

Mr McGuffin



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Crimes against
Literature Series

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Every dude and his dog, every popsie and her pooch, was in town for the Mays Plaza Dog Show.

As the streetcar lurched away from the stop on the corner of Union Square, she watched as a lugubrious man with two Sealyhams strolled out of Davidson's Pet Shop. He looked just like Alfred Hitchcock. In fact it was Mr Hitchcock: she'd heard that Universal were back filming on the Bay. She was slipping, she told herself: in her line of work, she should have spotted the camera crew, hidden in the studio truck, which they'd disguised as a furniture van to avoid attracting unwanted attention.

Guido, at the Turk Street club, insisted that Hilary was a dead ringer for Hitchcock's latest leading lady, Tippi Hedren, but this morning, in her headscarf and red sweater, she was hoping that no-one would give her a second look. Certainly, with so many ladies with lapdogs here for the Show, no-one seemed to have noticed the little Pekinese that she was carrying in her handbag. Until now.

He'd jumped on board at the last stop: the tall guy in a sharp suit frowned as he glanced from side to side, passing several vacant seats before stopping next to her.

'Is that seat taken?' Not waiting for an answer, he pushed past her and sat by the window.

'Hey, aren't you a nice little fella!' the little dog enjoyed his attention, 'Big baby eyes and a cute snub nose.'

As he patted the dog with one hand, he reached down into her bag with the other and made a grab.

'And I'll take *this* little snub-nosed beauty!'

He'd found the Pico Baretta that she always kept in her handbag. He clicked off the safety catch and held it under his jacket, pointing right at her.

'I'll call the shots now! I've seen your magic act at Guido's and I watched you at Mays this morning: just another of the dog-mad dames in the crowd at the press preview. Sooo clever the way you switched the mutt from your magic act with the Supreme Champion, Mr McGuffin, everyone's favourite Pekinese. And what a nice touch, the way you switched those ribbons, so that McGuffin matches that sweater of yours. What I didn't see was how you stashed away McGuffin's silver-gilt lead: that would have been a dead giveaway.'

But Hilary was giving nothing away. She stared forwards, a blank expression on her face.

'Silent type, huh?' he snarled, 'Well, my boss has a nice little sideline with a puppy farm out Bodega way, and he's very keen to meet Mr McGuffin, so let's take this nice and easy and no-one will get hurt.'

‘Hey, the tourists might like these old streetcars but we’ve been sitting on these slatted seats for long enough. How about you and I take a walk in the park? Looks like Lafayette’s our next stop.

‘You get up with that precious pooch and remember that I’m right behind you.’

Still looking straight ahead, she touched his wrist as a signal she was ready, stood up and walked calmly down the aisle.

‘Hey!’ He’d been so intent on clutching the handgun that he hadn’t noticed her sleight of hand. Looking down he saw that his right hand was firmly tethered to the seat by Mr McGuffin’s silver-gilt lead.

A tap on the window. Hilary raised an eyebrow and blew him a kiss. It was a perfect day to take Mr McGuffin for a walk across Lafayette Park.