



**Sample Pages from  
Dead Men Don't Jaywalk**

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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

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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 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 spittokens 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 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.

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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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