



LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 7

“Frank, I’ve got to get out of here. How long before the DA brings formal charges?”

Daniels had hoped to avoid that question for a while longer, but didn’t hesitate to answer. After all, a man deserved to hear the truth. “Not long. I’d say as soon as the doctor releases you, and you can be hauled down to the station for a formal inquiry.”

Denotta pushed himself to a sitting position, while trying to ignore the throbbing pain in his head. The room tilted slightly and then straightened. “Let me help you up,” Frank said, standing to his feet. “I can raise the bed.”

Price waved him away. “No, I’ve got to know my own weakness. I didn’t kill her, Frank, and I don’t have much time to prove who did.”

Daniels studied him for a moment. “You’re not planning on just walking out of here, are you?”

“You said it yourself,” he answered, managing a weak smile. “If I wait for the doctor’s release, I’ll go straight to jail.”

“You could let the police handle this, you know.”

“Is that what you would do in my place?”

Frank started to give him the expected response—the one he had been taught in the academy, and then stopped. This man’s life was in jeopardy, and the odds were not in his favor. He cleared his throat. “No, I guess I’d try to find out for myself. How’s your head?”

“Fine,” Price lied. “I think my biggest problem is the pain killers that they keep giving me. My brain feels like it’s been wrapped in cotton.”

Daniels shifted in his seat, the plastic cover creaking under his weight. “How do I know that you won’t leave here and flee the country?”

Price made a snorting noise that Frank took to be a laugh. “With what? I’m a starving PI remember, and using a credit card would be an instant giveaway. I couldn’t flee the country if I wanted to. I’m not sure I could afford to flee the state.”

Frank nodded and tried again. “Even if you make it out of here, you won’t have long, you know. Every policeman in the city will be looking for you.”

Price knew that the officer believed he was innocent and would give him what leeway he could—that he was only playing devil’s advocate as a token protest to ease his own conscience. “Someone has gone to a lot of trouble creating this frame.”

“You think it’s Stedman.”

“Who else? He had the most to gain, and I saw him kill her.”

“But you didn’t see who hit you over the head?”

“No.”

“All right. Let’s say I believe you. Where will you start?”

Price reached up to touch his wound gingerly. The pain had lessened, and his thoughts were becoming increasingly clear. “First, I will re-examine my own notes on the case, and then I will take apart the DA’s case, point by point.”

Daniels was quiet for a moment, and Denotta mentally prepared for an argument. What could he do if Daniels refused to give him the break he needed? He had practically admitted that he was going to run from the police. A telephone call would speed the DA’s actions and kill any hope he might have to exonerate himself.

“All right. Here’s what’s going to happen. I’m hungry, and as soon as we’re done talking, I’m going to lunch. When I return—let’s say in about an hour—we’re going to go over your case point by point. Is that agreeable to you?”

“Thanks, Frank.”

Daniels’s face was solemn as he passed through the hospital door.

End of Installment Seven

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