



Lady's Name

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# LADY'S GAME

*A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY*

## *INSTALLMENT 14*

Denotta spent a long, sleepless night staring at metal bars and listening to the unsettling sounds of the city jail. For the first four hours, he had been confined in a common holding cell, trying to look invisible to the drunks and gang members incarcerated along with him. He might have succeeded had not a young Latino taken a liking to some of his personal belongings. By the time he was given his own cell, he was one watch, two shoes, and a suit coat lighter. The good news was that his cellmate was sleeping off a drunk on the top bunk.

“Good night’s sleep?”

Price jerked around at the sound of Frank Daniels’s voice. “Not exactly a five-star, is it?”

“Not exactly a one-star,” Price shot back.

Daniels stood aside as the guard unlocked the cell and opened the door.

“Do you always visit prisoners before breakfast?” Denotta asked, making light to cover his over-whelming joy at seeing a friendly face.

Daniels walked inside. “Only when I have a *get-out-of-jail-free-card* to give away.”

Price’s heart pounded hard against his chest. “What do you mean?” he asked, swinging his feet to the floor.

Daniels cut a quick glance around, looking uncomfortable. “Let’s go,” he said. “I’ll explain once I have you out of here.”

Not needing to be told twice, Price stood up and made quick time through the door, past the still waiting guard.

“Whoa, where are your shoes?” the man asked, seeing his stocking feet.

“The hospitality committee in the holding cell are keeping them for me,” he answered back over his shoulder.

Daniels stopped. “Might take a while to sort things out.”

“Let’s call it a gift,” Price offered, not wanting to stay inside the police station any longer than he had to.

Daniels grinned, but didn’t comment. Twenty minutes later they were sitting at Alberta’s Coffee Shop over two steaming cups. Release had been a series of forms including the paperwork for the return of Price’s stolen items, which had been confiscated from the Latino the previous evening right after Price left.

“So, what happened? Why was I released? Was I granted bail?”

Daniel’s expression was grim. “No, nothing like that. The DA dropped the charges.”

Price stirred his coffee, while his mind ran conjectures. “Why?” he asked, finally. “I thought the DA’s case was air-tight.”

Daniels leaned forward, as if he thought someone might be listening. “That’s what’s so weird. It was. The wife of one of the state’s most prominent citizens is murdered, and the DA has weapon, opportunity, and a possible motive as well as the fact that the prime suspect in custody. Doesn’t make any sense.”

“Maybe I wasn’t supposed to be in custody.”

“Go on.”

“Well, I was picked up by accident—a fluke, just as I spotted the fake Mrs. Stedman. What if the warrant had been issued for my arrest with the idea that I wouldn’t be arrested? All of the evidence against me is already in place. Right?”

“Right.”

“Well, with me as the only suspect, my death would pretty well close the case. That’s what you think, isn’t it?”

Daniels sat back. “I think that’s the only way your release makes any sense.”

“And only someone with a lot of power and money could pull that off? Right? Like Tony Stedman.”

“Like Tony Stedman,” Daniels agreed.

Price made a covert survey of the coffee shop. “This has been a set-up from the beginning, and now they’re ready for the final act. With my death and all the evidence stacked against me, the police will never look for anyone else. So, what can I do to stop them from getting away with this?”

Daniels finished off his cup and pushed it to the edge of the table. “We need time,” he said. “Time and a lot of luck.”

Price nodded, waiting for Daniels to continue. His chances weren’t looking very good, and he needed to hear something positive.

“I’ll try my best to solve this case,” he assured Denotta, “But you can help me with I what we need most.”

“What’s that?” Price asked with a glimmer of hope.

“What we need more than anything else,” he said, holding Price’s undivided attention “is for you to stay alive.”

End of Installment Fourteen

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