



**Sample Pages from
Dead Men Don't Carry Handbags**

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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

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.

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

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.

Sound Effects & Recommended Techniques

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*.

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 ¾" 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.

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.



help@theatrefolk.com www.theatrefolk.com

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