



The Big Town

Monte Schulz

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A *Great Gatsby* for the 21st century.

A novel of the Jazz Age, *The Big Town* is the story of a failed businessman whose dreams of prosperity hinge on the secret proposition of a millionaire industrialist and a dangerous relationship he finds with a poor orphan girl chasing love in the great American metropolis.

Harry Hennesey's hopes of success, both in his household and the world, have driven him to sell his home in an Illinois small town and take his chances in the big city. He rents a room in a run-down hotel. He deals in wholesale items scavenged from yard sales and close-outs. One night at a movie theater downtown, he meets a teenage flapper named Pearl who latches onto him and won't let go. For several years now, Harry has threatened his marriage and self-esteem with innumerable infidelities. Now he finds himself falling in love with a girl less than half his age. But that's not all.

Charles A. Follette, chairman of the board of the American Prometheus Corporation, comes to him with a slick proposition: find Follette's missing niece, and the road to riches shall be his. Soon, though, Harry discovers a darker secret to the identity of the missing niece and what lies behind the urgency for her detection. It's this revelation that leads him to a closer examination of what it means to the life he's known since the birth of his children and that life he believes awaits him if he can only reach the top of the ladder.

Harry's story in *The Big Town* is set against a fantastic backdrop of an archetypal 1920s American big city. We see speakeasies, sanitariums, skyscrapers, and a glittering Gatsby-like party high atop the metropolis. Lost in his own moral confusions, we watch Harry try to reform his young lover and uncover the secret of her own past in a small canal town miles beyond a city where gangsters murder ordinary citizens and everyone seems to have a get-rich scheme as the Roaring '20s come to a thunderous close. *The Big Town* evokes a lost era through language and flamboyant characters reminiscent of Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Ring Lardner, etc. Yet it's also eerily relevant to our own time with its study of the role of business, crime, morality, and love in our lives.

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