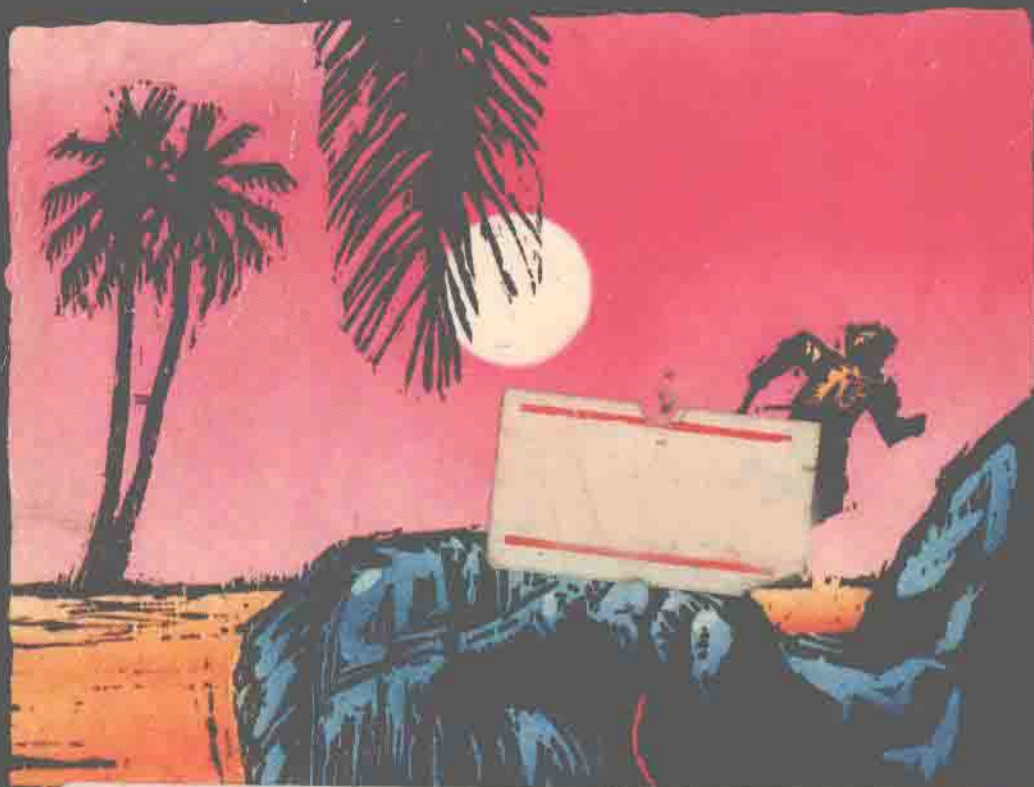


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EDGAR AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

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# **THE DEAD SEED**

**William Campbell  
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## How to Make Friends and Influence People . . .

Corey Raleigh, the boy detective, was parked in front of my house when the Sheriff's car pulled up behind him.

The deputy said to Corey, "Driver's license, please."

I said, "He wasn't speeding."

The deputy said, "I wasn't talking to you."

I said, "Maybe I resent this invasion of privacy."

"I resent being lectured on invasion of privacy by a man who makes his living invading privacy."

"I don't like being slandered, either," I told him.

"Let's all go down to the station so I can swear out a charge of slander."

The deputy apologized for the remark.

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**THE DEAD SEED**

**DEATH IN DONEGAL BAY (*coming in October*)**

**COME DIE WITH ME (*coming in December*)**



*FOR SARA ANN FREED*





# ONE

JAN'S TASTES ARE more sophisticated than mine. Jan favors Paul Klee; Norman Rockwell is my kind of painter. *War and Peace* is her idea of a great novel; *Bang the Drum Slowly* is mine. On the boob tube, Jan rarely deserts the PBS channel. My television diet is confined mostly to old movies on the independent stations.

So that Tuesday morning when I came in from waxing my aged Mustang and told her, "I just saw Fortney Grange next door," she looked at me blankly for a couple of seconds.

Then she shrugged. "Who is Fortney Grange?"

"Come on! Everybody knows who Fortney Grange is. He was—"

"Wait!" she interrupted. She tapped her forehead. "I remember now. My father used to talk about him. He was a football player. Wasn't he called 'the galloping ghost'?"

I shook my head. "That was Red Grange."

"Wait," she said again. "The gray ghost of Gonzaga—?"

"That," I informed her patiently, "was Tony Canadeo of the Green Bay Packers. For your sadly thin information, Fortney Grange was probably the greatest actor of his time and possibly of all time."

"Maybe to you," she said. "I never heard of him."

"He starred in some big pictures. There was *The*

*Sword of Destiny* and *Desert Fury* and—”

“Oh,” she said. “That kind of actor, *your* kind. What was he doing next door, trimming the hedge with his sabre?”

“You’re so smart!” I said.

She nodded. “And pretty, too. Let’s not argue. Kiss me. I have to run. I have an eleven o’clock appointment in Solvang.”

Ten minutes later, her little Mercedes was chattering out the driveway and Mrs. Casey, our housekeeper, came into the breakfast room. “Guess who is living next door?” she asked me.

“Fortney Grange.”

“Imagine!” she said.

“Right,” I agreed. “He didn’t buy the place, did he? The Medfords have been living there for three generations.”

“Buy? Him? With what? He was the biggest Hollywood spender of all time. The way I heard it, he’s an old friend of Miss Medford’s and living in that coach house they converted.”

“I’d sure like to meet him,” I said.

She nodded. “Maybe we will. Let’s hold our thumbs. I’ll never forget his pictures, not one of them. Fresh coffee?”

“No, thanks. I think I’ll go out to see if the backyard needs watering.”

She smiled knowingly. “Call me if you get a glimpse of him.”

Mrs. Casey and I share a lot of tastes, including the culinary. No fancy French chef who ever lived could come close to the subtle flavors in her Irish stew.

Still, even I had to admit it was adolescent of me to stand out there like an overaged groupie watering the lawn with a hose just to catch a glimpse of my hero. The yard was equipped with a clock-controlled sprinkling system.



Quiescent. I guess that's the word for the next half hour. Though not soundless; soothing Mantovani music from a local FM station was drifting out from the ancient Medford home.

Was something going on in there? Fortney Grange had been not only one of the great Hollywood spenders; he had also been one of its famous studs. And Carol Medford, the last of her line, had been that distinguished family's only free-soul advocate.

She had never married. She was around seventy now but nobody thought of her as a spinster. Legend had it that she had left a litter of broken hearts in all the fashionable capitals of Europe.

I turned off the hose and was about to splash my way back to the house when they came down the steps of the side porch next door, hand in hand. They stood there, staring at me across the low hedge.

"Is that he?" I heard him ask. "It is!"

"That's your hero," she agreed. "Come on—I'll introduce you to him."

Crazy world, isn't it?

"My all-time favorite Ram," he said, as we were introduced. "I thought you were working as a private investigator in Los Angeles now."

"I was, until a year ago. I'm retired. Sir, I have been standing here pretending to water a lawn that doesn't need it just so I could get a look at you."

"You can't remember me," he protested. "You're not that old."

"You name the picture," I said, "and I'll tell you the plot."

And then Mrs. Casey was hurrying across the lawn toward us, undoubtedly dreaming up an excuse on the way. "Mr. Callahan," she called, "I was wondering what you wanted for lunch."

"Something light," I told her. "Mrs. Casey, shake the hand that held the sword of destiny."

She stood there, staring at him, a true Irish ham. "It can't be," she said. "Fortney Grange? That I should live to see this day!"

He smiled at her. "You two are embarrassing me. But keep it up. It's been a long time since I last met any admirers."

It was a few minutes of chitchat after that when Carol explained that they were due in town in twenty minutes, but were Jan and I free to come over for dinner tonight?

"Even if we aren't," I assured her, "I'll see that we are."

"Cocktails at six-thirty, then," she said.

I had a diet lunch, cottage cheese and fruit, and faced another empty afternoon. Retirement was not the blessing I had imagined it would be. That grimy existence in Los Angeles, riding the rim of solvency, had not seemed as attractive then as it seemed in retrospect.

I put on my running clothes and went out for a six-miler. As a Ram, I had been forced to stay in condition. As a private investigator, my income had kept me from overeating. I enjoyed being solvent, but I did not intend to become a solvent slob.

I came home bushed and spent half an hour in the Jacuzzi. I was working with the barbells on the patio when Jan came home around three o'clock. She looked grumpy.

"Another wasted trip?" I guessed.

"I think so. I will *never* understand why people hire decorators because they mistrust their own taste and then constantly argue with them."

Jan had gone back to her pre-marriage vocation six months ago. She, too, had found retirement boring.

I told her, "Carol Medford invited us to dinner tonight and I accepted. You will finally meet the great Fortney Grange."

"You might have waited until I came home to accept any invitations."

"Sorry, ma'am."

She sighed, and slumped onto a chaise longue. "That was bitchy of me, wasn't it?"

I smiled and nodded.

"Is he living with her?"

"I guess."

"At her age? He's old, too, isn't he?"

"Even old people have to live somewhere, Jan."

"You know what I'm talking about."

"Not me. I'm just a dumb virgin jock. Think of the dinner this way, you'll get a chance to talk Carol into selling you some of her precious antiques."

She nodded. "True. Is it too early for a drink?"

"A light one wouldn't hurt. I'll get them. Vodka and tonic?"

She nodded again. "And not too light."

I brought the drinks and we sat in silence. The soothing, syrupy music went on again next door. Jan said, "I wish Carol's taste in music matched her taste in food and furniture."

"She's a sentimentalist," I explained. "That can affect one's taste."

Another silence. Then she said, "I hate to sound bitchy twice in one afternoon, but aren't you tired of loafing?"

I nodded.

"You can't sit around waiting for your friend Bernie to call you in on another murder case."

Bernie had never "called me in"; he always warned me to stay out. It didn't seem like the right time to mention that. I said, "Maybe I'll go out to Goleta and work with the Little Leaguers again this summer."

She finished her drink and stood up. "I'm through complaining. I'm going to take a shower."

I sat there, not looking forward as a solid citizen should to a summer of social service with the kids. Little League kids are fun; it's their parents who make the job unpleasant, their strident, overly competitive parents.

Jan had told Lieutenant Vogel about my father being

killed by a hoodlum down in San Diego. I had been nine years old at the time; Mom and I had moved to Long Beach two months later.

My father had been a cop. His killer had never been found. My friend Bernie has this dopey theory that I was still hunting for my father's killer.

Who doesn't hate killers? Killers of people, killers of the dream. Unless you don't like people, or despise their dreams. . . .

The music stopped next door, replaced by the clack of mallets striking croquet balls on the side lawn. That was a game to match her house and her furniture. But sadly out of time and tune with her three face-lifts.

The sun went down, the cold moved in. We had been having ridiculous weather, eighty during the day, down to forty at night. I took my shower and dressed. I wore a tie. I knew it was not obligatory, but I felt I owed it to tradition to wear a tie at dinner in the Medford home.

Her house was dimly lit, her dining table illuminated only by candles. That, too, could be tradition. And also cosmetic. Old people look younger by candlelight.

In any light they were a handsome pair, both of them tall, slim and elegant. At dinner, we were the triple interlocutors, he was the single-end man.

He told us about the Gish sisters and the Barrymores, both Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. He told us about his first picture, made right here in San Valdesto at the old Gramercy Studios. That was when he had met Carol.

After dinner, over cognac in the sun-room, he and I talked football, Jan and Carol discussed antiques.

As we walked back to our house, Jan said, "He's a real charmer, isn't he? Do you know whom he reminds me of? John Barrymore."

"John Barrymore? He was about four feet tall. Fortney Grange, lady, did his own stunts. He *never* used a stuntman."



"I can't always decipher your nonsequiturs. What does that one mean?"

"I mean Grange is—oh hell, you know, all *man!*"

"Now I get it. Macho, macho. Dear God!"

"Aagh," I said. "You!"

"Aagh, yourself," she said.

We had been squabbling too much lately. I held my tongue. At home, she went to the bedroom; I went to the den to watch the late news on the tube.

The news was over and I was turning to another channel to catch an old Errol Flynn picture when Jan appeared in the doorway in her dressing gown.

"Are you going to watch that idiot box all night, Mr. Macho?" she asked. "Or would you rather have some fun?"

## ══════════ TWO ══════════

MRS. CASEY DOESN'T make breakfast when Jan is home, but she was in the kitchen before we got there next morning.

"That truck is out there again," she said.

"What truck?" Jan asked.

Mrs. Casey pointed to the breakfast-room window. I looked out to see a weather-beaten Volkswagen van parked on the street between our house and Carol's.

Mrs. Casey said, "I saw them drive into Miss Medford's driveway after she and Mr. Grange left yesterday morning. And then they came out again and parked right across the street from where they are now."

"They—?" I asked.

She nodded. "A stout woman and a teenage boy. They parked over there for almost two hours."

"It is possible," I said, "that they are friends of Carol's. The butler probably told them Carol wasn't home. So they came back today."

"Then why are they sitting there now?" Jan asked.

"Because it's too early in the morning to come visiting," I explained.

Mrs. Casey looked at Jan. Both of them shook their heads in scornful disbelief.

"All right," I said. "One of you can go out and ask them what in hell they're doing out there."

"We don't have the right to ask them that," Mrs.



Casey said primly. "But I've had my breakfast. I'll go out and fetch the paper."

I watched her through the window. The morning *Los Angeles Times* was on the lawn about halfway between our house and the street. She picked it up and continued toward the curb. There, she made a show of looking into the empty mailbox and then came back to the house.

"The license plate was dirty," she told me. "I couldn't make out the number. But it's an Arizona license plate."

"A very clever piece of detection," I said. "Now what do we do with it? Phone Miss Medford?"

Mrs. Casey shrugged. Jan said, "I'll phone her."

She picked up the kitchen phone and dialed. A few seconds later she said, "I would like to speak with Miss Medford, Charles." A silence. Then she frowned at both of us and said, "This morning? Carmel? Would it be possible for me to reach her up there later today?" A pause. "The Delmonte Lodge? Thank you, Charles."

She hung up and stared at us. "Carol and Fortney left for Carmel an hour ago." She looked at Mrs. Casey. "How long has that van been out there?"

"About half an hour," Mrs. Casey said. She sighed. "Well, I have my laundry to do. I can't be worrying about the neighbors."

Jan looked questioningly at me. "Okay," I said, "I'll go out and tell them."

"Tell them what?"

"That Miss Medford is on her way to Carmel. They might sit there all day!"

"You tell them *nothing*. You ask them what right they have to park that obscene vehicle in front of our house."

"Calm down," I said. "It's a public street."

"Then I'll ask them." She started for the door.

"I'll go," I said. "Sit!"

Mrs. Casey had described the woman as stout. She was a little more than that; I judged her to be between

one hundred and ninety to two hundred pounds of pale flab. The youth behind the wheel was slimmer and less malignant-looking. He was in worn jeans and a blue work shirt, the woman in a soiled caftan. I came around to his side of the car. He glanced at me and then returned to staring moodily through the windshield.

“Trouble?” I asked him. “Out of gas? Looking for somebody?”

He didn’t look at me. He inclined his head toward the woman next to him. “Ask her.”

I looked at her; she glared at me. “Get lost,” she said. “We found what we’re looking for.”

“If it’s Miss Medford,” I said, “she isn’t home.”

“What makes you think we’re looking for her?”

The boy sighed and took a deep breath.

I said, “Because you went to her house yesterday.”

She scowled at me. “Are all the neighbors as nosy as you?”

I shook my head. “And they probably didn’t see your car here yesterday.”

The boy said, “Let’s go, ma. I’m tired of sitting here.”

“Shut up!” she said. “And you, Mr. Big Nose, take off!”

The boy said, “Be reasonable, ma! I’m taking off myself in the next five minutes, whether you do or not.”

“Like your father did?” she said.

I said quietly, “I’m going to wait five minutes, along with the lad, and then I’m going to phone the sheriff’s station. Maybe you’ll be more civil to them.”

Her smile was scornful. “You do that, big boy. We’ll be waiting right here.”

“For exactly five minutes,” the boy said.

I didn’t hear her reply; I was heading for the house.

There, Jan asked, “Well—?”

I related the dialogue.

“So,” she said in her reasonable, wifely voice, “phone the sheriff.”

“Why?” I asked in my equally reasonable way. “We

don't own that street in front of the house. The lady was perfectly willing to wait for the sheriff. What could he charge her with? It's not against the law to be overweight and nasty."

"Okay. But I'm going to phone Carol tonight. I owe her that much."

"And how about today?" I asked. "Do you realize we haven't played golf in two weeks? Why don't we get in a quick nine at Sandpiper before the boys take over at noon?"

She sighed. "Not today. Maybe tomorrow. I have to take some drapery samples up to that miserable woman in Solvang. You go and play with the boys."

She went up to Solvang but I didn't go to the course. At noon I was in Plotkin's Pantry where Bernie always ate lunch on Wednesdays. He was nursing a martini in a corner booth all by himself.

"What in hell are you doing here?" he asked me.

"Hoping to have lunch. Is it closed to goys on Wednesdays?"

"The only time I've ever seen you in here is when you're with me," he explained. "What's on your mind?"

"Only a few friendly questions. I'll buy your lunch."

"Sit down," he said wearily. "I'll buy your drink."

I ordered a stein of *Einlicher* and related the morning's adventure. "So what do I do now?" I asked him.

"How would I know?" he said gruffly. "I'm a city cop. Montevista's not in the city. Did you expect me to muscle those two or something?"

I smiled at him. "You're grumpy. You got turned down for captain again, didn't you?"

He glared at me. "Who told you that?"

"Bernie," I said soothingly, "this is old Brock, your stout friend and loyal confidant. Let's start over."

He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. You called it right. I got the shaft again."

I said, "You are not exactly the Chief's ideal Dale Carnegie cop, Bernie. But he can't live forever."