

## The First Two Pages of “Keep Me In Your Heart” by Alex Segura

From *Lawyers, Guns, and Money:  
Crime Fiction Inspired by the Songs of Warren Zevon*,  
edited by Libby Cudmore and Art Taylor (Down & Out Books)

An Essay by Alex Segura

I’ve always appreciated Warren Zevon and his music—even if I never truly considered myself an obsessive fan. Those slots were filled by the likes of Elvis Costello, The Replacements, Talking Heads, Neko Case, and more. But when Art and Libby reached out about contributing to this anthology, it opened the door to not only revisit Zevon’s music, but to position it as springboard into something else.

Since childhood, I’ve been fascinated by the 1970s—the deflated, complicated response to the high hopes and aspirational views of the 1960s. My novel, *Secret Identity*, drills down on the comic book industry of that era—and puts it in stark contrast with the world we live in today. One other area that I found particularly interesting was the sense of danger and chaos that was part of everyday life—skyjackings, bomb scares, economic disruptions. It felt so strange but also similar to what we’re dealing with now. One book in particular, Bryan Burrough’s *Days of Rage: America’s Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence*, was sitting squarely in my subconscious. I wanted to write a story about people caught up in the machinery of ideology and

politics. Once “normal” people who were swept up into taking decisive and often violent action to further their cause. The idea of radicalization was so interesting to me, from a human level. What makes these people do things like this? And, are they still themselves, deep down?

That’s the 30,000-foot perspective. But at its heart, “Keep Me In Your Heart” is about people—fucked-up people who are doing messed up things to try and make up for their own flaws and misgivings. That, to me, is noir in a nutshell—and pretty much the twisted north star I always write toward.

I hope you enjoy the story. It was truly an honor to be included in the book and I am thankful to share space with so many authors and friends. Huge thanks to Art and Libby for thinking of me, and I hope this tale delivers.

### **The First Two Pages of “Keep Me In Your Heart”**

Janna jumped every time the door buzzed. Like a live wire was being jammed into her side. She watched from the kitchen as Marnie walked to the door. Her friend nodded her head, long blonde hair bobbing along, as she accepted the small package from the delivery man. She gave him a charming smile and gently closed the door.

By the time she turned back around, the smile was gone. Their eyes met.

“Another piece of the puzzle, I guess,” Marnie said, handing Janna the box.

It rattled a bit as it was being handed off, and Janna felt another, smaller jolt. She reminded herself that this alone couldn’t hurt her. But it could as part of something bigger.

“I’ll take it to him,” Janna said, but Marnie was long gone—making a beeline for the lumpy couch in the living room and the lit

joint that awaited her in the ashtray. She sucked on it hungrily, no longer looking at Janna, the package a distant memory.

Janna walked down the townhouse's main hallway—the space both familiar and alien to her. She'd grown up here, in this four-story building in West Greenwich Village, the only child to two distant and often absent parents. Parents who had been very surprised to hear from their wayward daughter. The last they'd heard, she had dropped out of college to join a hippie group to protest the Vietnam War. Basically retired, her parents now lived on a sprawling estate in Long Island. The kind of space that would make Jay Gatsby blush. They used the townhouse sparingly on their infrequent trips into Manhattan. When she called to ask about living there for a while, she could almost hear their glee on the other end of the phone.

“Why of course, dear, you're our daughter,” her mother had cooed, each word a small, forced smile. “Just make sure you let the gardener in on the first Tuesday of the month...”

Janna shook her head slightly, dislodging the annoying memory from her head, and reached the narrow staircase that would take her down to the townhouse's cramped basement. As she began to descend, she felt a cold hand on her shoulder. She turned around with a start.

“Didn't mean to scare you,” Violet said, her pale complexion framed by her long, black hair. “You okay?”

Janna nodded.

“Yeah, sorry, just a little jacked up,” Janna said. “Pre-show jitters, I guess.”

Violet ignored Janna's comment.

“Can you tell Doug we're on for tonight?”

Janna gave her an empty smile and continued down the stairs.

Doug was where Janna expected him to be. Hunched over his worktable, dirt and sweat smeared on his face—wires, a large bag of packing nails, and a handful of sticks of dynamite spread over the long, worn surface.

“What?” Doug asked, not turning around.

Janna stiffened. She hated Doug. She'd come to terms with that over the last few weeks in the townhouse. After the last time they'd slept together and he'd slinked out of bed to return to Violet. She hated his it's-free-love-Baby bullshit. Hated his roach-brown mustache. Hated the way he chewed with his mouth open. Hated how he treated the girls like some twisted update on the Manson family.

Most importantly, she hated that he was in charge—that he was the only liaison between their cell and The Organization. The only funnel of information to and from. Their lives, whether they wanted to face it or not, depended on Doug. And Doug was a fucking asshole.

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Alex Segura is the bestselling and award-winning author of *Secret Identity*, which the *New York Times* called “wittily original” and named an Editor’s Choice. NPR described the novel as “masterful,” and it received starred reviews from *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus*, and *Booklist*. Alex is also the author of *Star Wars Poe Dameron: Free Fall*, the Pete Fernandez Miami Mystery series, and a number of comic books – including *The Mysterious Micro-Face* (in partnership with NPR), *The Black Ghost*, *The Archies*, *The Dusk*, *The Awakened*, and more. His short story “90 Miles” was included in *The Best American Mystery and Suspense Stories* for 2021 and won the Anthony Award for Best Short Story. A Miami native, he lives in New York with his wife and children.