



## Sample Pages from **Dead Men Don't Do Radio Plays**

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# DEAD MEN DON'T DO RADIO PLAYS

DEAD MEN DON'T CARRY HANDBAGS  
&  
DEAD MEN DON'T JAYWALK  
BY  
*Allison Williams*



*Dead Men Don't Do Radio Plays*  
*Dead Men Don't Carry Handbags*  
*Dead Men Don't Jaywalk*  
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Printed in the USA

# Dead Men Don't Do Radio Plays

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by Allison Williams

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*Dead Men Don't Carry Handbags* and *Dead Men Don't Jaywalk* were first presented in the All Ears Theatre series from Michigan Public Radio WMUK, Kalamazoo.

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## Character Note

Steve uses two voices. One is the deep, suave voice of a noir private detective. The other is his own 'natural' voice, which is higher-pitched and uncertain. Many of the voice changes are marked in the script, but feel free to play around with when Steve switches voices. Usually, if a line has a wacky metaphor in it, like "a tricky shuffle step in a tap-dance of crime," that's the noir voice. Lines with uh's, um's, and lots of hesitations marked by dashes are Steve's own voice.

## Production Notes

It's perfectly fine to do this show with scripts in hand. If so, it's easiest to use photocopies on single sheets of paper that are not attached to each other. Actors drop pages to the ground as they finish each one, to avoid the sound of paper rattling in the microphone.

## Music Notes

Music cues are as follows:

**Music up and under:** the music fades in, becomes prominent, and then fades down but plays under the dialogue.

**Music sting and out:** there's a musical accent and the music fades out quickly.

**Music sting:** just a musical accent (similar to “dun-dun-dah” when a villain says something horrible is going to happen). Used to shift the mood or change scenes.

**Music up and out:** the music fades up, becomes prominent, and ends strong, like you might hear at the “The End” moment of an old movie. The very end of “Singing in the Rain” has a great example of this, and clips of that can be found online. It's the moment when Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds kiss in front of the billboard.

**Music swells and fades:** the music has been playing, but it gets louder, hopefully at a meaningful-sounding moment, and then fades back down under the dialogue.

**Music fades out:** a normal fade-out to silence.

**Noir Transition Music:** music to convey a change of scene or location.

# Dead Men Don't Carry Handbags

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## Cast of Characters

9M 5W (Doubling Possible)

**STEVE POWELL**  
**BARBARA MITCHELL**  
**MITCHELL MARKHAM**  
**SERGEANT ANDERSON**  
**OFFICER 1 (PETE)**  
**OFFICER 2 (MICKEY)**  
**SECRETARY**  
**SALLY**  
**JUDGE**  
**BLONDE**  
**ANNOUNCER**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**PENNY**  
**DRUGGIST**

## Recommended Doubling

5M 2W

**STEVE**  
**MITCHELL**  
**BARBARA/SALLY**  
**PENNY/BLONDE/SECRETARY**  
**SGT. ANDERSON/DIRECTOR**  
**OFFICER 1/DRUGGIST/ANNOUNCER**  
**OFFICER 2/JUDGE**



*When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness, and the lines are heard as if the audience is listening to an actual radio show. Fog would be appropriate, or a gobo of a window shade, or a streetlamp set piece—anything that suggests 1930's noir. Ideally, the audience doesn't know it's a "show-within-a-show" until the Director's first line and the lights coming up.*

**SOUND: MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

**SOUND: MATCH STRIKES AND LIGHTS**

STEVE: I put my feet up on the desk and lit a Havana special. As the smoke curled gently towards the ceiling, I felt like the cat that opened a canary shop. I'd solved another unsolvable case, and the city fathers were in my debt once again. But something was missing...

**SOUND: DOOR OPENS**

**SOUND: MUSIC STING AND OUT**

STEVE: It was the payment of my usual fee.

BLONDE: Mr. Grayson, how can I ever thank you?

STEVE: Don't mention it, toots. All in a day's work.

BLONDE: But surely—you've done so much for me—the least I can do—

STEVE: The blonde had plenty of this and that and these and those, and she wasn't averse to sharing some of the wealth.

BLONDE: You've saved my life, Mr. Grayson. I think you're wonderful!

STEVE: You're not so bad, yourself, kid.

**SOUND: MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

*Lights fade up through ANNOUNCER's speech, revealing the recording studio of a radio show. At one side is a sound effects table with the sound effects artists. Facing the audience and center, a row of 4 or 5 microphones. STEVE is at the center microphone, with the microphone to his left the primary female microphone. When actors are not in a scene, they sit on a bench or chairs at the side or back of the stage area. The actors out of scene can read script pages, watch the action, whatever fits.*



*Note that the “real” action, too, is a radio show. So PENNY, the DIRECTOR, etc, still speak into microphones and face front while doing their parts.*

*See the Appendix for suggested sound effects and recommended techniques.*

ANNOUNCER: Tune in next week for another exciting episode of *Frank Grayson, Private Eye*, brought to you by Sani-Sweep! It's not just a broom, it's a Sani-Sweep! Coming up next time, Frank Grayson lands in hot water when he tries to help a beautiful brunette—

STEVE: She needed a “warning—dangerous curves” sign, but they were already putting out flashing lights for this jane.

ANNOUNCER: Next week on “Frank Grayson, Private Eye!”

### **SOUND: MUSIC UP AND OUT**

DIRECTOR: And we're out! Thanks, everyone, see you next week. Got a minute, Powell?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) Anything for you, doll.

DIRECTOR: Show's over, Steve.

STEVE: (*own voice*) Can't a guy, uh, kid around a little bit?

DIRECTOR: Steve, we have a problem.

STEVE: It's just a little, uh, cold—I, uh, I had the window open last night, but, uh, it'll be gone next week. I think it actually, uh, helps, you know, that raspy, uh, man-of-the-world sound—

DIRECTOR: Your performance was fine, Steve. You're very—consistent. You're always very consistent. The problem is, we're about to lose our sponsor.

STEVE: Sani-Sweep?

DIRECTOR: They say we're not “appealing to the common housewife.” To the users of their products. They aren't selling enough.

STEVE: Uh, maybe they shouldn't have opened a broom factory after the invention of the Hoover!

DIRECTOR: They want Frank Grayson to be more of a family man. More like—

STEVE: Like the kind of guy with a Sani-Sweep in his closet?

DIRECTOR: Hey, that's an idea—the brunette enters, you're tidying up the office and—

STEVE: Are you kidding me?

DIRECTOR: I know it's a stretch, Steve, but if Sani-Sweep pulls out, we've got no show. No show, no jobs—and radio's drying up as it is. I'd like to hang on a little longer. Say, how come you never got into movies?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I'd gotten into radio when I was young and handsome, and by the time I realized radio was on the out, I wasn't what Hollywood was looking for anymore. (*STEVE's voice*) I'm, uh, not so good with, uh, auditions. I, uh, I—

### **SOUND: FOOTSTEPS RUSHING UP**

PENNY: Excuse me, Mr. Powell?

STEVE: (*own voice*) Call me, uh, Steve.

PENNY: Gosh, thanks, Mr.—Steve! I'm Penny from Publicity.

STEVE: She'd been behind the door when they were passing out looks, but her smile lit up the whole room.

PENNY: Who's that, Mr. Steve?

STEVE: Oh—uh, how can I help you, Penny?

PENNY: I'm writing the press release for next week's episode, and I'd like to get a quote from you to liven it up. You know, for some color.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) The only color I could really add was the black hue of impending cancellation, or the gray wash of an endless rounds of auditions, hearing “you're too old, Powell” a hundred times while sinking a little deeper every day into the pit of—

PENNY: Steve? Mr. Powell?

STEVE: (*own voice*) What?

PENNY: Um...who are you talking to?

STEVE: I, uh, have a bad habit of narrating my own story.

PENNY: What?

STEVE: Sure, I'll, um, give you some color. (*noir voice*) I'm thrilled to be part of the seventy-first exciting episode of *Frank Grayson, Private Eye*. Every week brings a fresh new story, boy, I can't wait to hear

what those writers have dreamed up this time! My director, Bob Morris, is among the best in the business. How he finds a new beautiful guest star each week is beyond me, he must have a magic mirror that shows him—

PENNY: I think I've got enough. Thanks—Steve.

STEVE: (*own voice*) D-Don't mention it. (*calling*) Ah, good night, everyone!

VOICES: 'Night, Steve! Goodnight, Mr. Powell! (*etc*)

## **SOUND: DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES**

*From here, STEVE and the play director can choose which voice goes where, but some tricky shifts are also marked.*

## **SOUND: FOOTSTEPS OUTSIDE**

STEVE: Sani-Sweep was on my mind. How could a man with a broom in his closet be a suave private dick with a cigar in one hand and a babe in the other? And what was I going to do if they cancelled the series? When little Stevie Palowski came to Hollywood, he thought the world was going to be his mollusk. But Steve Powell found out it takes a piece of garbage and a lot of irritation before you get a pearl.

## **SOUND: TWO GUNSHOTS**

STEVE: When the shots rang out, I had just one thing on my mind. How the heck to work some cleaning products into the next episode?

## **SOUND: RUNNING FEMALE FOOTSTEPS TOWARDS STEVE**

## **SOUND: BARBARA COLLIDES WITH STEVE**

STEVE: Hey!

## **SOUND: BARBARA FALLS DOWN**

BARBARA: Ow!

STEVE: Her auburn hair glowed like a fire on a cold winter's night, and the rest of her would keep a man toasty all over.

BARBARA: Who are you talking to?

STEVE: Let me, uh, help you up—you must have been p-pretty scared by those shots.

BARBARA: Shots! I wasn't—I mean, yes, I was pretty scared.  
Terrified—that's why I'm running—I want to call the police, so they can—

STEVE: Did you, uh, see what happened?

BARBARA: No! I mean, I was waiting for a streetcar, and then I heard two shots from the alley, and I just panicked and ran...into you.

STEVE: There's an all-night d-drugstore a half-block that way. Why don't you, uh, go call the police, and I'll, uh, go see if anyone's hurt.

BARBARA: Do you think it's safe?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) It didn't matter if it was safe or not—sometimes, a private eye has to take a few risks to do the right thing.

BARBARA: What?

STEVE: (*own voice*) Nothing. I'm sure it's safe by now—anyone shooting must have run away—they'll know someone must be, uh, calling the police. Go sit in the drugstore—I'll, I'll meet you there in a few minutes.

BARBARA: The shots came from...they came from the alley in the middle of the next block. Do you think I'll have to be a witness?

STEVE: Probably. But you've got, well, nothing to worry about—you haven't done anything wrong, have you?

### **SOUND: SIRENS**

STEVE: Sounds like somebody beat you to the punch. Why don't you go, ah, sit in that drugstore, and I'll tell the police—

BARBARA: Please—I can't talk to the police!

STEVE: It won't be that bad—

BARBARA: I'm getting married next month. To Roy Van Allen.

STEVE: The city council man? They say he's going to be the next mayor!

BARBARA: I can't afford to be mixed up in anything that might be scandalous.

STEVE: Well, surely, just telling the police what you saw—

BARBARA: But I'd have to say I was alone at night in this neighborhood, and—

STEVE: I can see how that, well, wouldn't look good.

BARBARA: Maybe you could help me.

STEVE: I'd be happy to sit with you, while you talk to the police—

BARBARA: No, I mean, maybe I wouldn't have to give evidence at all. You were walking by here—you heard the shots. I didn't see anything, I only heard two shots while I was waiting for the streetcar. What good will it do the police to get the same story twice?

STEVE: There was something faulty in her logic, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

BARBARA: (*rushing on*) So you see, you wouldn't have to say you'd met me, just tell about hearing the shots, and then they know everything there is to know.

STEVE: I guess that wouldn't hurt.

BARBARA: And I'll be—I'll be right over there in the drugstore, and if they do need me, you can just bring them over there.

STEVE: OK. You, uh, go get cleaned up and settled down.

BARBARA: Thank you! You're just wonderful!

### **SOUND: KISS**

STEVE: Her lips were warm, but her hands were as cold as a fresh martini. I headed for the scene of the crime.

### **SOUND: SIRENS, CRIME SCENE ACTIVITY**

SGT. ANDERSON: Looks like our bird took one bullet smack in the face...but where's the other one?

OFFICER 2: Dunno, Sergeant. Maybe it went into one of these walls?

SGT. ANDERSON: Naw, they're all brick—would've glanced off. Keep searching the ground, boys!

OFFICER 1: Something's funny here, Sarge!

STEVE: (*noir voice*) The dead man looked like a tough customer. As the cop rolled the body over, his jacket fell open—I didn't know where the gun was, but if the empty holster was any evidence, this corpse had been a shoot-first-negotiate-later kind of guy.

SGT. ANDERSON: Well, I'll be damned!

OFFICER 1: Do ya think it's his?

STEVE: One thing was certain—this wasn't a guy who'd carry a handbag.

OFFICER 1: Hey, write this down, Sarge—victim appears to be clutching a mid-size white leather handbag. Chain strap of said bag wrapped around victim's left arm, handbag held in left hand. Hey, Mickey! Get a snap of this before I move anything!

### **SOUND: FLASHBULB POPS SEVERAL TIMES**

OFFICER 1: Contents of handbag include one lipstick, one change purse, one compact, gold, with bullet hole right through the center, and one roll of bills, elastic band, and a bullet hole going in but not coming out. Sarge, I found your second shot! Looks like a thirty-eight caliber!

STEVE: The scene was surreal—the white light of the flashbulbs exploding in the dim recesses of the alley, like ideas popping into the mind of an imbecile.

SGT. ANDERSON: Hey, who you calling an imbecile?

STEVE: No-one, officer, just talking to my—

SGT. ANDERSON: And whatcha hanging around a crime scene for?

STEVE: I'm a, a, witness.

SGT. ANDERSON: What'd ya see?

STEVE: Well, I didn't, uh, see anything, but I heard two shots and—

SGT. ANDERSON: Bug off, then—we got plenty a' people heard two shots.

OFFICER 1: Purse contents also include a card case, cards inside bearing the name of Barbara Mitchell—say, maybe this guy tried to mug some dame and she shot him?

### **SOUND: HURRIED FOOTSTEPS OF TWO PEOPLE**

OFFICER 2: Sarge! I think we got a perp!

SGT. ANDERSON: That little guy?

STEVE: He had a point. The officer was wasting his handcuffs on a bum from the wrong side of the lunch counter—the outside. This walking ragbag didn't have a dime, let alone the guts to shoot a man in the face. But the egg was on my face—over hard.

OFFICER 2: I found him on the corner—that is, he found me.

MITCHELL: I want to confess.

SGT. ANDERSON: You fell for that, Jackson? Come on—this hobo wants three squares and a warm night in the hoosegow. Wastin' our time.

OFFICER 2: He had a gun, Sarge.

SGT. ANDERSON: What?

OFFICER 2: A thirty-eight. Freshly fired, two empty cartridges.

SGT. ANDERSON: You gotta be kidding me! What's your name, little man?

MITCHELL: Mitchell Markham. (*softly*) And I want to confess.

SGT. ANDERSON: Confess away, buddy. This'll be the fastest crime-to-conviction in the history of the twenty-sixth precinct.

MITCHELL: I was sleeping in the alley. That man came into the alley. I came up behind him and grabbed his gun and shot him. I thought he might have some money on him, so I took his wallet.

OFFICER 2: I got the wallet off him, Sarge. ID for James Deland. Which makes the dearly departed "Slippery Jim" Deland—that guy we busted for extortion a few months back?

SGT. ANDERSON: That's the revolving door of justice for ya. So, Mitchell Markham, is this your handbag?

MITCHELL: That's—that's why I could grab the gun, because he was looking through the handbag—he must have robbed someone before coming into the alley.

OFFICER 1: So why'd you grab his wallet and not the handbag?

MITCHELL: He—he fell on top of the handbag, and I didn't want to roll the body over. I—I just grabbed what I could reach and ran.

OFFICER 1: I dunno, Sarge, this doesn't add up.

SGT. ANDERSON: We got a confession from a guy carrying the murder weapon a block from the crime scene. I got four. Jackson, do you got four?

OFFICER 2: I got four, Sarge.

SGT. ANDERSON: So what does two and two make in your book, Pete?

OFFICER 1: Four, I guess.

SGT. ANDERSON: All right, then. Pete, you and Mickey stay here and finish up—I'll radio the boys at the morgue. Jackson, put your hobo in the back seat and let's get back to the station.

STEVE: Something didn't add up. I was putting two and two together and getting five and a half. Or maybe even six. I headed for the all-night drugstore. Maybe the dame would have the missing numbers. I had a vague idea that maybe she'd be calming down over a strawberry phosphate, or leafing through some magazines. But the only title on the shelf was "Sucker," and I felt like the dregs at the bottom of the glass.

### **SOUND: DRUGSTORE DOOR OPENS**

STEVE: (*to druggist*) Say, did you see a redhead, about five-six, plenty of swerves and curves?

DRUGGIST: No-one's been in since eight o'clock, sir. I'm starting to wonder if being open all night's worth the trouble.

STEVE: Thanks, Pops.

### **SOUND: DRUGSTORE DOOR OPENS**

STEVE: The question now was, who was that unmasked woman? I solved an equation involving a handbag—and came up with an answer I didn't like.

### **SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC**

### **SOUND: MORNING NOISES**

STEVE: They say curiosity killed the cat—but I knew better. Curiosity gave the cat a pair of cement overshoes and a nice place on the water to spend his vacation. So I don't know why I didn't let it go—maybe it was the soft voice Mitchell Markham had confessed in, or the cop's doubts. Or maybe I just wanted to find the redhead before I took out a permanent subscription to "Fall Guy" quarterly.

### **SOUND: FOOTSTEPS ON STAIRS**

STEVE: Whatever it was, it was making me walk up the steps of the twenty-sixth precinct like a lamb to the swimming pool. They can't go in the water, y'know—all that wool makes them too heavy to swim.

SECRETARY: Can I help you?

STEVE: May I—uh, I'd like to—well, I'd like to see Mr. Mitchell Markham? Brought in last night?



SECRETARY: Are you his lawyer or a family member?

STEVE: Well, no, but—

SECRETARY: I'm sorry sir, no visitors but lawyers and family members.

STEVE: The set of her mouth was tighter than a Wallenda's highwire.  
This cute little trick kept the keys to the kingdom, and I was  
locked out.

SECRETARY: Wallenda? We don't have any prisoners named Wallenda.

STEVE: Just a habit—don't mind me.

SECRETARY: Wait a minute—I know that voice! You're Steve Powell!  
Golly, I listen to your show every Wednesday night!

STEVE: Thank you, I, uh—

SECRETARY: I won't even accept a date on Wednesdays—I can't bear  
to miss a week!

STEVE: That's very, uh—

SECRETARY: My favorite episode is the one where you deciphered  
the coded message in the telegram, and you go to the night-club  
dressing room, where the diabolically clever blonde flies at you  
like a cat, and you take her in your arms, and say—

STEVE & SEC: Those strong-arm tactics might keep a man away from  
you, baby, but I'd rather get close.

SECRETARY: That made cold shivers run down my spine!

STEVE: Episode thirty-six. One of the, uh, all-time greats.

SECRETARY: (*confidentially*) It's supposed to be against the rules, but  
I'm sure you wouldn't want to see someone unless it was very  
important. Is it private investigator business?

STEVE: I'm not really a private eye, that is—

SECRETARY: But you have to do research for your stories, right?

STEVE: I don't actually write them, I just—

SECRETARY: Will you please sign my autograph book? I always carry it  
just in case. Just put "I'd rather get close." Oh, and your name.

STEVE: Oh, uh, there you go.

SECRETARY: Wow! Wait'll I show the girls in the typing pool!

STEVE: (*noir voice*) You're one special lady—

SECRETARY: (*over him*) Just go along in there, and if anybody asks, I'll say you're the prisoner's brother.

### **SOUND: FOOTSTEPS IN CORRIDOR**

STEVE: I could tell she was trying not to show her true feelings for me. But I didn't have time to open up the candy box and look for chocolate hearts—I had a job to do. (*own voice*) Or, at least, some things I wanted to find out.

### **SOUND: CHAIRS SCRAPING**

STEVE: Mr. Markham? I'm, uh, Steve Powell.

MITCHELL: Do I know you?

STEVE: No, but I'm here to...here to help you.

MITCHELL: I don't want any help. I shot that man and I'm going to jail for it.

STEVE: You seem pretty, well, pretty casual about it.

MITCHELL: I'm going to take my medicine.

STEVE: Isn't it Barbara Mitchell's medicine?

MITCHELL: Barbara!—how do you know about Barbara?

STEVE: It's her handbag.

MITCHELL: Do you think they'll connect her with—will she be dragged into this?

STEVE: Depends on how much your, uh, story stands up.

MITCHELL: What's wrong with my story?

STEVE: It's not what's wrong with the story—it's what's wrong with, uh, you. You look like a fellow who's had some bad luck, not a killer.

MITCHELL: But I killed him, I pulled the trigger.

STEVE: S-sure you did.

MITCHELL: They have to believe me—she can't be—you have to keep Barbara out of this!

STEVE: Why don't you tell me the whole story? Maybe I can, well, help.

MITCHELL: Twenty years ago, I was in love—she was the daughter of a prominent businessman in Los Angeles.

**SOUND: MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

MITCHELL: Her father was away on a business trip, and she came into the store where I sold shoes. She was a six-double-A... We spent every minute with each other. She took me boating, riding—all the things her father could give her, and she shared them with me. I took all my savings, and bought her a ring with a diamond chip in it. You could just make out the sparkle if you held it up to the light. I knew it wasn't enough. When her father came home from New York, I asked to speak with him. He threw me out on my ear, said I'd never be good enough for his little girl. Didn't even let me say goodbye. But I did see her one last time.

**SOUND: MUSIC SWELLS AND FADES**

SALLY: Mitchell—I can't believe it's been almost a year—it seems like yesterday.

**SOUND: MUSIC FADES OUT**

MITCHELL: Sally—is there any hope?

SALLY: Daddy would never let me...I can't go against him—I'm all he has since Mother died.

MITCHELL: Sally, will you take this?

SALLY: A ring? But, Mitchell—

MITCHELL: Sally, there's no-one else I could ever give it to.

SALLY: Mitchell, Daddy's in New York—will you come and see me tonight?

MITCHELL: A few months later, her father sent her away to visit relatives back East. She came home with an “orphaned niece” that she and father were taking in. Sally must have put her foot down—she couldn't name the baby Barbara Markham, but she held out for Barbara Mitchell.

STEVE: How did you—

MITCHELL: It hurt me every day that I couldn't see my little girl. Then Sally died of influenza, and I didn't even see her in the society pages any more. I had to get away—I spent years riding the rails, living as a hobo, begging for handouts. Last year, I finally straightened up and came back to Los Angeles. I couldn't get much

work—mostly odd jobs—but I spent every spare minute looking for Barbara.

STEVE: Does she know you've, well, found her?

MITCHELL: She's an heiress—she's engaged to Roy Van Allen. It would ruin her if people knew she was the illegitimate daughter of a hobo.

STEVE: Mr. Markham—Mitchell—what really happened last night?

MITCHELL: I've been keeping an eye on Barbara for a few months now. This man Deland saw me following Barbara one day and tailed me to a restaurant where she was eating. He offered to buy me dinner, and after a few drinks, I told him the whole story. Deland started blackmailing Barbara—he told her he'd tell Roy's family she was illegitimate if she didn't pay up. All she knows about me is what that rat Deland has said. She must think I'm lower than dirt. But I couldn't stop following her—I had to see my little girl. Last night, I saw her go into the alley to meet Jim Deland. I heard the shots—she must have... I saw her throw the gun into the bushes, so I picked it up and made sure mine were the only fingerprints on the handle. Look, Mr. Powell, for twenty years, I haven't been able to do anything for my little girl. I'm going to make up for that now.

STEVE: But you can't—there must be some explanation—

MITCHELL: I'm sure there is. And after Barbara's been dragged through the mud, it won't make one bit of difference. Officer! I'd like to go back to my cell.

### **SOUND: MUSIC STING**

STEVE: It wasn't right to let a man rot in the icebox for a crime he didn't commit. Even I could see that the payment was bigger than the debt he felt he'd racked up. But I didn't see Barbara as a killer, either—sure, she was a redhead, but a spitfire, not a machine gun. There had to be another explanation. Getting Barbara's story was the next step. A tricky shuffle step in a tap-dance of crime.

### **SOUND: KNOCKING ON DOOR**

### **SOUND: DOOR OPENS**

BARBARA: I'm sorry, I don't buy from door-to-door—you!

STEVE: (*noir voice*) You seem surprised to see me, Miss Mitchell.

BARBARA: How did you—I'm sorry, I'm very busy right now, and I'm afraid I can't ask you in.

STEVE: Would you rather discuss last night right here in the hall?

BARBARA: Keep your voice down!

STEVE: It's an easy question, toots—yes or no?

BARBARA: You'd better come in. But I only have a few minutes—I'm expecting my fiancé.

**SOUND: DOOR CLOSSES**

STEVE: (*own voice*) I sent up silent thanks to the man who wrote episode fifty-three—his silver tongue had gotten me into the tiger's den.

BARBARA: Will you keep your voice down!

STEVE: (*whispers*) I hoped I'd escape without getting mauled.

BARBARA: Wait a minute—that voice—aren't you Steve Powell?

STEVE: I was, uh, walking home from the studio when you ran into me.

BARBARA: Saved by a celebrity! I love your show, Mr. Powell—the way you capture the cold, gritty feeling of the city streets. Thank you so much for your help last night. Was—was everything all right with the police? Did you—did you need to mention me?

STEVE: They had enough witnesses to the two shots.

BARBARA: Oh! Did anyone...see anything?

STEVE: No, they only heard the shots.

BARBARA: Thank goodness. Uh, would you like a cup of coffee?

STEVE: Thanks—uh, black is fine.

**SOUND: COFFEE CUPS SET ON TABLE**

STEVE: Funny enough, they got the, uh, murderer right away. A man walked right up to the cops and, uh, confessed.

BARBARA: What?

STEVE: Yep—well, at first they thought he just wanted a warm night in jail, since he was, well, down on his luck, but it turned out he had the, uh, murder weapon and everything.

BARBARA: How...how strange.

STEVE: You haven't—you haven't asked if they found your handbag.

**SOUND: BARBARA'S CUP CLATTERS ON SAUCER**

BARBARA: Handbag?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) White leather mid-size bag, chain strap, containing lipstick, gold compact, and a roll of bills with a bullet through it?

BARBARA: I don't know what you're...

STEVE: You shouldn't take visiting cards with you when you're paying off blackmail.

BARBARA: You mean my name...?

STEVE: Unless there's two Barbara Mitchells with something to hide in this town.

BARBARA: What do you want? Money? I'll pay you the same—

STEVE: Wouldn't it have to be more for murder?

BARBARA: Damn you!

STEVE: (*own voice*) Barbara, I, uh, I'm not here to blackmail you.

BARBARA: Then why?

STEVE: I don't think you're a killer, Barbara. But I don't think the man they arrested is, either. I'd...I'd like to know the real story.

BARBARA: I was waiting for a streetcar and I heard two shots.

STEVE: There's a man in jail right now with no family and no home. I don't know why he confessed, but I know he didn't shoot Slippery Jim Deland.

BARBARA: I was waiting for a streetcar and I heard two shots and I'm not changing my story so that you can pin a murder on me!

STEVE: And your, uh, handbag?

BARBARA: Obviously, this Deland or whatever his name is mugged me earlier in the evening and took my purse!

STEVE: Seems strange you didn't report it.

BARBARA: Mr. Powell, I am not going to sit in my home and be insulted by some third-rate radio actor. I'm afraid I must ask you to leave.

STEVE: I thought you liked my show! The cold, gritty feeling of the city streets?

BARBARA: More like cold mush without cream and sugar. Mr. Powell are you done playing private detective or do I have to call my fiancé to throw you out?

**SOUND: DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING**

BARBARA: (*on other side of door*) Hello, police? I'd like to report a robbery last night...

STEVE: Clearly, I'd rubbed this kitten the wrong way. But I didn't have time to smooth her fur—Mitchell Markham's arraignment was in half an hour.

**SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC****SOUND: JUDGE'S GAVEL BANGS**

JUDGE: Court is now in session for the arraignment of Mitchell Markham on the charge of murder in the first degree.

STEVE: First degree? Then Markham wasn't just going to rot—he was going to the gas chamber!

JUDGE: How do you plead, Mr. Markham?

MITCHELL: Guilty, your honor.

JUDGE: Very well. The court finds you—

STEVE: Wait! Um, er, ah, Your Honor?

**SOUND: GAVEL BANGS**

JUDGE: Order! Who is this?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) The judge wasn't taking any guff from a two-bit private eye, but maybe he'd listen to a third-rate radio actor. (*to JUDGE, own voice*) I'm Steve Powell, Your Honor, and I have—I have some important information about this, uh, crime.

JUDGE: We have a confessed murderer found near the scene with the weapon, Mr. Powell.

STEVE: I know—I mean, I was there. But Your Honor—look at this man! Does he look like a murderer to you?

JUDGE: My experience has taught me that murderers come in many shapes and sizes. I'm afraid you're out of order, Mr. Powell, and I must ask you to sit down.

STEVE: But—but what about the handbag? Barbara Mitchell's handbag?

JUDGE: I'm sure the police have a satisfactory explanation for it. Sergeant Anderson?

SGT. ANDERSON: Your Honor, Miss Mitchell rang up the precinct this morning to report being mugged last night, waiting for a streetcar—right before Slippery Jim was shot. It's obvious, Your Honor—the victim was getting ready to count the loot when the bum shot him.

STEVE: But why didn't Mitchell take the, uh, handbag? Why take the wallet and not the, the handbag if the motive was robbery?

JUDGE: It's a light docket today, Sergeant, and I must admit I'm curious to hear the whole story.

MITCHELL: No! You can't! I did it! I shot Slippery Jim Deland!

JUDGE: Now I'm even more interested. Court will adjourn for one hour. Sergeant Anderson is directed to subpoena Miss Barbara Mitchell as a witness.

SGT. ANDERSON: But Your Honor! Our case! Are you gonna listen to this—this—actor?

JUDGE: Have Miss Mitchell here when we reconvene or I'll cite you for contempt, Sergeant.

### **SOUND: GAVEL BANGS**

STEVE: I felt like a gambler who's thrown his life savings on double-zero. But I was ready to spin the wheel and see if Lady Luck was with me—or if she'd stepped out to powder her nose.

### **SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC**

### **SOUND: GAVEL BANGS**

JUDGE: This court is again in session for the arraignment of Mitchell Markham on the charge of murder in the first degree. Court calls Miss Barbara Mitchell to the stand.

STEVE: Her fur was still ruffled, and I didn't think she'd be smoothing out any time soon.

BARBARA: I don't understand why I've been called to this court, Your Honor. I mean, surely the fact that a man who robbed me has been killed has nothing to do with me.

JUDGE: I'll decide what's relevant to this case, Miss Mitchell. Mr. Powell? You seem to have some questions for Miss Mitchell.

STEVE: The judge was going to let me host the party—and all I had was a cheese log and some stale Ritz crackers.



# Dead Men Don't Jaywalk

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## Cast of Characters

5M 4W (Doubling Possible)

**STEVE POWELL**

**PENNY**

**HELEN WENTWORTH**

**CHARLIE WALKER**

**SERGEANT ANDERSON**

**TRIXIE**

**DIRECTOR (BOB)**

## Recommended Doubling

3M 3W

**STEVE**

**PENNY**

**HELEN**

**CHARLIE/DIRECTOR**

**SGT. ANDERSON/SOUND**

**TRIXIE/SOUND**

*Lights fade up, revealing the recording studio of a radio show. At one side is a sound effects table with the sound effects artists. Facing the audience and center, a row of 4 or 5 microphones. STEVE is at the center microphone, with the microphone to his left the primary female microphone. When actors are not in a scene, they sit on a bench or chairs at the side or back of the stage area. The actors out of scene can read script pages, watch the action, whatever fits.*

*See the Appendix for suggested sound effects and recommended techniques*

*During the noir music and before the action begins, the actors are behaving like actors—checking their scripts, greeting each other, asking the director questions, etc. We don't hear them, and they smoothly get into place just in time for the show to start.*

## **SOUND: MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

### **SOUND: CLOCK STRIKES FOUR**

### **SOUND: MUSIC OUT**

STEVE: (*noir voice*) Well, Stella, it's too late for lost dogs and wallets, too early for cheating husbands and wives. How about we send out for a few sandwiches and catch up on our paperwork from that last case? We can have a little picnic right here on the desk.

HELEN: That'll be swell, boss! I'll phone the deli if you'll pull the file!

STEVE: (*laughing*) Now I have to pull my own files? What kind of a secretary are you, anyway?

HELEN: The kind who's watching her figure! Every time you order the sandwiches, I gain five pounds! I'm getting the diet plate this time.

STEVE: Sure I can't tempt you with a BLT?

HELEN: It's cottage cheese and cantaloupe for me—and my hips.

### **SOUND: HELEN'S HEELS EXIT AND DOOR CLOSSES**

HELEN: (*other side of door*) Operator? Get me Dave's Deli Delivery, please...

STEVE: (*extra noir voice*) Her hips were like palm trees in a Bermuda breeze—and the diet plate only reminded me that we can't elope.

DIRECTOR: Cut! Cut, cut, cut!

STEVE: He was hot enough under the collar to make coffee on the back of his neck. And the look on his face made it clear he wasn't asking for cream and sugar.

DIRECTOR: Cut! Steve! You're doing it again!

STEVE: (*own voice*) Bob, did we, uh, mess up the take?

DIRECTOR: Steve, how many times do I have to tell you? We'll record all your voiceovers separately and dub them in later!

STEVE: Gosh, Bob, I'm sorry—I'm just so used to the radio show that I—

DIRECTOR: You can't narrate the movie on camera! Get me the script girl! Penny!

PENNY: Yes, Mr. Morris?

DIRECTOR: Penny, can we please get Steve a script minus the voiceovers?

PENNY: Um, well...he already has one.

DIRECTOR: What? Give me that!

### **SOUND: SCRIPT PAGES YANKED FROM PENNY'S HAND**

PENNY: After the last time, you said, well, and we did, um, so there aren't any—you see.

DIRECTOR: Steve! You aren't even narrating the lines from the script! You're just making it up!

STEVE: I guess after so many years in, uh, radio, it just, well, it just comes out naturally.

DIRECTOR: Helen!

HELEN: Yes, Bob?

DIRECTOR: We're going back to the beginning of the scene! Frank Grayson in his office! Stella at the desk! Cue the clock! Clapperboard!

PENNY: Right here!

DIRECTOR: I thought you were the script girl.

PENNY: We're a little short-handed today. The egg salad sandwiches sat out for awhile during takes twenty-eight through thirty-one, and most of the crew really likes egg salad, so...

STEVE: (*noir voice*) Food poisoning had swept through the crew like a tsunami through a family picnic. And there's nothing worse than a tidal wave of egg salad the second time around.

DIRECTOR: Augh! He's doing it again! Why, Louis B, why? Of all the pictures in the world to be made, why did you give me *Frank Grayson Private Eye*?

PENNY: Because your career was on hold after *Beach Blanket Bunnies Go Nantucket* and no other studio would touch you?

STEVE: (*own voice*) I think that was, ah, a rhetorical question, Penny.

PENNY: What's rhetorical, Mr. Steve?

STEVE: It's when you don't really want an answer.

PENNY: Then why would you ask the question? I mean, when I ask a question, I want an answer, don't you?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) She wouldn't be turning any heads on the sidewalk, but her eyes were as bright as a tin star on Christmas morning, before you unwrap your pony and find out it's a package of socks. I thought of a question I wanted the answer to, but now wasn't the time.

PENNY: What's your question, Steve? Is it math? I'm really good at math!

STEVE: Oh, ah, nothing, Penny. Nothing important.

PENNY: Just let me know when you want an answer! Oh—Look out, Miss Wentworth!

## **SOUND: HELEN BANGS INTO DESK**

HELEN: Ow!

DIRECTOR: What now?!

HELEN: Sorry, Bob—I'm fine, but I ripped my stocking on this desk. Can I get another pair?

DIRECTOR: Costumes!

PENNY: Yes?

DIRECTOR: Penny? I thought you were—

PENNY: We're a little short-handed today, the egg salad sandwiches—

DIRECTOR: Augh! That's it! That's a wrap! We're done for the day!  
One lousy movie tanks at the box office, just one, and this is what I get!

**SOUND: FOOTSTEPS STOMP OFF AND DOOR SLAMS**

PENNY: Oh! My script! I need that!

**SOUND: FOOTSTEPS RUNNING, DOOR OPENS AND CLOSSES**

HELEN: Got any plans for your evening off?

STEVE: (*noir*) Helen Wentworth had it all—style, brains, beauty, class, and a pair of hips so snaky I was tempted to start raising rats. (*own voice*) Are you asking me to um, well, Helen, I'm—

HELEN: Relax, Steve—I've got my own date tonight. But I couldn't help noticing you're pretty stuck on Penny.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I'd tried playing my cards close to the vest, but sometimes you have to shoot the moon when you have a handful of hearts.

HELEN: She is awfully sweet, isn't she? And you're doing it again, Steve.

STEVE: Doing what?

HELEN: Narrating your own story.

STEVE: Well, uh, ten years of Frank Grayson on the radio, and it just, uh, becomes a habit.

HELEN: You should tell her how you feel.

STEVE: Aw, she'd never go for a guy like me.

**SOUND: CAR HORN**

CHARLIE: (*calling*) Helen? Where are ya, baby? I'm triple parked between two studio heads and the mob, and either way I'm gonna get—

STEVE: (*noir*) His voice should have been announcing ten-cent prizes at a two-bit bingo parlor, not dining out with the lovely Helen Wentworth.

HELEN: Charlie's an old—obligation. One I'll be done with after tonight.

STEVE: It always hurts to have to drop people on your way up, I guess.

HELEN: Sometimes it hurts more than others. Charlie was the publicity photographer for the *Beach Blanket Bunnies* series, and now I can't seem to get him off my back.

STEVE: It must have been fun to do those movies—all those great locations.

HELEN: Mostly we shot them in the studio. I'm just glad I'm out of B-movies.

CHARLIE: Helen? Helen! I got the jalopy running out front! (*to self*) Dames—slower than molasses.

HELEN: Coming!

CHARLIE: Hurry it up! Gas ration coupons don't grow on trees, ya know!

HELEN: Give it a shot with Penny, Steve. I'll bet you ten dollars you'll be pleasantly surprised.

STEVE: You think so?

HELEN: I know so.

### **SOUND: HIGH HEELS EXIT THROUGH DOOR**

STEVE: (*noir voice*) It was still hard for me to believe that little Stevie Palowski had come to Hollywood and made it his own. Frank Grayson, radio private eye, was making the jump to the silver screen, and Steve Powell was jumping, too. As I leapt into stardom like Esther Williams bounding into the deep end, I hoped I could keep my headdress of sparklers dry. (*own voice*) And I couldn't help hoping I was going to owe Helen Wentworth ten dollars.

### **SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC**

### **SOUND: CAR DRIVING**

PENNY: Gee, thanks for the ride, Steve!

STEVE: You know, we don't have to go straight home. I mean, maybe we could, ah, get a bite to eat or something?

PENNY: Oh, I'd like that, Steve. But no egg salad! I'm allergic to eggs, which is why I was all right while everyone else was—

STEVE: I thought maybe we could go to Le Plateau?

PENNY: Oh, I'm not dressed for Le Plateau—and besides, a guy shouldn't take a girl there unless he's serious about her!

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I knew Frank Grayson would have a suave parry for her quick touché, but Steve Powell was as tongue-tied as a frog at a necking party.

PENNY: Did you ever remember that question you wanted to ask?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) It was time to put up or shut up. I'd always dreamed of dating a siren of the silver screen, but this sweet little script girl had pulled over my heart and was writing me a ticket for driving while infatuated.

PENNY: I agree, those people should be kept off the road. I mean, it's all right to have a cocktail or two, but you should never—

STEVE: Penny, I—

PENNY: Look out!

### **SOUND: CAR SCREECHING TO A HALT**

STEVE: (*over brakes*) Crazy jaywalker!

### **SOUND: STEVE AND PENNY BREATHING HARD**

STEVE: Whew, that was close!

PENNY: At least we didn't hit him!

### **SOUND: BODY FALLING TO THE GROUND**

PENNY: ...did we?

### **SOUND: CAR DOORS OPEN, FOOTSTEPS RUNNING**

PENNY: Is he alright?

STEVE: No, Penny. He's—well, he's—dead.

PENNY: Steve—a dead man can't jaywalk, can he?

### **SOUND: STEVE ROLLS THE BODY OVER**

STEVE: It's Charlie Walker.

PENNY: Who? Steve, do you know this man?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) It was Helen Wentworth's suitor. And in the harsh light of the high beams, one thing was clear—Charlie wasn't going to be worrying about ladies keeping him waiting any more...not even if they had to wash their hair.

### **SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC**

STEVE: (*own voice*) Between the police station and the morgue, Penny and I hadn't had much sleep—and there isn't really a right time to tell a girl how you feel when you're discovering that a guy you met once alive and kicking has been stabbed through the heart with an ice pick.

**SOUND: MUSIC OUT**

**SOUND: DOOR OPENS, HIGH HEELS WALK IN, DOOR CLOSSES**

HELEN: Good morning, Steve.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) Helen's tone was cheerful, but the bags under her eyes weren't singing zippitty-doo-dah. (*own*) Hi, Helen. How was your, uh, date?

HELEN: Terrible. He got fresh and I got out. I went home in a taxi.

STEVE: Did you, uh, get rid of your obligation?

HELEN: I don't know, Steve...I really don't.

STEVE: Helen, there's something I should tell you about last night—

HELEN: Did you tell her how you felt?

STEVE: No, not about Penny—

HELEN: I hope I didn't put my foot in anything. She just seems like such a sweet kid—I really think you two should—

DIRECTOR: Alright, everybody, let's try and get the sandwich scene in the can today!

HELEN: Let's talk at lunch, all right?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) Something was funny here, but I didn't know what it was. Like watching a clown take a shower.

PENNY: *Frank Grayson, Private Eye* scene seventeen, take thirty-five!

**SOUND: CLAPPERBOARD**

DIRECTOR: Action!

STEVE: Well, Stella, it's too late for lost dogs and wallets—

**SOUND: SCUFFLE**

PENNY: Oh, no, you can't go in, they're filming and Mr. Morris—

**SOUND: DOOR OPENS, HEAVY FOOTSTEPS**



SGT. ANDERSON: Is there a Miss Wentworth here?

DIRECTOR: Out! Out! You're ruining the take!

HELEN: I'm Helen Wentworth.

DIRECTOR: No she's not! She's Stella Bright, secretary to Frank Grayson, crack private eye, and we've almost got the take...we've almost got it... (*starts to break down*)

SGT. ANDERSON: Cut! I always wanted to say that. Now then, Miss Wentworth, I have a few questions for you, if you don't mind.

HELEN: What seems to be the problem?

SGT. ANDERSON: You know a Charlie Walker?

HELEN: I've met Mr. Walker on occasion, yes.

SGT. ANDERSON: Was one of these occasions last night?

HELEN: Yes—we had a date.

SGT. ANDERSON: And what time did your date end?

HELEN: Rather early, I'm afraid—Mr. Walker attempted to take some liberties and I left him at an arcade.

SGT. ANDERSON: Did you attempt to retaliate in any way for these liberties?

HELEN: I slapped his face good and hard. (*laughs*) He's not suing for assault, is he? I guess half the girls in Hollywood would be behind bars!

SGT. ANDERSON: It's a bit more serious than that, Miss Wentworth. His body was found last night—by your colleague, Mr. Powell.

HELEN: Steve!

STEVE: I'm sorry, Helen—I didn't know how to break it to you—

SGT. ANDERSON: And you were the last person seen with him, so we're naturally interested in your movements.

HELEN: I left Charlie—Mr. Walker—in an arcade around eight o'clock. I took a taxi home.

SGT. ANDERSON: Charlie Walker was dead at eight-twenty. He wandered in front of Mr. Powell's car a few blocks from the arcade.

HELEN: He was hit by a car?

SGT. ANDERSON: He was stabbed by an ice pick.

HELEN: Oh, no...

SGT. ANDERSON: I'd like you to come down to the station for questioning. Purely to assist us in our inquiries, of course.

HELEN: Of course.

**SOUND: RUSHING FOOTSTEPS**

PENNY: Here's your purse, Helen—I got it from the dressing room. I thought you'd want to take it with you to the police—

**SOUND: PENNY TRIPS, DROPS PURSE, PURSE CONTENTS SPILL**

PENNY: Oh, gosh, I'm sorry! I'll get it!

HELEN: No, I'll be fine—

PENNY: Here's your hankie, your compact, your ice pick—

STEVE: (*noir voice*) There was a big fat empty feeling in my heart—I felt like a screenwriter who'd signed on for a percentage of the net.

PENNY: (*oblivious*) Is that everything?

SGT. ANDERSON: That's all I need. Helen Wentworth, I arrest you for the murder of Charlie Walker.

HELEN: No! This is all a terrible mistake! I'm innocent—(*her protests fade out*)

**SOUND: MUSIC UP AND UNDER**

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I couldn't believe that lovely Helen Wentworth would ice a man for getting fresh. I headed for the police station with Penny in tow to see if we could straighten anything out.

**SOUND: MUSIC FADES OUT**

**SOUND: TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS CLIMBING STAIRS**

PENNY: I feel like such an idiot! If I hadn't dropped her purse—

STEVE: (*noir voice*) The truth is like ice cream, Penny—it comes in thirty-one flavors, but they're all gonna get you in the gut.

PENNY: I really don't think this is the time for us to be thinking about food, Steve.

**SOUND: POLICE STATION DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES**

PENNY: Oh! Sgt. Anderson! It's all been a terrible mistake, right? You've found the real killer and Helen's coming back to the movie?

SGT. ANDERSON: I'm afraid not, Miss—

PENNY: Oh! I'm Penny from Publicity but there was this egg salad crisis—it was absolutely devastating—

STEVE: (*noir voice*) It was a geyser of Technicolor agony. And just like Old Faithful, it continued to happen on the hour.

PENNY: So now I'm also Penny the Script Girl, Penny the Clapperboard Clapper, and Penny from Costumes!

SGT. ANDERSON: All—right...

STEVE: How, that is, how bad is it, Sergeant?

SGT. ANDERSON: Pretty bad, Mr. Powell. Miss Wentworth admits she was out with the guy, says they quarreled and she stormed off in a cab. But we got a gal from the Ace Novelty Arcade says Wentworth came back in and bought an ice pick.

STEVE: Is she, uh, sure it was Helen?

SGT. ANDERSON: The gal from the arcade is a part time actress—Trixie Bellwether, knows Wentworth from a B-flick they did together a few years ago. Anyway, you're barking up the wrong tree with mistaken ID—Wentworth admits she bought the ice pick. Trixie says she came in madder than a wet hen and had to have an ice pick right that minute to settle some business.

STEVE: What does Helen say?

SGT. ANDERSON: Says Trixie Bellwether told her she needed protection if she was going to be out at night alone. Either way, we got Wentworth with the weapon, and the timing's right.

PENNY: But why would Helen stab anyone with an ice pick?

SGT. ANDERSON: That's what we wanted to know. So we searched the dearly departed's apartment, and came up with these pictures.

**SOUND: PICTURES BEING PLACED ON A DESK ONE BY ONE**

STEVE: Penny, I don't think you better, well, that is—

PENNY: Why, that's Helen! But she's lost her bathing suit top! Funny, she doesn't look upset about it.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I was pretty sure she'd look upset about it now—there was no room in the career of Helen Wentworth, rising star, for some photos so cheesecake they could fill the dessert carousel at Schraft's.

PENNY: Steve, we can eat later—right now, we need to help Helen!

### **SOUND: PICTURES RUFFLE**

SGT. ANDERSON: Charlie Walker was the publicity photographer for a series of B movies a few years ago. Apparently, he kept a private library of pictures that didn't make it into the papers. We're pretty sure he was blackmailing your friend. And everybody knows, there's only three things to do with a blackmailer—pay up, brazen it out, or kill 'em off.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) It looked like Helen had chosen Option C—and made a dark mark that completely filled the bubble. (*own voice*) Penny, I guess we've just got to face facts on this one.

PENNY: Steve! Would Frank Grayson desert a friend in need? How could you believe that Helen would—well, I don't care how bad it looks. We are going to find the real killer!

STEVE: Alright, Penny, if you think we can do it—

PENNY: I know we can!

SGT. ANDERSON: Well, I admire your gumption, Miss Penny from Publicity, but it's an open and shut case. Why don't you go see Trixie Bellwether at the arcade and see for yourself?

### **SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC**

STEVE: (*noir voice*) The Ace Novelty Arcade had definitely seen better days. There was only one way to score a prize in this joint—you could win some dignity by walking out.

### **SOUND: MUSIC FADES OUT**

STEVE: (*own voice*) You better wait in the car, Penny.

PENNY: Not on your life! I like Helen, and I'm not going to see her railroaded by some sergeant who thinks it's an open and shut case!

### **SOUND: ARCADE DOOR (WITH BELL) OPENS AND CLOSES**

### **SOUND: 1940's PINBALL MACHINES**

TRIXIE: (*rote*) Welcome to the Ace Novelty Arcade all the machines take tokens except the jukebox which is a nickel please use the spittoons and ashtrays provided do you need any change or tokens?

STEVE: (*noir voice*) There was a box of ice picks next to the cash—at three for a dollar, they cost more than a candy bar, but you can't stop a blackmailer by thrusting a Good and Plenty into his heart.

PENNY: Steve! Stop with the food! (*to TRIXIE*) We're here to see Trixie Bellwether.

TRIXIE: Who's askin'?

PENNY: Steve Powell and Penny from Publicity!

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I had hoped for a more low-key approach, but this bull was already registered for a complete set of Wedgwood.

### **SOUND: CHINA CLINKS**

TRIXIE: Nah, it's not real Wedgwood—ya couldn't win it at an arcade if it was. (*rote*) Three little prizes trades up for the platter, three big prizes for the coffee set, great for ya mother or ya sweetheart—Say, did you say Steve Powell?

STEVE: Yes, I, er, she did. That's me.

TRIXIE: I useta follow your radio show—how come you went off the air?

STEVE: We're making, well, we're filming—

PENNY: There's going to be a *Frank Grayson, Private Eye* movie! We're filming it right now!

TRIXIE: And me in my old blouse—hang on, let me swipe on some lipstick.

STEVE: Not, that is, not right this minute.

PENNY: Oh! No, it's going on in the studio!

TRIXIE: Yet another big break passes Trixie by.

PENNY: So you are Trixie!

TRIXIE: That's right. Now whaddya want? (*sweetly*) Mr. Powell?

STEVE: We heard that you were the, uh, clerk here at the arcade last night.

TRIXIE: You here about the broad stabbed Charlie Walker?

PENNY: Oh, you knew him, too?

TRIXIE: I heard his name 'cause the cops showed me a picture and all. When they was askin' about the ice pick.

PENNY: But you sound just like you knew him! Didn't she, Steve?

TRIXIE: Get your hearing checked, toots. I didn't know Charlie Walker from a hole in the ground. Cops came in, showed me a picture of the guy, asked if I seen him. I did. I also seen that high-falutin' Helen Wentworth with him, and I seen them argue, and I seen her head out that door with an ice pick in her hand.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) Her recollection was better than her grammar—but a girl like this couldn't have a perfect past. And I couldn't help noticing that in the present, she was tense. (*own voice*) Um, Miss Bellwether?

TRIXIE: What?

STEVE: Sergeant Anderson said you knew it was Helen because you had been in a movie together?

TRIXIE: Yeah—*Beach Blanket Bunnies Go Poughkeepsie*. It was a bomb.

STEVE: (*noir voice*) I remembered the series—it had seemed like a good idea at the time, but after they used up Florida and Hawaii, the franchise ran out of places to frolic.

TRIXIE: Ya got a point there—they tried Far Rockaway, the South Shore, even Lake Michigan. But the series never recovered. And I couldn't get picked up by another studio.

PENNY: You know, I don't think people realize how much bad publicity can hurt a film! What kind of publicity photos did you do?

TRIXIE *gasps*.

Oh, I understand if you don't know, I mean a lot of times the actors have no idea what the studio is doing to promote the movie! You know, I think Publicity is a very important field, but we could do a lot more to let the film world know just what it is we're doing!

STEVE: Miss Bellwether? Trixie? Are you all right?

TRIXIE: Get outta my arcade!

STEVE: Miss Bellwether?

**SOUND: STEVE KNOCKS OVER THE BOX OF ICE PICKS**

STEVE: Sorry! Your ice picks!

PENNY: Oh, gosh! Let me help!

TRIXIE: Get out!

STEVE: Come on, Penny.

**SOUND: ARCADE DOOR (with bell) OPENS AND CLOSES****SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC****SOUND: CAR DRIVING**

PENNY: Gosh, that Trixie Bellwether sure is funny! All I did was ask her about the publicity photos for *Beach Blanket Bunnies* and she just about snapped my head off! I mean, they're just pictures, right?

STEVE: Penny, I uh, have an idea. I think I know how Charlie Walker was killed—

PENNY: He was stabbed with an ice pick, wasn't he? Or did we discover something new that shows he wasn't? Ooo! Was it one of those rare untraceable South American poisons? Or a heart attack? Maybe he had a heart attack right in front of our car! The shock of almost being hit was too much for him, and—

STEVE: Penny? He was stabbed with an ice pick. There was a hole in his chest. His blood was on the ice pick in Helen's purse.

PENNY: You are just not creative, Steve.

STEVE: Actors aren't paid to be creative, Penny—we're paid to hit our marks, memorize our words, and say them on cue. (*noir voice*) We're like trained dogs—only our motivation comes in a window envelope.

PENNY: (*squeals*) You sounded just like Frank Grayson! Do it again!

STEVE: Penny, I'm not Frank Grayson—I'm Steve Powell. I used to be Stevie Palowski, but the studio made me change it. Don't get me wrong—I love being Frank Grayson. He's so, well, smooth, and he always knows what to say. And I, well, I don't always know what I want to say, and when I do, I don't always know how to say it.

PENNY: Steve? Is there something you want to say?

STEVE: There sure is, Penny—and now that I know what it is, I haven't got the slightest idea how to say it.

PENNY: Maybe if you think about how Frank Grayson would say it.

STEVE: I think Steve Powell needs to say this one. But he can't right now.

PENNY: Why not?

STEVE: Because I owe Helen Wentworth ten dollars, and I don't think they'll let me give it to her in jail. Penny, I know how Charlie Walker was killed, and I need you to help me prove it.

PENNY: I'm your girl, Steve. I mean, well—

STEVE: I know what you mean.

**SOUND: NOIR TRANSITION MUSIC**

**SOUND: DOOR OPENS**

DIRECTOR: Welcome to the set, Miss Bellwether.

TRIXIE: Yew can call me Trixie, Mr. Morris.

DIRECTOR: We've had some trouble completing this scene with Miss Wentworth, and we're ready to test a new actress for the part.

TRIXIE: I always knew I'd get another break!

DIRECTOR: Steve spoke very highly of your work. He said we'd be doing him a great personal favor if we could get you into the picture.

TRIXIE: He did? I mean, of course he did—me and Stevie go way back.

DIRECTOR: I'll just send the script girl over with your pages, and we'll be ready to do the test shots in a few minutes.

TRIXIE: Am I gonna get a lot of lines?

DIRECTOR: You can just read from the script for the test shot.

**SOUND: SCRIPT RUSTLES**

PENNY: Here are your pages, Miss Bellwether.

TRIXIE: Say, aren't you that girl who came by the arcade?

PENNY: Oh, yes! Mr. Powell and I were just so impressed with your range of emotion, we had to get you in the picture!

DIRECTOR: And Steve has assured me that we will be able to complete the picture on schedule with a new actress if we just got you in.



STEVE: That's right! (*noir voice*) My plan was in motion—but would it tie up the case or unravel like my birthday sweater from Aunt Kate?

TRIXIE: I have an Aunt Kate, too! We have so much in common, Mr. Powell!

STEVE: Call me Steve.

TRIXIE: Of course, Stevie!

DIRECTOR: (*sotto voce*) Steve, she's a two-bit starlet! What do you mean telling me this girl can replace Helen Wentworth?

STEVE: Just, uh, trust me, Bob—when we finish the shoot, your, uh, problems will be solved. (*noir voice*) Or so I hoped.

DIRECTOR: The crew goes down with food poisoning, my leading lady's in jail, and my leading man can't stop commenting on his own action! Why couldn't I have gotten into something less dramatic, like opera!

PENNY: We're ready for the test shoot!

DIRECTOR: Places everyone! And action!

PENNY: Test shoot of Trixie Bellwether, for *Frank Grayson Private Eye*!

**SOUND: CLAPPERBOARD**

**SOUND: CLOCK STRIKES FOUR**

STEVE: Well, Stella, it's too late for lost dogs and wallets, too early for cheating husbands and wives. How about we send out for a few sandwiches and catch up on our paperwork from that last case? We can have a little picnic right here on the desk.

TRIXIE: (*she's awful*) That'll be swell, boss! I'll phone the deli if you'll pull the file!

STEVE: (*laughing*) Now I have to pull my own files? What kind of a secretary are you, anyway?

TRIXIE: The kind who's watching her figure! Every time you order the sandwiches, I gain five pounds! I'm getting the diet plate this time.

STEVE: Sure I can't tempt you with a BLT?

TRIXIE: It's cottage cheese and cantaloupe for me—and my hips. (*her own voice*) Should I kiss him here? I feel like I should kiss him.

# Sound Effects & Recommended Techniques

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Part of the charm of live radio drama is watching the sound effects (SFX) operators in action. The live audience enjoys both the realism of the effects and the ambience they add, and watching their creation with both obvious and not-so-obvious noisemakers. But some SFX are more easily done with recordings, and it's fine to use a mix of the two techniques. It's best to avoid using entirely recorded sounds, as that takes away from the vintage feeling of these scripts. If you have terrific equipment and strong sound technicians, you may be able to add effects to the operator-generated sounds through the microphone. You can also add live music if desired—if you want to bring in the school jazz group to play the noir music, go for it!

One of the most challenging aspects of radio drama is making voices appear to be in different locations. This can be done with the actors physically shifting. For example, in *Dead Men Don't Jaywalk*,

when Charlie calls from the car outside, locate the actor about six feet back from his microphone and have him call like he's calling outside. Then adjust in rehearsal if he needs to be closer or farther for it to sound right.

There are music and effects that can be used free of charge by doing a Creative Commons search, looking on YouTube for sound effects, and using the loops, stingers and jingles in Garage Band on a Mac computer. Garage Band also has footsteps, doors opening and shutting, telephones, ambient city sounds, as well as suspense accent sounds. Sound effects CDs are also commonly available.

Rehearse the sound just as you rehearse the acting, watching for unintentional laughs at the SFX operators' actions, and working the timing out to be just right.

Here are some tips and tricks for the SFX used in *Dead Men Don't Carry Handbags* and *Dead Men Don't Jaywalk*.

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## Getting Started

Start by setting up a sound table and area. You'll need a sturdy table, preferably wooden, as this saves a step later when you need wood. Because most radio plays have an old-fashioned setting, it's rare you'll need a plastic sound.

Make sure the table is level and doesn't rock or make any noises on its own. To silence the legs, use the stick-on circular felt pads sold in DIY stores like Home Depot and Canadian Tire. If you need to

level the table, add extra felt pads to the shorter legs.

Cover most of the table with a layer of felt. Staple the felt under the table so that it stays tight, or use long circles of elastic as if they are rubber bands around the table and the cover.

If you use elastic straps vertically and horizontally, this also helps define areas of the table; otherwise, use masking tape to set specific areas for each item. Just like a props table, it's important

that everything goes in the same place every time, especially if there is more than one SFX operator.

If you are using the table as a “walking” or “knocking” surface, cut a square out of the felt in a convenient location to make a clear wooden surface.

On the floor, put down a 2'x3' square of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood and a 2'x3' square of linoleum for “walking” effects. This lets the SFX person help define the different locations with different walking sounds. For *Dead Men Don't Carry Handbags*, you'll also want a square of four tiles or another hard surface that can read as “outdoors.” Put down a strip of carpet for the SFX operators to stand on when they are not making walking sounds.

The operators are going to need hard-soled shoes/high heels for the SFX, and the carpet lets them not worry about changing shoes by creating a silent surface between “walking” effects. If you can also use your stage floor, that gives you three walking locations!

If you already have a freestanding door, set it up close enough to the “walking” mic to hear it open and shut. Otherwise, build an 18"x15" tabletop door hinged into a frame made of 2x4s and add a doorknob.

If you'll actually be recording the show, make an “APPLAUSE” sign to cue the audience for opening and closing rounds of applause. By cuing them, you'll also deter them from clapping in the middle of the show, which breaks the mood.

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## For the Show

Prepare your recorded SFX, and decide whether they will be played by an SFX operator at the table or by another technician.

Set a microphone at the sound table, pointing towards the table surface.

Set a microphone at the “walking” surfaces, low to the floor and pointing at the first-needed square. The SFX operator will gently pivot the microphone to the other surface as needed.

Place a music stand in the location that's best for the SFX operators to have and read their script. While of course they'll end up learning most of their cues, it's better for them to have the script right

there—it's unintentionally hilarious if the wrong sound effect is heard!

SFX operators should wear quiet clothes that don't rustle or jingle. If they are wearing rings, they may need to remove them to avoid clinking when they pick up an item.

It's useful to have a female SFX operator wearing heels and a male in dress shoes or heavy hard-soled shoes. If you can only have one, pick a female operator, or have a male operator do any high-heel walking as a tabletop effect, putting their hands in the shoes. It will get laughs in the wrong places if a male operator wears heels to do female walking.



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