

Rex Sweeny

Two Worlds

In the unrefurbished back room of the Vine,
the bar where Begbie glassed someone for nothing,

I encountered one of Scotland's movers and shakers,
a chiselled, commanding bloke of heroic presence

who in the legitimate sphere could have risen high
and in the realm of crime was clearly a ruler,

who thought I'd insulted his girlfriend. That was a most
alarming fifteen minutes, listening to what

precisely could be done to me if he ordered it
and how it lay in his power to make me vanish.

He wasn't easily won. But I held my nerve
and in an unyielding respectful businesslike way

did what I do, until his arm slipped around me
and he started kissing my cheek, and his free fist

was punching the air as he shouted 'Real in Leith!'
And I didn't even suffer delayed shock.

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Yet in the Athenaeum, Decimus Burton's
statue-encrusted, book-saturated masterpiece

of a club for the intellectual aristocracy,
I shuddered from sheer fear as I poured out tea.