

The First Two Pages of “Love Happy” by Frankie Y. Bailey

From *Monkey Business: Crime fiction Inspired by the Films of the Marx Brothers*

Edited by Josh Pachter (Untreed Reads)

An Essay by Frankie Y. Bailey

I was delighted when Josh Pachter, the editor of the anthology, invited me to contribute a short story to *Monkey Business*. I’ve been a fan of the Marx Brothers since I discovered their movies on television as a kid. So, I jumped at the opportunity to contribute a story—the only problem was, I don’t do funny. Even my best friend would say I can’t tell a joke. So, how was I going to write a short story that had zany, slapstick, over-the-top Marx Brothers humor?

Fortunately, when I joined the project, *Love Happy* (1949) was one of the movie choices still available. This final Marx Brothers movie features Harpo, Chico, and Groucho—and introduces Marilyn Monroe in what Groucho described as a bit role for which she was paid \$100. In the movie, Groucho plays a private detective named Sam Grunion. Monroe appears late in the movie when she walks into Grunion’s office to ask for his help because men are following her. Grunion accepts the case with a joke and an attempt to follow her out. He is stopped by the thugs who were strong-arming him when she arrived.

In the movie, Grunion tells the audience the story of his search for a legendary diamond necklace. My private eye is also the narrator of the story and has been searching for a missing map. As with his idol Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*, his encounter with a *femme fatale* client sets the story in motion. Of course, since this is a story inspired by a Marx Brothers' film, this trope of PI films has a twist.

The tone of my story was influenced by the presence of Marilyn Monroe in the film. I knew I wanted to acknowledge her presence, and as I began to write, she became central to the story. My private eye's *femme fatale* client wants him to keep an eye on her younger sister, "Norma Jean," until she can persuade her to go home to Indiana. Of course, "Norma Jeane" was Monroe's real name. In my story, she has gotten her first acting role in *Love Happy*, the musical that the broke but talented group of kids are trying to put on.

Here are the first two pages of the story.

"Love Happy"

I, Sidney P. (for Peregrine) Sturgeon, private eye, being of generally sound mind and occasional integrity, do hereby attest that I have never been in possession of the much-sought-after Oldenburg treasure map.

I attest that I have spent the past eleven years searching for this legendary object of lust, passion, greed, and underhanded chicanery. But in spite of my Herculean efforts, I have not been able to return the map to the gnarled hands of the turkey-necked dowager Helena Oldenburg, the matriarch of the American branch of that great

European family—great until it was stripped of its rank, title, and castle and died out.

Tough times when you take the wrong side in an uprising and cross the monarch.

But that's another fairytale, children. Suffice it to say that Helena's ancestor was smart enough to skip the battle and head for the border. He stashed his mother's timeworn parchment document in his doublet when he fled. And that was the beginning of the legend of the map that would restore the family to its former wealth and glory.

Who knows where it is now? But far be it for me to point out to a client who has me on hefty retainer that she could find better ways to squander her dead husband's money. My job is to continue to search—relentlessly, traveling near and far—until the day her checks begin to bounce.

Do I sound cynical? Well, isn't that the way you *expect* a private eye to sound?

Think Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*. Actually, he was pretty good as Marlowe, too. And that Lauren Bacall: hot-cha-cha-cha!

But I digress. As I was saying, the Oldenburg map has eluded me for years. I came close, once, but . . . well, you'll understand when I tell you the tale.

Cue bluesy music, the "Harlem Nocturne," a personal favorite. And fade to flashback. . . .

The world-weary private eye glanced up as a beautiful blonde bounded into his office.

Wait, what's this? A Golden Retriever? Get this four-legged vixen out of here before she licks my face and I have to adopt her. My landlady doesn't allow pets. Where's my *femme fatale*? I demand a *femme fatale*.

Let's try this again, director. (Anyone got a clothes brush?)

"Action," I say. "Action!"

All right, fine, *you* say it.

And cue music. . . .

His office door opened, and Sid Sturgeon glanced up from his newspaper.

"Forget something, sweetness?"

But instead of his girl Friday Thelma—no Velma had applied for the job, so he had had to make do—instead of Thelma, a dazzling

blonde stood in the doorway, the kind of blonde that could make a saint contemplate sin.

Yes, that *was* a nice turn of phrase. Thank you.

Where was I? Blonde, saint, sin....

She was wearing a tasteful black dress and a darling little hat with a half-veil.

Her wide blue eyes said *Please save me*, but her curves said *Danger ahead*.

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