul University. When Sara starts spending time with classmate Mark, his jealousy grows. Again, horror-crime angle.

The Blue Line Ronald Levitsky. A man is offered a job by a famous Mexican artist. There's been death threats against his wife. The artist wants him to protect her at a dinner they are attending, but the P.I. has his suspicions. A solid story with a nice twist.

Lower Wacker Blues by Brian Pinkerton. Two childhood friends, stuck in the grown-up grind of 9 to 5, recreate their childhood game of 'Escape' in the abandoned urban landscape of Lower Wacker. Decent writing, unsurprising ending.

The Lower Wacker Hilton Four cops about to go on duty are standing around telling stories. Sent out to make a dent in shoplifting, they discover a dead transient in the Lower Wacker tunnels. Awkwardly written, 'surprise' ending with no actual clues.

Pete Nickeas says

Erin bought me this book. I'm usually not a fan of fiction. I read a lot of fiction when I was younger but find myself far more interested in fact these days.

This book, with its couple dozen or so short stories, was a nice break. I could read a story or two at a time, put the book away for a day or two, and come back to it without worrying that I may have forgotten something.

TCPils says

It's not always easy to review a book of short stories because there is usually an inconsistency in the quality of the work. Especially when there are multiple authors. But in the case of Chicago Blues, a collection of 21 stories compiled by Libby Fischer Hellmann, the quality is consistently excellent.

They all take place in Chicago and contain a diverse assortment of pretty unsavory characters including, corrupt cops, crooked politicians, gangsters, perverts and general crazies. You know, the kind of people you meet every day in the Windy City. (Well, I live in Chicago so I can get away with that kind of talk.) This is crime fiction at its best. Well done Ms. Hellmann.

J says

MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS.

Fischer Hellman authors 1 story in this anthology, which she also edited. I don't read a lot of short stories, but loved this book.

Such a variety of authors and treatments of stories that all have a tie either to Chicago and/or the musical genre of blues.

Loved reading about the "L", below Wacker Street, the blue-blood suburbs north of the city.

Also, a great range of eras and characters -- from '80s feminist urban P.I. to lower-level Mafia street thugs (in '70s?) to a young child of a female blues singer who's unfaithful to her husband ('50s? '60s?) (wrote this review fr. memory, as I returned the library book a while ago)

Melissa says

An anthology of somewhat dark blues stories based in Chicago...I loved it and highly recommend.

Sarah says

I am usually not that crazy about short stories, but I did enjoy these. Twp perfect elements....Chicago and

crime - can't go wrong with that!

Kathleen says

I always keep a book of short stories on my nightstand so that when I finish one book I don't have to jump into another one right away. This was a good anthology of Chicago stories that refreshed my memory about many parts of the city. Like any themed compilation, some of the stories were better than others. Overall it was a worthwhile read.

Mary says

Thought I'd just read a few stories at a time, in between other books. Ha! Each story has its own flavor and twists that it was like eating potato chips. The "Blue" part of the book related to the blues music scene in Chicago, or the Windy City police force. With stories set in different decades, and with the variety of author's voices, this was a fun read.

Lisa Zink says

meh.... Perhaps the hardest part about short stories is their length. I liked most of the stories but would have preferred them in a longer format. Definitely I have a few new authors to add to my reading list.

Barbara Nutting says

If you're into Chicago and enjoy short stories you'll like this compilation. Some were 5 star and some 2 star, thus a 3star overall. Having lived in the Chicago suburbs for 20 years I found these "blue" tales a fun revisit to the city.

Rose Blum says

I'm not a fan of crime fiction... just read this because I'm a fan of Chicago... the Bears, the Blackhawks, the Blues, the Bulls, & my husband who grew up there :)

Jessica says

Mystery and the Second City - what could be better?

Kris says

This was a great collection of crime stories with the one common ingredient being the use of the theme “blue”. Sometimes it refers directly to the musical connection that Chicago has with the blues and blues men and women who have and still do populate Chicago.

Other times, the blue refers to the Chicago police and the thin blue line, sometimes very thin indeed, that separates the good guys and the bad guys. In other stories, the great rattling El train that races all around the city is the focus – particularly, the Blue Line.

The diversity in the stories also extends to the geography of Chicago as a city. The stories range from Rogers Park in the North, all the way down Cottage Grove in the South and over to Wicker Park and beyond in the West. It includes the suburbs: Lake Forest, Hinsdale and Rosemont all make an appearance. This makes it one of the books that represents the city so well for me.

The characters are Mexican, Polish, Irish, German, African American, Jewish and Indian. The melting pot is shown in all its color and cultural composition. This too is unusual for most current stories about Chicago.

I had a few favorites in this anthology. “O Death Where Is Thy Sting?” is a great story about a long lost blues recording. “Your Sweet Man” is a very complicated family love story. “Guarding Lacey” is an important story about girls and human trafficking. “The Sin Eater” is a great Irish Catholic tale set in the western part of the city, Back of the Yards - a hard scrabble neighborhood. My other favorite is set under the El in my old neighborhood of Uptown, on Lawrence avenue in a bar at the Crossroads.

I could go on and on about how much I enjoyed this book. But rather than that, I really recommend you grab it. One rider, this has a weird look on the e-reader. The text download's in large, unevenly spaced paragraphs. I treated it like jazz and accepted it for what it is, but I would love to see the editors/publishers fix this for future readers.
