



LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 15

Vincent Price Denotta spent the ride home looking over his shoulder, unable to shake the feeling that he was being watched. Being paranoid wasn't any fun, especially when the feelings were justified. After a meal and a hot bath, he felt better, ready to study the case impassionately. His thoughts returned to Mrs. Stedman—the woman who had hired him—the woman he had seen yesterday on the street.

She had wanted to disappear, but hadn't been able to. Somewhere, there was a trail, and he was going to find it. After calling for a cab, he traveled back to the location of his arrest. That's where he had spotted her, leaving a haberdashery shop with several bags of merchandise—presumably hats.

“May I help you, sir?”

He had walked into the shop and was examining a table of artfully displayed mannequin heads. Looking up, he smiled at the clerk. “Yes, you can. I'm trying to find the name of a woman who purchased a hat yesterday.”

The clerk, a fortyish-looking woman wearing a navy suit and sporting a '60's French twist, appeared to be nonplussed by his request. “Lots of women buy hats.”

He pulled a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and pressed it into her palm. “I need to see the names of all the women who bought hats yesterday,” he said.

“Who are you?”

She had made no move toward the register to retrieve the names, but neither had she refused the twenty-dollar bill. He pulled his Detective license from his pocket. She seemed impressed and relieved. Now, she could keep the money he had given her in good conscience. “I’m working with Detective Frank Daniels. You can call the station, if you’d like. They’ll verify my credentials.”

“That won’t be necessary, but we don’t keep a running list of our customers, you know. All I have are the checks and the credit card receipts—and you’re lucky I haven’t been to the bank yet.”

Price agreed he was lucky and waited while she went into the back room to obtain the information. Fifteen minutes later he was reading the unfamiliar names from the back seat of a cab. There were nine—beside which the polite clerk, who also happened to be the owner of the shop, had thoughtfully listed addresses and phone numbers. Now, if the pseudo Mrs. Stedman had made a purchase and had not paid in cash, he had her.

He was on the way to his office when the call came through to his cell phone.

“Denotta, it’s me, Daniels. Got some bad news.”

“Worse than being charged with murder?” he asked dryly.

“Someone broke in and ransacked your office. I’m here now.”

Price thought of the box of money stashed under his bed. “I’m on my way, Frank. Just have to make one quick stop.” Too late to berate himself for not depositing the cash in a bank. Either it was there or it wasn’t. The good news was that he had already removed a good portion for expenses. The remainder, if there was any money remaining, would probably have been spent on his defense.

By the time the taxi reached his home address, Price had prepared himself, mentally and emotionally, for disaster, so finding his door unlocked and standing open was not a huge surprise. Finding the perpetrator still inside, however, was.

“I see the rumors of your death have been greatly exaggerated,” he remarked to the attractive woman facing him with the gun.

End of Installment Fifteen

C. R. Myers is an award-winning author of more than fifty published novels, including the BobbiCat children's books, and a long-time Bullard resident. www.crmeyers.com

