

reliquary

Sample file

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Sample file



At his sentencing, Manny Romito said that he was sorry for killing Bob Jesten, Albert Wilson, and Peter Sochowsky. Manny lied, and the judge knew it. The judge sentenced him to death by lethal injection.

Manny died because of love. If anyone had asked him during his trial why he'd killed those three men, he'd have told them it was because they'd hurt the woman that he loved. But he hadn't even told his lawyer that, so bringing it up himself during the trial, starched shirts, borrowed ties and all, seemed out of place. Besides, it wasn't like they'd raped her, or beat her up, or anything that a jury of 12 honest (white) people would have understood. They tried to steal something from her that didn't technically belong to her in the first place, but that she owned anyway.

The more Manny thought about it, as he was led away in handcuffs with his mother and sister wailing and his father turning away from him, the more he reckoned it was a good idea he'd never brought up the gold apple after all.

— ● ● ● —

Manny met Gail at a block party. At first he thought she was lost, and then that she was slumming, but then he had to admit that other than the fact that she wasn't Italian, she fit right in. Maybe she was just light-skinned and bleach-blonde? He walked over to her to ask. He was already drunk.

Manny was what his mother called "good-hearted." That is, he was honest and hard-working, but not terribly bright. Manny recognized that, but didn't figure being smart was too big of a deal. His cousin was smart. He'd been in college for years, and was living in a crappy apartment while he worked on a degree that would let him call himself "Doctor" even though he wasn't a "real" doctor. Meanwhile, Manny was a welder and made good money, had a good retirement plan, and didn't have to spend every waking minute reading boring, thick books about art and metal and stuff. Although even Manny admitted it was kind of neat to hear about how people worked metal a hundred years ago, without torches or galvanization or anything.

So Manny saw Gail, and while some of his brothers or cousins might have thought about how to get such a good-looking girl in the sack, Manny just figured it'd be nice to bring her a drink. So he did, and they got to talking. Manny fell in love.

Gail danced, but not very well. She wasn't Italian and hadn't been going to these block parties all her life, like Manny had. Manny never did get around to asking why she was there, and later, in his cell awaiting the needles, he wondered if asking that might have spared him some trouble later. The thoughts were painful, because if he'd asked, she probably would have found someone else to help her with her problem, and that meant she'd never have loved him. That thought nearly made him cry. But everybody cries on death row, sometimes, no matter what *Sample file* you want to believe.

— ● ● ● —

After the party, Manny and Gail went for a walk around the block. Manny was still a little buzzed, but he'd cut back once he and Gail had met because he wanted to feel at his best while talking to her. She told him about the apple. He couldn't remember later how she had brought it up, but then Manny didn't have a great memory for that kind of thing.

"It's about the size of your fist," she said. "I think it's made of gold, but I need to know what it's worth and I don't trust gold dealers." Manny nodded, even though he didn't know any gold dealers. "You don't know anyone who knows about this stuff, do you?"

Manny shook his head, and they moved on to other things. They talked about their work. Mostly Manny talked about his work and Gail nodded, because she wasn't working just then. They had walked all the way around the block when Manny remembered his cousin Al. "Hey, my cousin knows about art and metal and stuff."

"Oh, yeah?" Gail had just stepped under the streetlight, on the corner across from St. Jude's. Manny was watching the way the fake light caught in her hair. "Manny," she laughed, "what are you looking at?"

"You," he said, and then he kissed her. She seemed surprised, but she kissed him back. Later, when Manny was waiting to die, his traitorous mind sometimes thought that she'd used him somehow. But, he told himself, if Gail had meant for him to do all of this, wouldn't she have seemed more interested in the apple that first night?

— ● ● ● —

The day Manny Romito died, he said something very strange before they put the needle in his arm. He said, "I never got to see that apple." Most of the people at the execution figured he was just being poetic. Some of his family figured they'd slipped him a pill before they brought him out, just to keep him calm,

and that he was just drunk-talking. Only one person present knew that "the apple" was significant, and he waited for Manny to die and then scanned the room for ghosts. He didn't see any, so he left, resolving to look into the matter when he had time. That might be a while, though, because this particular person was a busy man. The only reason he was there at all was because Manny had killed a friend of his.

If Manny's family had known about the vagaries of life and death, and how it all "works," they wouldn't have been surprised to find that Manny didn't leave a ghost behind. Manny didn't hold grudges or remember slights. If he had something to say to you, he said it. If he felt like he needed to hit you, well, he'd do that, too. That was why they felt, perhaps as a coping strategy and perhaps with some logic, that if Manny had killed those men, he must have felt he needed to.

They were right about that. Manny hated those people with more passion than he'd ever hated anybody. He hated them because of what they did to Gail. But by the time he came to die, he'd had his revenge and spent his anger. All that was left was love, and over the years that he waited to die, his lawyer half-heartedly going through the appeals, even that turned into memory and regret.

The man who knew that Manny's last words were significant, but that he didn't leave a ghost behind, didn't care about some blue-collar thug under the drip. He didn't care about Manny's family and their confusion, and he certainly didn't doubt that Manny was guilty, because in his experience people were just crazy and who knew why they did anything anyway. But he was concerned about how said thug snuck up on his friend Bob and shot him in the head. The man got out to his car before he decided that he did have time to look into it, after all, and went to a dingy office downtown.

The man's door had the letters "L Y GRAND" stenciled on it. "PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR" would have cost too much, and "PI" just looked silly. Besides, while Lyle was a private investigator, most of what he did fell more under the "hired thief" category than actual investigation, and if he advertised his PI license, he was sure he'd be investigating cheating husbands within the week. Lyle couldn't abide the notion of snooping on some fat white guy with a hooker. The thought made him queasy.

Lyle pulled out a scrapbook and looked over photos of his friend. Bob had been in the military, and while he wasn't a SEAL or Army Ranger or anything like that, he had kept in shape and stayed alert. It was Bob, actually, who'd taught Lyle about having "street eyes" - watching shadows, reflections, looking down alleys, that kind of thing. So how did Bob wind up getting shot by a guy like Manny?

Everybody has an off day, mused Lyle. Wonder if Bob left a ghost?

— • • • —

Manny had never killed anyone before. He'd been in fights before, even a knife fight once, but it had never escalated too far. A few stitches in his arm, and that was it. He'd never considered killing anyone, let alone planned how to do it. Never until Gail...

Gail had told him that Bob had the apple originally. But he'd stolen it (Gail never said where it had come from), and Gail wanted to give it back, but she couldn't while Bob was still out there free. Manny had suggested turning him in for stealing it, but Gail said he had friends on the force and wouldn't get arrested. She didn't suggest killing him; she just cried in Manny's arms and said how scared she was that Bob would come find her. Manny was pretty sure he had just meant to scare Bob.

He found Bob in his car outside Gail's apartment building. He walked up, put his hand on his gun, and put it to Bob's head. And then he felt something. He couldn't place the feeling then and was never able to express it later, but he knew that Bob was *doing something* without moving, and he pulled the trigger. And he saw the hole appear from the other side of Bob's head and spray brains and blood all over the window. Manny ran, and he got all the way home before he threw up.

Gail was waiting for him. When he told her what happened, she held him close and told him that it was okay. Bob was dangerous and if Manny hadn't shot him, he'd probably be dead. Bob never went anywhere without a gun. It was self-defense, in a way.

Manny wouldn't have accepted that coming from anyone else. Truth be told, he had almost run to find a cop rather than coming home. But from Gail, it made just enough sense that he could accept it, and put what he'd done behind him.

It had only been a week after Bob died when Gail asked Al to look at the apple. Then she came home with a black eye, crying to Manny that Al had hit her and tried to take the apple. Manny had been incensed. He went straight over to his cousin's apartment, and when Al opened the door, he'd punched him in the face.

Al stumbled backwards and fell over his couch. Manny heard breaking glass and then a gurgling sound. He walked around the couch and saw that Al had fallen through a glass coffee table. Thick blood oozed from a gash in his throat. He reached up for Manny, and then went limp. Manny learned before the trial that a chunk of glass had punctured his windpipe just above the Adam's apple and he'd choked on his own blood.

Manny had never meant to kill Al, but as Al lay dying, Manny had thought *Shouldn't have hit her*. Then he left. He went straight home. This time he didn't throw up. He told Gail what had happened and asked if maybe they should call the police, but she just asked him for more ice to put on her eye. Manny got her the ice, and then they made love, and he fell asleep feeling like he'd done right by her. It didn't occur to him to ask why Al hadn't taken the apple, or what Al had told her about what it was worth. Manny didn't ask questions like that, not of Gail.

— • • —

By the time Lyle got to the apartment, Al had been dead five years. It takes a long time for the legal system to execute a man, and Lyle just hoped that Al hadn't moved on when Manny had died.

No one was renting the apartment. Lyle broke in and looked around. Walls painted, furniture moved out, bare bones. Cold, even in spring. He tapped on the wall and called out softly; he saw a flicker of movement from the next room.

"Al?" Lyle walked a little ways toward the movement, but kept his hand on the door frame. "Albert Wilson?" *Hope he remembers his name.*

The movement stopped, and then drifted closer. Lyle never saw ghosts as full-bodied apparitions, though Bob had claimed to. Lyle only saw them as tiny wisps of movement out of the corners of his eyes. Lyle wished ruefully that Bob *had* left a ghost; maybe he could've answered some questions and contacting Al wouldn't have been necessary.

"I'm Lyle Grand. I want to talk to you." No response. "About Manny Romito." That brought a reaction. The room got even colder. Lyle decided to press his luck. "And an apple."

Lyle flew back against the wall. The ghost was here in full force now, although Lyle still couldn't see it. "I'm here to put things right!" The ghost lifted him up and pinned him against the wall. Lyle grabbed at a straw. "I'll get you the apple!"

The ghost dropped him. Lyle could still see it (sort of), but it was calmer now. "I'll get it for you," he said, "but I need to know what happened." He felt the ghost acquiesce.

Not all ghosts can communicate with the living, but those that do have various ways of going about it. Some ghosts send their voices through electronics. Some invade dreams. Some just make pictures in the air, and the ghost that Al Wilson left behind was one of those. Lyle watched those pictures for an hour, and when he left, he knew the truth.

He had to find Gail and get that apple. But he knew he couldn't touch it, or look at it, or he'd end up like Al and Bob...or worse, like Manny.

He went back to the office to think it through. He had a feeling he was missing something: something that had to do with Gail.

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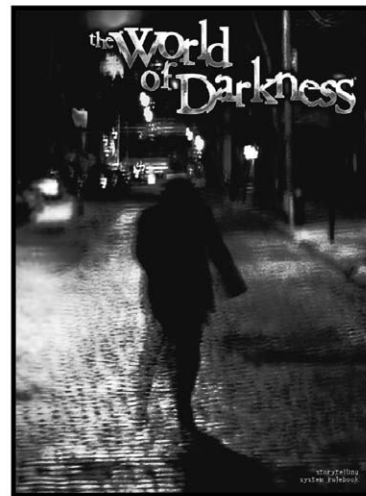
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Welcome to the Reliquary

reliquary

“Thou shalt dance!” he said. “Dance in thy red shoes till thou art pale and cold, and till thy body shrivels to a skeleton. Thou shalt dance from door to door; and where proud, haughty children dwell shalt thou knock, that they may hear thee and be afraid of thee!” “Mercy!” cried the girl. But she did not hear what the Angel answered, for the shoes carried her away — carried her through the door on to the field, over stock and stone, and she was always obliged to dance.
— The Red Shoes,
— Hans Christian
— Anderson

An Introduction to Relics

The term “relic” can mean many different things, depending on the context. A museum may define a relic as an item of interest because of its age or historic import. A treasure hunter may think of a relic as a valuable artifact, saleable to the highest bidder. To the religious community, a relic is a body or body part of a venerated individual (often a saint). These definitions are diverse, and yet there is a common theme running through them. For whatever reason - emotional, spiritual, economic or historic - a relic is a precious item. Relics may be many things, but whatever form they take, whatever powers they possess, and no matter how old or new, relics are valuable and desired.

Relics in the World of Darkness

Within the World of Darkness, there seem to be exceptions to every rule. Every “always” likely has an “other than”, every “must” has at least one corresponding “but”. These supernatural creatures are a certain way, except when they are not. These legendary places are just like this, other than when they are different. These people behave this way, except when they do not. Likewise, magical items are exactly what they are described as in the various other game books — unless they are relics.

Relics are, as a group, anomalies. Unlike standard magical items (klaives, imprinted items, Artifacts, fetishes or the like) crafted by mages, werewolves or any other supernatural group with such abilities, relics as a whole have very little in common with each other. They are not identifiable by any particular singular quality. Some are very powerful, others inert. Some are ancient, others all but brand new. Some are legendary, known even to those who know nothing else about the supernatural world; others are treasured only by a select few or even a single individual.

Some relics are ancient artifacts, timeless creations which transcend the memory of modern man, and have value as much for their lost origins and what they may teach about long-forgotten times as for any supernatural power they may possess. Others are the stuff of legends, perhaps powerful at their creation, but most significant because of the millennia of meaning bestowed upon them in myths and folklore. Still other relics are heirlooms, memorabilia or legacies, given meaning (and sometimes power) not by the virtue of having been crafted by powerful supernatural individuals, but because of their ties to a single dynamic moment, or long-term exposure to circumstances fraught with emotion, danger, or energy.

In truth, the term “relic” in the World of Darkness is more a broad label for things which do not fit neatly into other categories, rather than a specific category itself.

Rather than waste pages of text attempting to define the minutia of how and why relics are what they are or how they *should* be used in game, we will give readers the tools they need to use relics in their stories in whatever way *they* see fit. We will offer a broad sampling of relics great and small, mundane and powerful, precious



and disposable, which can be utilized as-is or customized with the wide variety of powers, costs and curses available in this book. Perhaps more importantly, we will give players and Storytellers the tools with which to create their own relics, and offer essays, chronicle ideas and specific game scenarios to help implement relics into any World of Darkness game in an entertaining, exciting and enriching fashion.

Theme: Things Have Power

In human society, a great deal of emphasis is placed on possessions. We judge ourselves and each other based on our houses, our cars, our jewelry, our “toys”, and our clothing. The things we own, however, also own us. Possessions are more than tools or toys: they are symbols and labels which we and others use to define ourselves.

We invest money, time, energy and emotion into items, and sometimes those investments pay off in ways we might have never suspected they would. Things can become tangible symbols of ideas.

- A childhood toy becomes a symbol of our youth, whether that means it is an icon of simpler times, a reminder of otherwise forgotten dreams and desires or a receptacle of childhood pain and sorrow.
- A wedding ring serves as a form of armor against unwanted attentions, a symbol of acceptance into adulthood and normalcy, or an unbreakable shackle to an abusive spouse.

A gun symbolizes freedom to the man who uses it to escape his captors (or the law), wealth to the one who feeds his family with his hunting, or hopelessness as he sees its barrel swinging towards his children, whether in his hands or those of an enemy.

Humans are also fickle in regards to our “things”. We lust after something, crave it, *need* it, do anything to obtain it... until the next “thing” comes along. And then we forget the old item. We discard it, store it, stick it away - out of sight and out of mind. These things don’t just disappear, however; they remain where we leave them, gathering dust and, sometimes, power.

And sometimes, they don’t forget us as quickly as we forget them.

Mood: Lost Lore. Discovery. Peril.

Relics are more than “power up” items or curses incarnate — at least if they’re handled well. With proper attention paid to background and dramatic atmosphere, they can serve as icons for the spirit and theme of a game. A well-introduced relic can add more to a game than back-up healing or a few extra dice on a combat roll; it can serve as an icon that reinforces the thematic elements of the chronicle as a whole, or a counterpoint to help balance a game which has become too light, dark, depressing or one-dimensional.

Relics can represent forgotten secrets. They can give players the sense of leaving the lit path and venturing into

the dusty cracks of the world, of touching something that has gone untouched for a thousand years.

Relics can remind us of the value of keeping secrets, and the alienation it can bring. The power of hidden knowledge and the agony of possessing an item of importance or value and being afraid to tell anyone about it. The fear of discovery.

Owning a relic and trying to go about every day life can be like going to work with a loaded gun in your pocket and trying to keep it to yourself.

Even relics without astronomical supernatural powers can bring their own challenges. The discovery of a letter that reveals a truth undreamed of by the populace at large. The knowing of the impossible. The light-headed, heavy-stomach, steaming-skin feeling that comes over you in waves as you gradually make sense of what you see and realize that it changes *everything*.

Relics can add that to a game. The thrill of discovery. The triumph of reclaiming lost knowledge. The wonder of realizing the truth beneath layers of fiction and falsehood. And the heavy weight of the implications thereof.

How to Use This Book

The chapters of this book are laid out in such a way as to facilitate the introduction of relics into any World of Darkness chronicle.

Chapter One: In Dark Corners provides a selection of essays designed to aid players and Storytellers in using relics and relic-focused plotlines to enrich their games.

Chapter Two: A Million Little Things offers sample relics, complete with backgrounds, Powers, costs, and storytelling hints. These can be incorporated “as-is” into a chronicle, or serve as inspiration for creating new relics which can be owned by players or serve as plot devices (or both).

Chapter Three: Powers and Prices gives details and mechanics for dozens of relic Powers which can be mixed and matched to create an endless supply of unique artifacts, treasures and heirlooms. As well, new Merits relating to relics and those who use them are found here.

Chapter Four: Tales of the MacGuffin provides a plethora of sample scenarios specifically taken from relic-focused games. Each not only offers an example of the types of challenges that may face characters (and Storytellers) in a game that includes relics and artifacts, but can be stripped down and reloaded with details to allow it to be dropped into any game incorporating relics.

Sources and Inspirations

Relics are not unique to the World of Darkness. Throughout history, storytellers have been utilizing

unique magical items of this sort to provide motivation, symbolism or conflict to their tales.

Books

Beowulf - The poem is absolutely obsessed with the stuff that people have, especially the stuff that Beowulf gets over the course of his adventures. The stuff that World of Darkness characters get should be just as precious to them, just as valuable, just as detailed and just as nebulously magical.

The Lord of the Rings - Besides having one of the most famous relics ever (the One Ring), Tolkien's books (and the movies inspired by them) are filled to the brim with objects made unique and prestigious through background details, lineages, past usage, famous owners and familial ties. A **World of Darkness** chronicle probably won't have this kind of volume of relics, but might well blend profound, frightening objects like the One Ring with less powerful but no-less-individualized objects like Sting and Glamdring.

The Necronomicon - This book, while itself a fictional creation of H.P. Lovecraft, has spread across so many different media, stories, genres and eras that it must be considered is one of the superstars of occult relics. Sometimes it's a catalyst, sometimes a MacGuffin, sometimes a simple prop, sometimes a joke, but it never seems to completely lose its luster.

Constantine - Notice that the Spear of Destiny is actually not a MacGuffin in this movie. Rather, it is the dramatic deadline (unknown to the protagonists); when the Spear reaches Los Angeles, the shit will hit the fan. Also, notice how the Spear of Destiny does not define the visual elements and thematic territory for the film. Even if the Spear of Destiny wasn't in the movie, it'd still be set in Los Angeles and would still have a strong Catholic atmosphere. On top of all this Spear of Destiny stuff, the movie is littered with important (and pretty cool) artifacts: talismans, fiery wands, holy water, haunted chairs, blessed bullets, arcane tattoos and more.

Television Shows

Alias - This show's use of artifacts and MacGuffins is a pretty standard example of a chain style - one MacGuffin leads to another, which leads to yet another - with a surprisingly drawn out lifespan for a larger MacGuffin: the truth about Rambaldi himself, the great MacGuffin maker.

The Dresden Files - While many of Harry's magical items might be seen as Artifacts or imbued items (being crafted by a “wizard”/Mage), others lean more towards relics, taking their power less from “magic” and more from their sympathetic connection with a situation, person or event.

The Lost Room - This Sci Fi Channel miniseries centered around a mysterious room and the dozens of once-mundane items from within it which have now taken on

supernatural powers. While the Objects are all the result of a single cataclysmic Event, any one of them might be given a unique background and serve perfectly well as a relic for a World of Darkness campaign. As well, *The Collectors*, *The Legion* and *The Order of Reunification* are intriguing examples of how mysterious and powerful relics can affect those around them, both as individuals and groups.

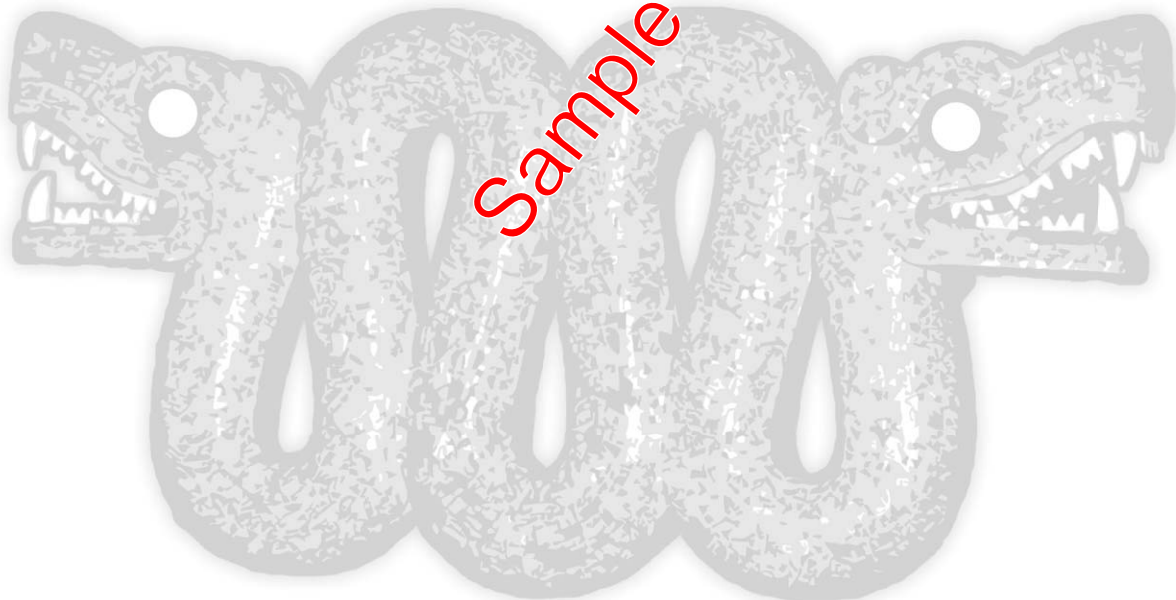
Movies

Indiana Jones - Each of the Indiana Jones movies centers on an antique, mystical MacGuffin that doesn't just drive the action but implies the settings, enemies and visual vocabulary for the film. The MacGuffin certainly isn't the

only role that an artifact can fill in a story, of course, but it's an important one that's easy to use.

A Simple Plan - This movie's about money, rather than a mystic artifact, but the moral dilemma and the suspense are all spot on for relic adventures. Bill Paxton's character slides right down the Morality scale as this movie goes on and you can see how it affects his psyche.

Frailty - This, however, is the movie where Bill Paxton's eroding morality really makes him nuts (or vice versa). He thinks that axe has supernatural powers. Does it? Or do his words simply give it such dramatic weight that, without any magic powers, the presence of the axe is effective enough to warrant modeling in the game mechanics?



Sample file

Carl Wagner



Night falls over Boston.

If you listen, you can hear the machinery of the Big Dig in the background.

I love the Big Dig. Ever since it started, I've been sneaking into the tunnels and taking pictures. I sell the pictures to the Globe sometimes, when there's something juicy going on, but mostly it's about the art. The imagery of the ground that people walk on getting torn up, making caves underneath the city. Wherever there's a deep, dark place, people gotta fill it. Get Freudian with that if you want, but it's true. They're starting to tell stories about some monster that lives in the Dig now, strong enough to lift bulldozers and all wild-haired and covered in mud.

Anyway, yesterday I saw two guys talking in hushed tones.

Not uncommon.

I figure them for Irish mob 'cause they sure aren't wops, but then I get closer and they're talking too free to be mob. These are amateurs, people who aren't used to thinking that someone might be listening.

One guy's white with dreadlocks, the other I can't see well enough (and he didn't come out in the photos, damn it). The dreadlocks guy says, "I haven't found it yet."

Other guy says, "She's still got it, and she's not in the city anymore."

"Maybe you should just let it go."

"What's this? You're turning down gold booty?"

"Ha-ha," says Dreadlocks, and I get the distinct feeling there's a joke I'm not getting. But they're talking about stealing, that's sure enough. "You know where she is?"

"Yeah," says the other guy, "she's in Buffalo."

"Out of my territory," says Dreadlocks, "and yours, too."

"Let me worry about that. Just give me what you've got." Dreadlocks hands over an envelope, and I look through the telephoto lens. The words "GAIL WAGNER" are written on it. "You mind if I bring it here once I get it, Davey? For appraisal?"

Davey tosses his dreads and glares at the guy. "You bring that thing to Boston, Enoch," he says, "and I'll turn Annie on your ass."

Enoch nods. "Duly noted." He walks off, away from me. What the hell kind of name is "Enoch" anyway?

I'm shaking. This is a big deal. Buffalo's my hometown. I knew a Gail Wagner back in high school. If she's involved in something, I could shoot it from the ground up - "Anatomy of Grand Larceny" or something. Don't know if it'd be worth a Pulitzer or not, but it'd sure get my name around.

Although "Peter Sochowsky, Pulitzer Prize Winner" sure has a nice ring to it.