

“The Man With The Shellfish Heart” Sample #1

Written by Frederick Passmore

(Laughter, talking and glasses tinkling in the background, with a lounge piano playing at a low level in the background throughout.)

(STU is sitting and nursing a root beer. He is slumped over the table in a dejected posture. Enter WRIGLEY in hat and trench coat. He pauses and checks out the stage.)

Opening narration: Sometimes people get into trouble. Sometimes they have a friend or loved one looking for them. And sometimes they're just lost. When somebody needs to be found, that's where I come in. My name is Wrigley. Private Detective. It was a steamy Saturday night in our southern coastal city, and I was standing in front of the seediest dive in town. A Seafood place called "The Raw Bar and Grill." But I wasn't afraid... because greater is He that is within me than he that is in the bar.

(WRIGLEY pulls out a piece of gum, unwraps it, and puts it between his lips like a cigarette. He lets it dangle there.)

So with my chin out, my fedora cocked with a hair-trigger and a fresh stick of spearmint in my kisser, I went in.

(He walks a short ways in, stops, looking around.)

The place was filled with human refuse, the waste of a user society. With eyes like two steel wool pads, I scoured the place thoroughly. I was looking for a guy named Pittman. First name, Stu. Finally, thru the dimly-lit haze of smoke, I saw a likely suspect. He was sitting alone, staring a bottle of root beer into submission.

(WRIGLEY stops next to the table, takes the piece of gum from his lip and tips back his hat.)

WRIGLEY: "Is your name Stu?"

STU: *(Looking up.)* "Who wants to know?"

WRIGLEY: "The name's Wrigley." *(Putting the gum back between his lips, he pulls out a badge and flips it.)* "Private detective."

STU: "I ain't done nothin' wrong."

WRIGLEY: "Didn't say you had. I just got a couple of questions to ask you."

STU: "Get lost, gumshoe."

WRIGLEY: "Been lost. Didn't like it. Now, are you gonna answer me, or am I gonna have to get tough?"

(He leans over into STU's face, takes the gum from where it was dangling from his lips, then-- never taking his eyes off of STU's-- he folds it in half and put it into his mouth, chewing it with deliberate jaw motions. STU seems shook up at this act of "toughness" and relents.)

STU: "Yeah, yeah, my name's Stu. What's it to ya?"

(WRIGLEY turns around a chair and straddles it, putting his hat on the table.)

WRIGLEY: "Been looking for you. Your garage has been closed for weeks and your phone's disconnected. You hang out here a lot, Stu?"

STU: "Mostly. Only, folks round here call me "Oyster."

WRIGLEY: *(with surprise.)* "Oyster?"

STU: "Yeah, Oyster."

WRIGLEY: "Oyster Stu." *(WRIGLEY takes out his notepad and looks at it. He rubs his chin in thought, then puts on his hat.)* "Well, Oyster, I think I might have made a mistake. The guy I'm looking for goes by the nickname of..."

(STU sits back up suddenly, not hearing WRIGLEY.)

STU: "And you know why they call me "Oyster?" Because I like to be left alone."

WRIGLEY: *(Rising.)* "Well, then, I'll leave you alone and look somewhere..."

(STU suddenly grabs WRIGLEY by the coat lapels and pulls him into his face.)

STU: "I live a solitary life...just like an oyster. And I like it that way." *(STU releases WRIGLEY and slowly settles back down in his seat.)* "And...like an oyster, I have a hard, crusty shell. A shell to keep the world away. And to keep me away from the world. I don't want to be bothered by anyone. And I don't need a friend."

(WRIGLEY takes each sentence to be STU's last and starts to leave, but then STU starts again and WRIGLEY stays, to be polite. This happens several times after each sentence. WRIGLEY starts to show a little exasperation, until he finally realizes STU is wanting to talk, and he takes off his hat again, settling back to listen. STU's voice grows reflective and his face softens.)

STU: "But, like an oyster, hidden inside is a soft, vulnerable creature. A sensitive part, tender and gentle." *(His face grows dark again.)* "But, like an oyster, I'm also slimy inside. Slimy and disgusting to look at in broad daylight. Too low to kick and too wet to step on. So I keep my shell closed and lie at the bottom of life's polluted riverbed, in the filthy mud and rusty tin cans and worn-out old tires." *(STU leans back and takes a swig from the bottle.)* "But deep inside that crusty exterior, hidden even deeper inside the slimy insides, there lies... a pearl. And you know what's inside that pearl, gumshoe? A grain of sand. An irritating, painful piece of grit that gets inside your shell, between your bivalve and your siphon, rubbing you raw. And you can't get it out, no matter how much pain it causes. You know what my pain was, Wrigley? A memory. A memory of a woman. It ate away at my heart until I wrapped it in beautiful memories of the good time we had. And it didn't hurt so bad anymore." *(STU grabs WRIGLEY by the shoulder and squeezes until he winces.)* "Do you know what pain is, Wrigley?"

WRIGLEY: *(Wincing, he pries STU's fingers out of his shoulder and then rubs it.)* "Oh, yeah."

(STU appears not to notice and continues talking. WRIGLEY rests his elbow on the table and leans his face on his fist as STU goes on.)

STU: "Dames. You can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em. And this dame, she was something special. Her name was Pearl. I've never found any woman that I had so much in common with. *(A faraway look comes into his eyes and he grins wistfully.)* We both loved changing our engine oil on the weekend, and running barefoot through the cow pasture. We both loved shooting squirrels as they walked over the telephone lines across the highway, and watching them hit the road and get flattened by eighteen-wheelers. We loved picking our toes on the front porch as the sun went down, and then watching our tapes of our favorite TV commercials. I remember those summer days, spent looking for snails in the garden, then surrounding them with salt and betting on which ones would melt first as they tried to get away." *(Continues...)*