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Dead Man's  
Hand

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**WORMWOOD**

and the **Five Fingers of Glory**

a prose/audio anthology from Habit Forming Films.

[www.wormwoodshow.com](http://www.wormwoodshow.com)



{Fig. 1} ex., "Hand of Glory"

*Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery* is an audio podcast production of Habit Forming Films, LLC.

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The Complete Wormwood Seasons 1 & 2 are currently available via iTunes and the Wormwood website, [www.wormwoodshow.com](http://www.wormwoodshow.com).

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# Wormwood and the Five Fingers of Glory

*An Audio & Prose Anthology for*

Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery

The Hand of Glory remains one of the strange artifacts at the dark heart of the many mysteries of Wormwood. An occult object of great curiosity, The Hand has crept into the very center of the chaotic maelstrom of murder and magic in Wormwood, California. The Hand's true origin has never been revealed. Until now.

"The Five Fingers of Glory" is a new anthology kicking off third season of the critically acclaimed and award-winning audio drama podcast, *Wormwood: A Serialized Mystery*.

The anthology series charts the path of the fabled Hand of Glory through history, from its creation in 700 BC to its arrival in present-day Wormwood. Inspired by the works of writers such as Robert E. Howard, Bram Stoker, Dashiell Hammett and Richard Matheson, three Wormwood writers have taken up the task of revealing the storied history of the Hand of Glory from the dusty streets of ancient Assyria to a haunted Sicilian Monastery to the shadowy backstreets of Chinatown and beyond.



Moments later, the man in the black coat came into view. He walked cautiously into the alley. Cross couldn't make out much...

# Dead Man's Hand

by

David Accampo

*(with acknowledgment to the works of Dashiell Hammett)*

## I. A Petty Death

"You know this stiff?" asked Lieutenant O'Malley, scratching the whiskers on his chin. He pointed to the dead man lying face down on the street, arms and legs jutting out at crazy angles.

Harvey Cross shrugged his slim shoulders. His eyes were small and close-set, almost invisible beneath his arched brows. He shook his head and said: "From time to time. He's a snitch. Name of Petty. Linus Petty."

"Well, looks like Petty was trying to overcome his namesake," said O'Malley.

"What do you mean?" asked Cross.

"We found this on him," O'Malley extended his hand. In it was a folded stack of bills.

"Christ," said Cross, tipping his hat back on his head and rubbing quizzically at his left temple. It was a move O'Malley had seen before, back when Cross worked in the Homicide division. "So why call me?"

"When's the last time you talked to your snitch?" O'Malley's thick brow creased, darkening his eyes.

Cross shot him a look: "What are you after?"

"We found something wrapped up in this wad of dough," said O'Malley, flipping out a small white card. "Recognize this?"

Cross recognized the simple black font. He already knew what it said. He answered: "My card."

"We've got a small-time snitch carrying some big-time cash... and your business card. I'm going to ask you again, Harvey, and for the last time... when's the last time you talked to Petty?"

"I haven't talked to him in months, Tom. Maybe Petty just liked to keep my name handy. You know how it is."

"How about your partner?"

"Johnny? No, Johnny's been working a pretty basic cheating husband thing. You know how it is. Besides, he and Petty didn't see eye-to-eye."

"Enough of a difference to kill a guy?"

"You know Johnny."

"Yeah, I know Johnny."

"How'd Petty die anyway?" said Harvey, eyeing the corpse. He could clearly

see the holes in the jacket, but wanted to steer the conversation down a different avenue.

"Gunshots. Looks like two. In the back."

"Witnesses?"

"None. Yet. Folks are pretty tight-lipped in this neighborhood, but we'll find one."

"So Petty was running away. Out of the alley. Someone shoots him twice. But..." Cross circled the body, walking up to it from behind. "The killer would have had to walk out of the alley, past the body."

"Yeah, so?"

"So, Petty has a wad on him. That's no small amount of money, Tom. Why didn't the killer take it?"

Tom O'Malley scratched his chin again, then loosened his collar a little. "Jesus, Harvey, I don't know. Maybe the killer wanted something more valuable?"

"More valuable than money?" said Cross, "Hell, Tom. Now that's a thing I'd like to see."

## **II. Cross & Callahan**

By the time Cross opened the door to the offices of Cross and Callahan, it was nearly five o'clock in the morning. Cross figured he might as well get a head start on the day since there was no use sleeping after the police had put the screws to

him. The office was dark. Mindy wouldn't be in for another few hours, and his partner Johnny Callahan wouldn't be in for a few hours after that. Cross flipped on the light-switch, but was startled as the telephone began to ring in the early morning gloom.

"Cross and Callahan," said Cross, nestling the receiver to his ear.

A low whisper of a voice crossed the line: "Harvey. I'm sorry."

"Johnny?" asked Cross. It had to be his partner, but Callahan was a thick man with a voice to match his powerful presence. The man didn't whisper.

"It's the hand, Harvey. I had no idea..." Johnny's voice trailed off.

"Johnny, I can barely hear you," said Cross. "Where the hell are you? You hear that Petty just turned up dead?"

"I didn't believe them," Johnny rambling loose-jawed now, and Harvey had to wonder if the old rummy hadn't returned to his ways. The big man had been known to like a drop of the hard stuff. "I didn't believe him until I opened the door. I think I'm lost. I can't find my way back. It's so damned cold here."

"It's always cold this time of year, Johnny. Listen, just tell me where you are and I'll come and get you. You down at that joint on Geary?"

"I'm not in San Francisco, Harvey. I'm not in the city anymore," said the voice.

"Where are you?"

"Someone is... someone is following me. Every time I turn, they disappear like shadows. But if you don't look closely, you'll catch them. There are doors, I keep opening the doors, but they turn in on themselves. I think I'm walking in circles. The hallway is always the same."

Whatever was happening, it was clear Johnny Callahan, who had survived the Great War, who had been a decorated policeman and a fine private detective, was cracking up. It had happened to lesser men quite easily, Cross noted, but he never expected it of John Callahan.

"Listen John, I'm going to come and find you. Are you at a telephone box? Where are you?"

"Don't let them take the hand, Harvey. You've got to destroy it. They're already watching you." The receiver clicked and the line went dead.

Cross tried to puzzle out his partner's words, but it was too early and he hadn't slept a wink. He dialed Callahan's house. Maggie answered the telephone in a sleep voice.

"Morning, Maggie. Sorry to wake you."

"Harvey? Harvey... what time is it?"

"It's early. Listen, I'm trying to find John."

"He didn't come home last night. He said he was on a case."

"He was. He is."

"Is everything okay, Harvey?"

"It sure is, doll. Don't worry."

"Harvey? You'd tell me if... if it happened again?"

"Johnny's on the job, that's all. Forgets to check in sometimes."

"Promise me, Harvey."

"Mags, I—" Cross caught himself. He rubbed the narrow bridge of his nose. "John's my partner. This is entirely business. That's how it has to be, remember? It's best for all of us."

Maggie went cold. "Okay, Harvey. Thank you," she said reluctantly.

Cross hung up the receiver. He recalled the case Callahan had been working. He rifled through Callahan's file cabinet, retrieved folder marked "Zane." He sat down on the leather sofa and flipped through the pages.

### III. One Gloved Hand

Mrs. Priscilla Zane stepped through the offices of Cross and Callahan at a quarter past nine o'clock. Despite the early hour, the woman appeared fully put together. She wore a fur-lined brown overcoat tied over a neat silk grey dress. Her raven curls were smothered by a felt cloche hat. Mindy, the smiling blonde who ran the front desk, politely sent the woman to Harvey's office.

"I got her as quickly as I could, Mr. Cross," she said as Harvey lit her cigarette. He returned to his desk, where he retrieved a pouch of Bull Durham tobacco and proceeded to roll a cigarette for himself.

Cross said: "On the telephone you told me you hadn't seen Johnny in three days, Mrs. Zane."

"Please, call me Priscilla, Is there a problem, Mr. Cross?"

"Well, the problem... Priscilla... is that Johnny was in here yesterday, and he left this." Cross slid an open notebook across the desk. "Now, I don't usually go

through John's things, but I've reason to believe my partner is in trouble. He says here that he saw you two nights ago, and you two met with Linus Petty."

"Yes, yes, I suppose the days have slipped my mind. It's so difficult. I'm quite nervous all the time, wondering if Herbert is--" Priscilla dropped her face into one gloved hand. "Do you know that I haven't seen my husband in two days, Mr. Cross?"

"I'm sorry for your misfortune," said Harvey flatly in a rehearsed voice. "But Linus Petty is dead, and John Callahan is also missing. About the same amount of time as your husband, I might add. I've reason to believe that my partner is in serious trouble."

Mrs. Zane raised her eyes. "Oh? What makes you say that?"

Harvey considered telling the woman about the phone call but quickly thought better of it. He lit his cigarette and regarded her coolly.

"What's your angle, Mrs. Zane?"

The woman touched her collar. She seemed taken aback by Harvey's forwardness. "What do you mean, Mr. Cross?"

"I mean that I know what you told us about your husband, but something doesn't add up. The whole situation's queer, and I need you to clear it up for me."

"I don't know what you're getting at, Mr. Cross. I told you what I believe, that my Herbert is seeing another woman."

"Who is the Albino?"

"Excuse me?"

"Johnny tailed your husband for two weeks, Mrs. Zane. He kept notes. Your husband never even looked in the direction of another dame. In fact, your husband is nothing short of a perfect, law-abiding citizen -- with one exception. Three times he met with someone Johnny called 'The Albino.' So, I'm going to ask you again: what was your husband up to, and who was the Albino?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Zane, touching her lips with her handkerchief. "I'm afraid I haven't been exactly honest with you, Mr. Cross."

#### **IV. The Value of Truth**

The Albino was a man named Alfred Rogers. He was a peculiar kind of merchant. He dressed in smart suits, kept his hair shiny and thick with Brylcreem, but his place of business was a cluttered room the size of a large pantry. The door to his shop was hidden deep along a narrow alley in Chinatown.

"You must be Harvey Cross," said the man as he emerged from a smoke-filled back room. The Albino was as pale as his namesake. He hid his eyes behind dark spectacles. He was a tall man; he looked down on Cross with a tight-lipped half-grin.

"Mr. White," said Cross, quickly removing his hat. "Thank for taking my call."

"I'm not one to meddle with an investigation. My little business thrives on the value of truth. Truths, of course, come in many forms."

"Maybe you can help me get to the bottom of one particular truth."

"And which would that be?"

Cross spat: "I'm here about 'the hand.'"

"Which hand would that be, detective?" asked the Albino with a tight smile.

"Don't get cute with me, White. The hand of glory. The one Herbert Zane was trying to sell to you. I know all about it."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Cross, I'm afraid we've a bit of a misunderstanding. I'm not in the business of 'buying' merchandise. I'm what you would call... a facilitator of transactions."

"You're the middle man?"

"If you must put it that way, I suppose. I provide a valuable service."

"The kind of service that ends with one man dead and two more missing?"

"In my line of work, you can never be certain," said the Albino. "But in this case I can assure you I have nothing to do with your missing partner."

"I never said anything about a partner, Mr. White."

"No, I suppose you didn't," answered the Albino amusedly.

If the revelation rattled the man, Cross couldn't tell. He said: "Tell me what you know."

"Well, I know your partner was following Mr. Zane. He asked me about Zane's doings, and I explained that Mr. Zane was looking to sell a family heirloom."

"And this was something called a 'Hand of Glory.'"

"Do you even know what it is you're talking about, Mr. Cross?"

"Some kind of antique from what I've been told."

"And who told you that?"

"Friend of the family. It makes no difference to me, Mr. White. I'm not here about a dusty piece of jewelry. I'm looking for two missing men. And one of them is a friend of mine, so let's dispense with the pawn shop lessons and get to some answers."

The Albino chuckled. He pressed his pink knuckles against the counter-top and leaned toward Cross.

"You're embarking on a very dangerous course, detective."

"As are you, Mr. White."

The Albino eased back, returning to his prostrate position. He looked down for a moment, and Harvey noticed the man had a black-eye.

"Yes. Well," said the Albino, "At any rate, it doesn't matter. I told Mr. Callahan what he wanted to know, and he left."

"Did you have a buyer lined up?"

"Yes, I did."

"And did you give that information to Johnny?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"In exactly what manner are we speaking here, White?"

"My clients are... rather exclusive and peculiar. They prefer their privacy."

"But you told Johnny."

"He was... rather persuasive."

Harvey grinned. The tall man was used to preying on his clientele, and Harvey figured that dealing with street toughs was a little out of his jurisdiction. He glared at White, leaned in, and said quietly: "I can be pretty persuasive myself."

The man tensed, and then sighed and said: "Of that, I have no doubt. I have no intent to withhold anything from you. What I gave Mr. Callahan before he left was this." White slid a small black card across the grimy counter.

Cross picked up the card. He flipped it over and read the small white type.

He shot The Albino a look: "This is what you gave Johnny?"

"Indeed."

"What does it mean?"

"It's the only link I have to my client."

"One more question, White. Did Johnny tell you anything about leaving town? Going somewhere cold?"

"Not as such."

"All right, then. Thanks for your time, Mr. White."

"Mr. Cross? It's funny that you mention the cold like that. It reminds me of something the client said. He wanted to meet somewhere. He called it the Cold Room. I thought it was perhaps the name of a club."

"And did you meet the fellow in the cold room?"

"We never got that far. Communication ceased once Herbert disappeared."

## V. Lonely Women in Distress

The following morning Harvey dialed the operator and asked for the number printed on the card given to him by the Albino. The number had been disconnected. Cross set the hand-set back into the cradle and began to read through his partner's notes and files. After Callahan's brief note about the Albino, there was nothing to indicate the identity of the other party that the Albino had mentioned.

At half past ten, Priscilla Zane burst into Cross' office. This morning she wasn't as prepared as she had been the night before. Her coat was thrown hurriedly over a housedress, and her makeup wasn't done. Dark shadows clung under her eyes, making the woman look much older than Cross had previously assessed.

"Mr. Cross! I've been trying to reach you!"

"Well, don't you look the fright, Mrs. Zane. Has someone else gone missing?"

"Please, Mr. Cross. Don't be cruel! Someone's following me - and I believe they mean to hurt me."

Harvey looked up from the newspaper he had been reading. The woman looked genuinely distressed.

"Did you get a look at him?"

"I... why, yes. I don't believe he was even trying to hide the fact that he was watching me."

"Describe him."

"He's a large man... muscular. He was bald. And... he wore a big red

mustache."

"That's a good look, alright."

Mrs. Zane continued: "There's more. This was... very distinct. He had a tattoo. It was of a snake, coiling around his hand like this." She pointed to the area between her thumb and index finger and then slowly circled her finger around the back of the hand and down to the wrist."

"That's very specific, Mrs. Zane. How did you get such a good look at this fellow?"

"I stopped in a store on Union Street. I pretended to try on hats, but I got a good look at him as he waited outside the store-front window."

"You're an attractive lady, Mrs. Zane. Perhaps he was just an admirer?"

"Please, Mr. Cross. You can't be serious. With Herbert and Mr. Callahan both missing... why you can't possibly... you can't..."

"Relax, Mrs. Zane. I was just entertaining a notion."

"Oh you were, were you?" she said, looking into his eyes. Harvey noticed the shift in her manner.

"Let's go about finding your husband, Mrs. Zane."

"But what about the man who was following me?"

"Did he attack you?"

"No. Not yet, anyway."

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it."

"He could be right outside."

"Then he'll have to deal with me, won't he?"

"And will you... always be close?"

Harvey raised his eyebrow slightly. "I need to ask you something, Mrs. Zane, and I don't think you're going to like my asking."

"But I've told you all I know about the hand. It's a family heirloom that Herbert was trying to sell—"

"This isn't about your husband, Mrs. Zane. This is about my partner."

"I don't understand. You know him better than I do."

"Do I?"

Priscilla said: "What are you getting at, Mr. Cross?" There was an edge to her voice. Harvey noticed a rosy blush spread across her pale cheeks.

"Look, Priscilla. I don't care what you get up to in your spare time. My partner... he's... well, he's had some trouble with that in the past, you see. So, it's nothing personal, my dear, but it has an exact bearing on this entire case."

"Is that a common thing amongst detectives, Harvey?" asked Priscilla. "Lonely women in distress?"

"If you say Johnny took advantage of your... situation... well, I'll believe you. Johnny was a good soldier, a good cop, and a good investigator. One thing he's never been is a good husband."

"And what about you, Harvey?"

There was a light knock on Harvey's office door. Mindy's round smiling face pushed through. "Lieutenant O'Malley is on the wire, Harvey."

"Thanks, Mindy," said Harvey with a curt nod. He reached across his desk and picked up the telephone receiver. "Cross here."

O'Malley's voice sounded tired. "Harvey, you'd better get down here. We've got another body. Your cheating husband just turned up dead."

Harvey wrote down the details and then hung up the telephone.

## **VI. The Wrong Bed**

Herbert Zane was a small, mild man by the look of it. His round spectacles were smashed against the pavement. His body was twisted at terrible angles, but his over-coat seemed to drape over the entire mess like a circus tent. A dark pool of blood surrounded the misshapen body.

"He took a dive, or he was pushed," said O'Malley.

Harvey looked up at the buildings surrounding him. "He hadn't seen his wife in days. How in blazes did he end up here? Where's he been all this time?"

O'Malley said: "I thought that's what you boys were hired to find out. Still no sign of Johnny?"

"I would have called you if I had," replied Cross.

"You talked to his wife about this?" O'Malley sneered slightly as he spoke.

Cross tensed. He flexed his knuckles. "Don't you have better things to be worried about right now, O'Malley?"

"I was just thinking that she must be awfully worried, Cross. Given your partner's history."

Cross stepped to the heavy-set man, reached out and grabbed the man's coat with one hand. He hissed: "Johnny was a good cop, O'Malley. He got a raw deal."

O'Malley took half a step back and put his thick fingers over Cross' white-knuckled fist. "I never said otherwise, Harvey. Your partner was a good cop. He just chose the wrong bed to sleep in."

Cross struck out quickly with his left hand, knocking O'Malley squarely across the jaw. The policeman stumbled back at the force of the blow. A uniformed officer rushed to Cross, grabbing him from behind.

"Leave him, Montgomery," said O'Malley, spitting blood on the ground. "You get one, Cross. And that was it."

Cross wrestled away from the flatfoot. He glared at O'Malley: "Did you search the body, Lieutenant?"

O'Malley nodded to another uniformed officer, who stepped over to Cross and presented him with several objects: a ring of keys, a billfold, and a pocketwatch.

"Just your usual accessories," said O'Malley. "No suicide note tucked into his pocket, if that's what you're looking for."

Cross flipped through the billfold, which contained a few small bills but nothing more. He lifted the watch, snapped it open. There was a photograph of a

woman in the opposite cover. It wasn't Priscilla Zane."

"Despite what you think about me, Cross, I do like you," said O'Malley, "So I'm doing you a courtesy when I tell you that your partner is currently a suspect in this investigation."

"I understand," said Cross. He turned and walked away from the scene with more questions than answers.

## VII. A Familiar Tattoo

Cross hopped a trolley to head back uptown. As he looked around at his fellow travelers, he noticed a man in a large black coat at the opposite edge of the car. He couldn't make out the man's face. He had seen the man on Powell Street. He observed the man from the corner of his eye. The man shifted his position to let a small Chinese woman on the trolley, and Cross caught a glimpse of the man's large hand. A familiar tattoo wound its way between his thumb and forefinger.

Cross jumped off the trolley car at the next stop. He made his way past a grocer and wound his way through a small alleyway, littered with trash. He ducked behind a row of garbage-cans and waited.

Moments later, the man in the black coat came into view. He walked cautiously into the alley. Cross couldn't make out much, but he could see the man was built like a Liberty tank. Cross hoped that the man wasn't as bullet-proof as one.

As the big man passed by, Cross leapt up and prodded his pistol into the big man's kidneys.

"Not another move until you tell me your game, big fellow," said Cross.

The man spoke with a thick English accent. "That'd be inadvisable, sir."

"So's following a defenseless widow, pal. What's your game, and why are you tailing Priscilla Zane?"

"The lass is queering a deal between Mr. Zane and an interested party."

"She's the one who's queered the deal, eh? If this deal is so legitimate, why'd you kill Zane?"

"That's not my doing, sir," said the big man. "You'll have to speak with the missus about that one."

"I wonder what's more likely... a big man like you pushing Mr. Zane out of a window, or a slim gal like Mrs. Zane."

"That's what you call..." the man fumbled for the words, "That's circumstantial evidence, innit?"

"Following me ain't helping your chances."

"It was my client's suggestion. He thought maybe you knew where the Hand had gone."

"What do you know about the hand?"

"Not much, sir. I only know my client wishes to acquire it. Priceless artifact, it is."

"Then why was Zane trying to sell it?"

"Can't say as I know that one, sir."

"Why did you say the woman's trying to queer the deal?"

"The other man. Your partner. Put the screws to the Albino, didn't he? Tried to stop the deal, get the hand from Zane. After that, they both disappeared. My client presumes your partner killed the Zane bloke and made off with the prize."

"And they think Priscilla Zane put him up to it?"

"Indeed they do, sir."

"What's your name, fella?" asked Cross.

"Louis."

"Good to know, Louis."

"What happens now, sir, if I may ask?"

"I don't know. I'm still mulling that one over."

"If I may make a suggestion, sir?"

"Sure, Louis, sure thing."

The large man wheeled around suddenly, his massive fingers wrapping around Cross' thin wrists and smashing his gun hand against the brick wall of the alley. The gun's retort echoed off the walls. The last thing Harvey saw was Louis' forehead speeding toward the bridge of his nose.

## VIII. A Soft Halo

Bruised and bloodied, Cross arrived at the Zane house on Nob Hill. Cross suspected it was inherited wealth, as the neighborhood appeared to be well beyond the means of a meager accountant like Herbert Zane. He pounded on the front door.

A black woman in a white apron answered the door. Her eyes widened at the sight of Cross' gory visage.

"Is Mrs. Zane available?" asked Cross.

"I'm sorry, sir," answered the woman, "Mrs. Zane is quite ill."

"Well, she was fine enough to see me this morning, and I've got a few questions for her, so I'm sure she'll see me now."

"This morning, sir? I'm afraid that's no possible."

"Saw her with my own two eye's ma'am. So I think it's pretty damn likely."

"But...I'm sorry, sir. It's just that... Mrs. Zane hasn't been out of the house in quite some time. The doctor has confined her to bed rest because of the illness."

After a bit of cajoling, Cross convince the woman, whose name was Alberta, to let Cross into the house. The house was small but ornately furnished. Herbert Zane didn't seem to be a man who needed to pawn a priceless antique.

Alberta led Cross up the stairs and down the hall to a large bedroom. She peaked her head in first, then quietly motioned for Cross to follow.

A woman lay motionless in a large canopied bed. Her arms were folded peace-

fully over her lap. She was pale and thin. Chestnut curls spun from her head in a soft halo. Cross recognized her instantly. It was the woman from Zane's pocket watch.

"Ma'am?" said Alberta softly. "Mrs. Zane?"

The woman stirred, opening her blue eyes. She regarded Cross with mild surprise.

"There's a gentleman here to see you, Mrs. Zane. Mr. Cross. He says you know him."

The woman swallowed. She answered in a whisper: "Mr. Cross? Have we met?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Zane," answered the detective gently. "I'm afraid we haven't. But I'm acquainted with your husband."

"I haven't heard from Herbert in several days," said the woman. "I'm afraid he may have left me to my illness."

"Mr. Zane, well, he's been busy," answered Cross. "He's enlisted my help in selling the hand."

"Ah, yes. The hand."

"So you know about the hand?"

"Yes. Herbert blames the hand for my current condition, if he hasn't told you."

"No I'm afraid he hasn't given me many details."

"It was a family heirloom, you see. My father passed away several years ago, and among his possessions was a strange locked box, carved with the most intri-

cate patterns. Herbert broke the lock and discovered a ghastly sight - a mummified hand, encased in wax. At first it seemed a curiosity, but then our luck began to fail. Herbert lost several clients. There was a fire. Our daughter broke both legs in a horse-riding accident. And then my... my health began to fail. Herbert believed the hand was the cause of our dilemma."

"Why didn't he just throw it away? Toss it into the bay?"

"He tried. It only cemented his notion that the object was cursed. The hand would always find its way back to us."

"That's a hell of a story, if you don't mind my saying so," said Cross.

"I would very much like to see Herbert again, Mr. Cross. When you see him, can you tell him that his wife is waiting for him at home?"

Cross looked down at the carpet and murmured his reply: "Sure thing, Mrs. Zane. I'm sure you'll see him very soon."

## **IX. The Other Mrs. Zane**

Back at his office, Cross had Mindy dial the other Mrs. Zane. There was no answer. Cross sat at his desk and cleaned his gun. After a minutes, the phone rang. Mindy stepped into the office. Her face was pale.

"Harvey," she whispered, "It's Johnny."

Harvey sprang across the desk and picked up the telephone.

"Johnny!" shouted Cross, "where are you, man?"

There was a silent hiss on the other end of the phone. Cross called out again. He called a third time.

"Harvey?" The voice quietly hissed in the receiver, "Harvey? Are you there?"

"I'm here, Johnny. Can you tell me where you're calling from?"

"It's too late, Harvey. You need to listen —"

"I know about the hand and about Zane," said Harvey, "Christ, pal. You got yourself in the thick of it this time."

"Yes... Harvey...the hand. You need to get rid of it..."

"I don't have it, Johnny."

"...under your nose... But... you have to... return it..."

"Johnny, where are you?"

"The hand... it opens doors..."

"Johnny, they think you killed Zane."

"I... we fought... over the hand... we opened a door... I came here... to the endless hallways."

"You're not making any sense!"

"...I don't know where Zane went..."

"He took a dive off a building in Chinatown."

"Yes... he went through another... door..."

"Johnny, I don't understand any of this."

"No time... don't look further... can't destroy it... have to return it..."

The line went dead.

## X. Under Your Nose

Harvey searched his office. Johnny wasn't making much sense, but he did say the Hand was "under your nose," which was a shorthand the two had developed. Years of detective work had led Cross and Callahan to understand that most thieves tended to hide their valuables somewhere close to their home, presumably out of paranoia that they would, in turn be stolen from. Cross had never considered Johnny a thief. He was a many of many mistakes, but that was a line Johnny wouldn't have crossed unless he thought it was necessary.

He searched his desk, the liquor cabinet, the small leather sofa. He couldn't find anything. He paced back and forth, pondering what Johnny might have meant. The floorboards creaked below him. Cross looked down.

He muttered: "Under my nose."

Cross traced the floorboards, pushing on them gently to see where they came loose. Near the corner, he felt as a small section of the floorboards gave under his weight. He pried them up. In a small space beneath the wooden planks was an object wrapped in a handkerchief. Cross retrieved the bundle, and sat down on the floor. He unfolded the handkerchief and looked at the hand. It was a grotesque ornament, leathery and desiccated, coated with a thick waxy sheen.

"So you're the cause of all of this trouble," whispered Cross. "They say you're

cursed. Let's see what kind of trouble you bring me."

A shot rang out in the outer office. Mindy screamed.

## **XI. For a Dead Man's Hand**

Cross leapt to his feet. He dumped the hand into the drawer of his desk, picked up his gun, and slid against the wall. A shadow appeared in the frosted glass window. The door-knob rattled, and the door cautiously cracked open. As the assailant poked his arm into the room, Cross reached out, grabbed the man and twisted his arm, forcing him to drop his weapon. He pushed his gun into the man's neck. He spun the man around. He had a long face, a thin mustache, and a large bulbous nose. He didn't look at Cross; his eyes never wavered from the barrel of Cross' gun.

"The only reason you're still alive is because I'm hoping to God you've got some of the answers I'm looking for," said Cross through gritted teeth.

Behind him, he heard the audible click of a gun being cocked.

"I'm really sorry it had to come to this, Harvey," said a soft, familiar voice.

"If it isn't the 'other' Mrs. Zane," he said, not daring to turn his head.

"You know, your partner was a lot easier to convince."

"What's your real name, sister?"

"Does it matter?"

"I like to know who's shooting at me."

"DeNicolo," said the woman, dropping all pretenses and picking up an Italian accent, "My name is Francesca DeNicolo."

"Pleasure to meet you, Miss DeNicolo. Now I'm going to call a doctor the girl in the other room, or your man here gets it."

DeNicolo shrugged, stared at Cross for a moment and pulled the trigger on her gun. The man in Cross' arms jerked violently, causing Cross to pull his trigger. Cross gasped and stumbled back, covered in gore.

"Expendable," said DeNicolo, "Just like you and your woman. You know what I want, Mr. Cross."

"The hand," said Cross, dropping his gun to the floor. "All this... for a dead man's hand?"

"The object has a great deal of power, Mr. Cross. They say the hand of glory can open any door. That carries quite an appeal to someone in my line of work."

"DeNicolo...DeNicolo..." Cross nodded. "I know you. You're the one they call the 'Black Cat.' You did the Frankfurt heist a couple years back."

"My reputation precedes me."

"You are one crazy broad. Why the charade?"

"I'm a 'broad' who get what she desires. The hand is one such thing. My anonymity is another."

"You let me get Mindy to a doctor, and you can have your damned hand."

"You have it? Oh, Harvey, you continue to amaze me. You're more difficult to

manipulate than that ape you call your partner, but you certain produce better results. I never expected him to run. Where did you find him?"

"He's gone. Don't worry about him. The thing you're looking for is in my desk. Take it and get out of here."

DeNicolo looked at Cross cautiously as she circled the room. She kept her gun trained on him as she slid open the desk drawer. She looked down and then up at him.

"It's not here, Harvey."

"What are you talking about? I just put it there."

DeNicolo yanked the drawer from the rollers, letting the contents spill across the floor.

"It's not here, Harvey! Where is it? In this room? Do you even have it? Are you just buying time to save your girlfriend there? I'll shoot you both right now –!"

A shot rang through the office. Francesca DeNicolo stared wide-eyed at Harvey. Her mouth dropped open. Blood trickled from her lips as a dark stain began to spread across her green silk dress. The gun fell from her hand, and then after a moment, the woman fell forward and collapsed on the floor.

Cross turned. The massive figure of Louis stood in the doorway, an automatic pistol clutched in his giant hands.

"Client doesn't like the sort of trouble a woman like that brings," said the big man.

"I'm not any sort of trouble, Louie," said Cross.

"Don't suppose you are, sir. Were you telling the truth then? Hand's gone?"

"On my mother's grave, Louie. Johnny had the hand. He gave it to me. I put it right there in that desk. And now it's gone."

"That's how it works, innit? Your partner never owned it. It'll find its way back to its rightful owner. S'why my client was seeking to buy the hand from Zane. Now I suppose we'll have to start all over again. Mr. Bressier's not going to like that."

Without another word between them, Louis holstered his gun and walked out of Cross' office as silently as he had entered.

Cross stepped into the main room and found Mindy. The blonde girl had passed out from the shock, but Cross smiled when he saw the wound was only a graze. She'd need a new blouse and maybe a couple of stitches and belt of whiskey, but she'd live to type another day.

## **XII. Passed in the Night**

Two days later, alone in his office, Cross opened up the morning newspaper and performed his usual routine. He scanned the headlines and then flipped to the obituaries. He was slightly saddened but not surprised to read that Priscilla Bloomington Zane had passed in the night from her illness. The Zane estate would pass on to Priscilla's only living relative: her daughter Isabella, age twelve.



"Hand of Glory, Hand of Glory, let those who are asleep remain asleep –  
in a sleep that is fast and deep! But those who are awake, be wide awake!"

-- Hand of Glory Spell



## About this Story: A Word from the Author

We had presented ourselves a unique challenge: to tell the story of the Hand of Glory in different time periods, in an appropriate literary style. Our first tale, set in ancient times, seemed a proper fit for pulp author Robert E. Howard. Another obvious choice was the father of the American short story, Edgar Allan Poe, and a tale set in the late nineteenth century. But as we moved into the 20th century, we had a few choices to make. The 1920's and 30's saw the birth of the pulps and while we had already used Howard for a tale set far in the past, we still had our pick of authors who wrote about their time period. An obvious choice might have been H.P. Lovecraft. Every fiber of *Wormwood* reeks of Lovecraft's influence, after all.

And maybe that's exactly why I chose Dashiell Hammett (1864-1961). As we tried to tell different types of stories, I felt we needed a nice crime story. After all, a large part of *Wormwood* is a detective story. And our own Doctor Crowe, with his bitter outlook and moral ambiguity, actually has quite a bit in common with Hammett's detective, Sam Spade. I also wanted to see the hand as a mummified object, unattached to our fair Doctor Crowe -- a bit more similar to how such a hand is usually displayed in occult lore. I wanted to tell a cautionary tale about the object itself and the lengths people will go to in order to acquire it. And when

you're talking about objects in the 1920's, there is perhaps none more recognizable than that most infamous of literary "MacGruffins," titular object of Hammett's novel, *The Maltese Falcon*.

And thus, this chapter of our series serves as a tribute to our man Hammett and his man, Samuel Spade. Hammett, a former Pinkerton detective had a wonderfully lean writing style that was fun to copy. He wrote prose with a sharp sense of detail and a lot of hidden underpinnings, all revealed through dialogue and action. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett didn't go inside the minds of the characters. He'd set the stage, describe the scene and the characters within, and then let each of them tell you who was a womanizer, who had a past relationship, who was on the take. And in doing so, he created some of the greatest crime fiction in history full of double-crossing rats, sardonic anti-heroes, and les femmes fatales. Admittedly, I dipped a bit more into the characters heads than Hammett does with *The Maltese Falcon*. I'll attribute that to also re-reading *The Thin Man* while writing this. I also married some supernatural elements that don't quite fit in Hammett's world. When discussing the story with Wormwood co-creator Jeremy Rogers, he said it sounded like I was blending a little Clive Barker into my Hammett story. I don't think he's entirely wrong. This still had to be a Wormwood story, after all.

It's worth noting -- perhaps only to me -- that as I went about writing this story, I tried to copy as much of Hammett's language as I could. I hyphenated words like "telephone-box," I used brand names for products like "Bull Durham," and I tried to capture some of his style, including sometimes beginning sentences with phrases like "Cross said: 'Listen...'" I also used a technique Hammett applied to *The Maltese Falcon*. Each chapter title is taken from a phrase within the chapter itself. Little things like this helped me to maintain a feeling

that I was working in Hammett's style, even if it's only apparent to me. Mostly, though, I simply tried to capture the rhythm of his dialogue. I'll let you be the judge of whether or not I did him justice. I hope I did. All I can say for certain is that I had a great deal of fun discovering the world of Harvey Cross.

-- David Accampo

Los Angeles, August 2009



*Dashiell Hammett*

SPEAK  
TO THE  
DEAD

KNOW  
YOUR  
FUTURE

MAGICK HAND OF GLORY



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## The Hand of Glory...

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