

## GOLDFISH

Carmady is a private detective. He works alone, and there's enough crime in the city of Los Angeles to keep him busy most of the time. He makes mistakes – who doesn't? – but all the bullets have missed him so far.

When Kathy Horne comes into his office with a story about the long-lost Leander pearls, Carmady doesn't think much of it at first. But Kathy's a friend. There's a \$25,000 reward for anyone who finds the pearls, and Kathy needs some money for when her husband gets out of prison. So Carmady goes on listening.

There's a guy called Peeler Mardo, Kathy says. He was in prison one time and he met the guy who stole the Leander pearls from the mail-car. And this guy, Wally Sype, had too much to drink one night and told Peeler where the pearls were hidden.

So Carmady goes to talk to Peeler Mardo. But he's too late, as Peeler Mardo isn't going to do any more talking – ever. He's already talked too much, Carmady realizes, and it's a long journey, a lot of bullets, a lot of dead bodiee, before anyone gets near those pearls.

And where do the goldfish come into the story?





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# Goldfish

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To Jane  
for so many things

RAYMOND CHANDLER

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# Goldfish

*Retold by*  
Christine Lindop

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Terry Hand



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## **The Leander pearls**

I was sitting in my office, busy doing nothing. No phone calls, no messages. Nobody in Los Angeles seemed to need a private detective today.

A warm wind blew in at the window, bringing with it the smell of the oil-burners from the hotel opposite.

I was just thinking about going to lunch when Kathy Horne came in.

Kathy was a tall blonde with sad eyes who had once been a policewoman. She lost her job when she married a cheap little crook called Johnny Horne, hoping to make him into an honest man. Now Johnny was back in prison again, and Kathy worked at the Mansion House Hotel across the road, selling cigars, and waiting to try again with Johnny.

She sat down and lit a cigarette.

‘Did you ever hear of the Leander pearls?’ she asked. ‘God, that old blue suit of yours is so shiny. You must have money in the bank, the clothes you wear.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘to both your ideas. I never heard of the Leander pearls, and I don’t have any money in the bank.’

‘Then maybe you’d like to make yourself a cut of twenty-five grand.’

I put my cigarette out. How was Kathy Horne going to put her hands on twenty-five thousand dollars?



*‘Did you ever hear of the Leander pearls?’ Kathy asked.*

‘It was nineteen years ago,’ Kathy went on. ‘A guy up north named Sol Leander bought the pearls for his wife – just two of them. They cost two hundred grand.’

‘How can you wear something as big as a football?’ I asked.

‘I see you don’t know a lot about pearls,’ Kathy said. ‘It’s not just how big they are. Well, they’re worth more now, and the insurance company is still offering a reward of twenty-five grand for them.’

‘Ah, I get it,’ I said. ‘Somebody stole them.’

‘Now you’re using your head. It was a mail-car robbery. A guy hid on the train, got into the mail car and shot the clerk. Then he took all the valuable mail and got away. But when they caught him later in Canada, they didn’t get any of the stuff. They sent him to Leavenworth prison for life, but they never proved he got the pearls.’

‘If it’s going to be a long story, let’s have a drink.’

‘I never drink before sunset,’ Kathy said. She watched me get my little flat bottle out, then went on, ‘His name was Sype – Wally Sype. He did it alone. And he never said anything about the stuff that he took. After fifteen years they offered him a pardon, but he had to tell them where the stuff was. So he gave them everything – except the pearls.’

‘Where was it?’ I asked. ‘In his hat?’

‘Listen, this isn’t just a funny story, Carmady,’ Kathy said. ‘I’ve got a lead to those pearls.’

I shut my mouth with my hand and looked serious.

‘Sype said he never had the pearls, and I guess they believed him, because he got the pardon. But the pearls were on the train, and they were never seen again.

‘Just once in Leavenworth prison Sype had too much to drink and started talking. The guy that he told was a little man called Peeler Mardo. Sype said he’d hidden the pearls somewhere in Idaho.’

I sat forward a little.

‘Getting interested, eh?’ Kathy said. ‘Well, listen to this. Peeler Mardo rents a room in my house and he drinks too much and he talks in his sleep.’

I sat back and sighed. ‘Oh Kathy,’ I said. ‘For a moment I was planning how to spend that reward money.’

Kathy looked coldly at me. Then her face changed. ‘All right,’ she said, a little hopelessly. ‘Maybe it’s a crazy idea. It was a long time ago, and a lot of people have looked for those pearls. But he’s a nice little guy, and I believe him. He knows where Sype is.’

‘Did he say all this in his sleep?’

‘Of course not. But you know me. An old policewoman’s got ears. I guessed he was an ex-con, and sometimes I stopped outside his door and listened to him talking to himself. When I’d heard enough, I made him tell me the rest. He wants help to get that insurance money.’

I sat forward again. ‘So where’s Sype?’

Kathy smiled. ‘He refused to tell me that, or the name that Sype’s using now. But it’s somewhere up north, near Olympia, Washington. Peeler saw him there, and he says Sype didn’t see *him*.’

I lit another cigarette and had another little drink.

‘OK,’ I said. ‘Will he talk to me? I guess he wants help with talking to the insurance company. After, of course, he goes to see Sype, and Sype just puts the pearls straight into his hand and walks away. Is that it?’

Kathy sighed. ‘Yes, he’ll talk to you,’ she said. ‘But he’s really frightened about something. Will you go and see him?’

‘Sure – if that’s what you want.’

Kathy took her keys out of her bag and wrote her address

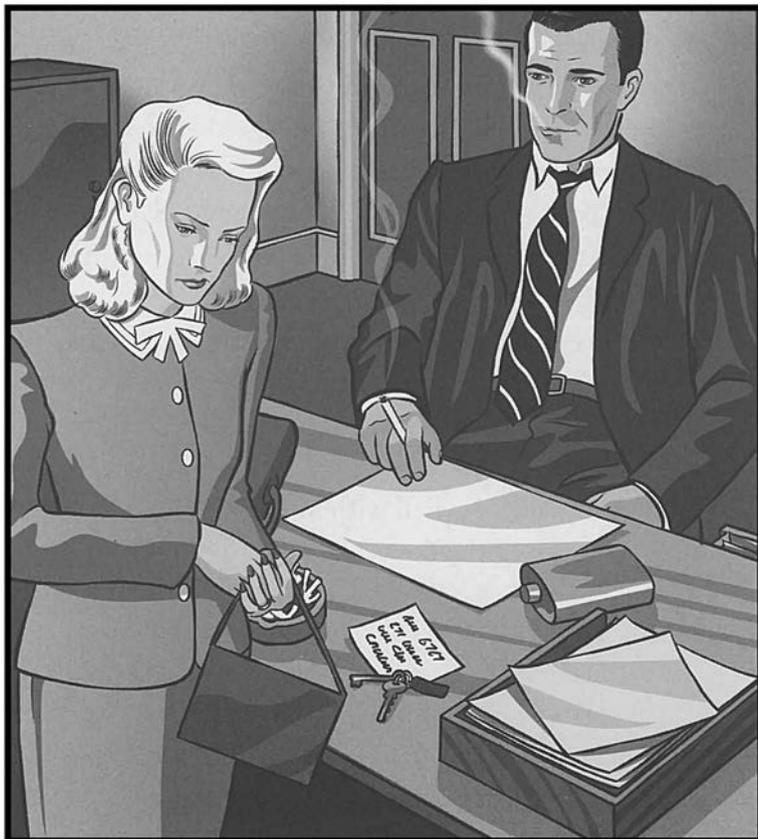
*The Leander pearls*

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on a piece of paper. She stood up slowly.

'I live in one side of the house, and Peeler has a room in the other side. There's a door between the two sides, with the key on my side. If he won't come to the door, you can get in that way.'

'OK,' I said. I blew smoke at the ceiling and looked at her.



*I blew smoke at the ceiling and looked at her.*

Kathy walked towards the door, stopped, and came back. She looked down at the floor.

‘This is Peeler’s business, really,’ she said. ‘And yours now. But if I could have a grand or two waiting when Johnny came out, then maybe—’

‘Maybe you really could keep him honest,’ I said. ‘It’s a dream, Kathy. It’s all a dream. But if it isn’t, you get a third, with Peeler and me.’

Kathy opened her mouth in surprise, then stared hard at the window, to stop herself from crying. She went towards the door, turned and came back again.

‘That isn’t all,’ she said. ‘It’s the old guy – Sype. He did fifteen years in prison. That’s a long time. Doesn’t it make you feel bad?’

I shook my head. ‘He stole the pearls, didn’t he? He killed a man. What does he do now?’

‘His wife has money,’ Kathy said. ‘He spends all his time with his goldfish.’

‘Goldfish?’ I said. ‘To hell with him.’

Kathy went out of the door.



## **A body and a reward**

Kathy's house was on a corner, high up on a hill. It had been two houses once, so it had two front doors. I rang the bell on Mardo's side, but nobody came. Then I went to the other door. Nobody answered.

While I was waiting, a grey Dodge car went quickly round the corner and a smart girl in blue looked up at me for a second. I didn't see the other person in the car. I didn't look very hard. I didn't know it was important.

I opened the door with Kathy's key, and walked in to a living-room with just enough furniture in it. I walked through the house until I found the door to the other side. I unlocked it and went through.

At the back of the house I found a room with a closed door. No answer. I went in. The little man on the bed was probably Peeler Mardo. I noticed his feet first, because they were tied to the end of the bed by a rope round the ankles.

Somebody had burned the bottoms of his feet until there was no skin left. There was still a smell of burning in the room, and on a table by the bed there was a hot electric iron. I turned it off.

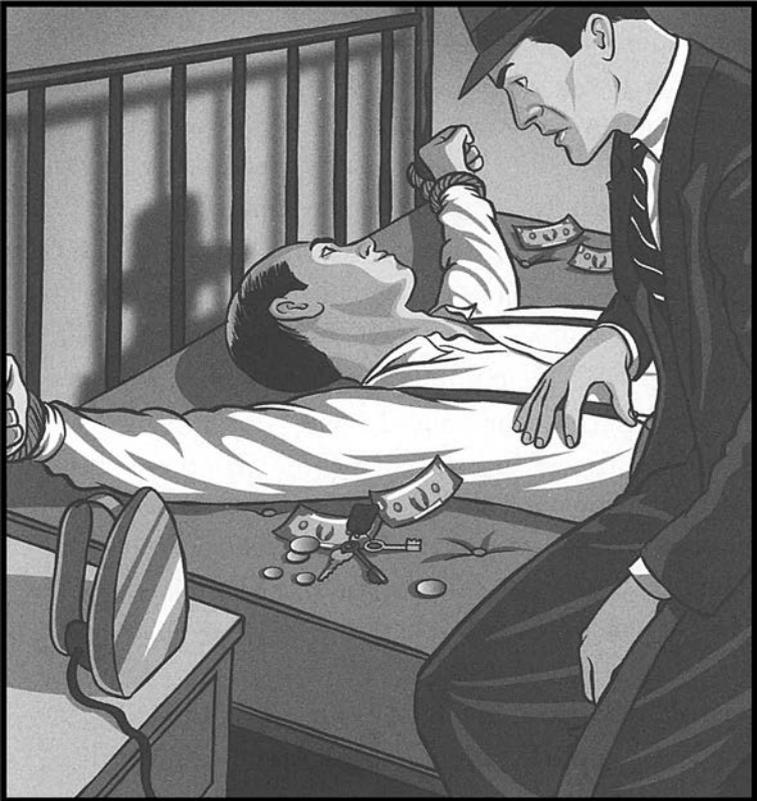
I went to Kathy's kitchen and found some whiskey. I drank some of it and looked out of the window. Then I went back to Peeler Mardo's room.

## Goldfish

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Peeler was wearing a shirt and trousers. On the bed next to him was the stuff from his pockets – some keys and some money.

He was a little man, no taller than one meter sixty, with thin brown hair and large ears. His eyes weren't blue or brown or green. They were just eyes, very open, and very dead. His arms were tied by ropes to the bedhead.



*I looked for bullet holes, but there was nothing.*

I looked for bullet holes, but there was nothing. It was just the burns. I suppose his heart stopped when they put the iron on his feet. He was still warm.

I cleaned everything that I had touched, looked out of Kathy's front window for a while, then left the house.



It was three-thirty when I walked into the cigar shop in the Mansion House Hotel and asked for a packet of cigarettes.

Kathy gave me the smile that she kept for customers. 'You didn't take long,' she said, passing me the packet.

'It's serious,' I told her. 'Are you ready for this?'

She looked past my head, her eyes cool and empty.

'I'm ready,' she said.

'You get half the money,' I said. 'Peeler's dead. He was bumped off – in his bed.'

Kathy's eyes moved a little, and a white line showed around her mouth. That was all.

'Listen,' I said. 'Don't say anything until I've finished. Somebody burned his feet with an electric iron. I think he probably died quickly and didn't say very much. When I went there, I didn't believe this story, but now I'm not so sure. If he told them anything, we're finished, and so is Sype, if I don't find him first. If he didn't, there's still time.'

Kathy looked towards the hotel door. Her face was white.

'What do I do?' she said very quietly.

I dropped her keys into a box of cigars. In a moment her long fingers had taken them and hidden them.

'When you get home, you find him. You don't know

anything. Don't talk about the pearls, don't talk about me. When they find out he's an ex-con, they'll think it was something from his past.'

I opened the packet of cigarettes and lit one. I watched Kathy, but she didn't move.

'Can you do it?' I asked. 'If you can't, tell me now.'

'Of course I can do it,' she said. 'Do I look like the kind of person who could do that with an iron?'

'You married a crook,' I said.

'He isn't a crook!' she answered, her face turning pink. 'He's just a bit stupid sometimes. Nobody thinks the worse of me because of him.'

'All right. It's not our murder, after all. And if we say anything now, we'll never get any of that reward – if there ever is one.'

'You're right there,' said Kathy. 'Oh the poor little guy,' she said, her voice breaking.

I touched her arm gently, smiled and left the Mansion House Hotel.



The Reliance Insurance Company had offices in the Graas Building, three small rooms that looked like nothing at all. The manager was named Lutin – a middle-aged bald man with quiet eyes and small thin fingers.

'Carmady, eh? I've heard of you.' He touched my business card with his little finger. 'What's your problem?'

I took out a cigarette and spoke quietly. 'Remember the Leander pearls?'

His smile was slow, a little bored. ‘Remember them? They cost this company one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Sure I remember them.’

I said, ‘I’ve got an idea. Maybe it’s a bit crazy – in fact it probably is. But I’d like to try it. Is your twenty-five grand reward still good?’

He laughed. ‘Twenty grand, Carmady. But it’s not worth your time.’

‘It’s my time. Twenty it is, then. How much help can I get?’

‘What kind of help?’

‘Can I have a letter that I can take to your other offices? Or show to the police if I need to?’

‘Which offices? Which police?’

I smiled at him, and he smiled back. Neither of our smiles was honest.

‘No letter,’ he said. ‘We can’t put anything on paper. The New York office wouldn’t like it. But we’ll give you all the help that you want. And the twenty grand, if you find the pearls. But you won’t, of course. Not after twenty years.’

I lit my cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling.

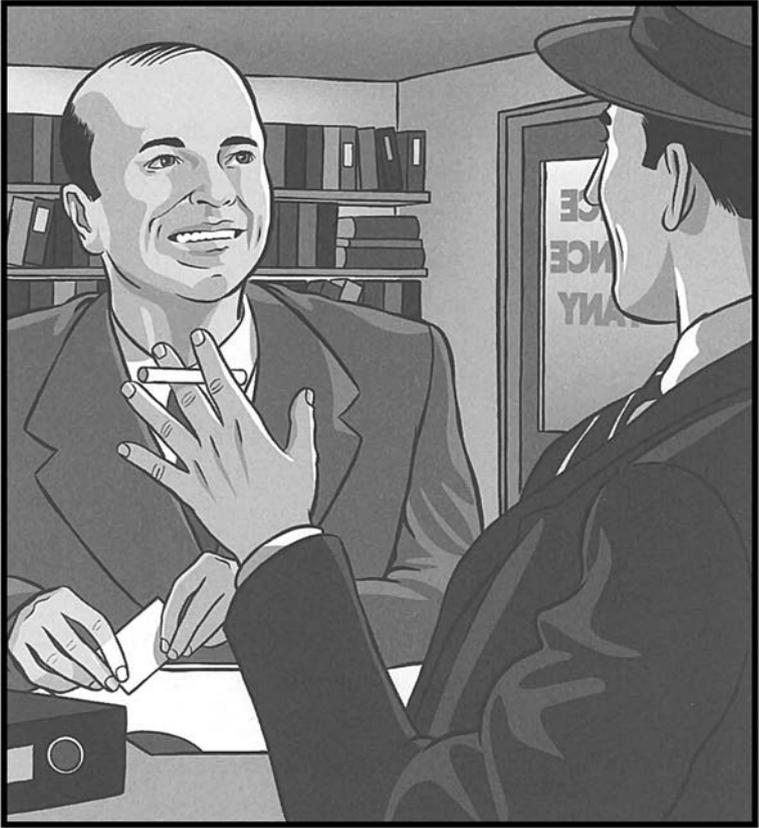
‘It’s still my own time,’ I said.

He looked at me for a moment. ‘Suppose I send somebody to follow you? What then?’

‘I’ll know if that happens. I’ve done this job for too long. I’ll tell the police what I know, and go home.’

‘The police? Why?’

I put my hands on the desk. ‘Because,’ I said slowly, ‘the guy that had the lead got bumped off today.’



*I smiled at him, and he smiled back.  
Neither of our smiles was honest.*

‘Oh – oh.’

‘I didn’t bump him off,’ I said.

We were both silent for a while. Then Lutin said, ‘You don’t want a letter. And now you’ve told me that, you know I won’t give you one.’