



Lady's Name

C.W. Myers

# LADY'S GAME

*A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY*

## *INSTALLMENT 17*

“Took you long enough. I’d about given up.”

Price stared around the disheveled office in amazement and then up at Frank, who was sitting behind his desk. “I stopped by my apartment first to see if they had searched there as well.”

“And had they?”

Price wasn’t sure if he should share the story of his visitor. Having been the only person to actually verify the existence of the woman, he was becoming increasingly reluctant to mention her. “Nothing was missing from my apartment.”

His answer struck Frank, who was used to dealing with people having something to hide, as evasive and therefore more interesting than the sum of the words should have been. “Nothing was missing,” he repeated. “Had someone broken in? Had the place been searched?”

Price’s eyes darted through the piles of rubble, while he wondered why he was trying so hard to protect the woman who had very likely set him up for murder. Was it simply because she was beautiful, or was it because that deep down he was hoping to prove her to be as innocent as he was?

Frank noted his hesitation and made an intuitive leap. “She was there, wasn’t she—the woman who hired you, Mrs. Stedman?”

Price walked farther into the room, reaching behind him to close the door to his office, as if someone might be listening. The policemen investigating the break-in had all gone, leaving Frank to take his statement. “She was waiting for me, weapon drawn—a SIG .40 from the look of it.”

“I’m surprised she let you go.”

“She didn’t want to. If she’d had her way, I’d be long gone by now—probably dead.”

“So, how’d you manage it?”

Price began to clean up the mess nearest the door. “Refused to go with her and convinced her that the blood evidence would be too strong if she killed me at the apartment.”

“You were right, of course. Your death would have left Stedman as the only suspect.”

“Whereas my disappearance would have just tagged me as a guilty runner.”

“Exactly. You did well. Did she say anything?”

Price placed a number of file folders and paperbacks on the desk. Having just started his agency, the majority of the folders had been empty, and the paperbacks had been read more than once. “Before she left, I asked her to tell me who she really was.”

“And?” Frank prompted, when Price, caught up in the memory, failed to continue the story.

“She insisted that she was Mrs. Tony Stedman.”

“But you know that’s impossible; right? The fingerprints and dental records were conclusive. The real Mrs. Stedman is lying on a slab, not prancing about in red, waving a gun.”

Price looked unconvinced. “But she seemed so sincere. I know you’re right, but why would she have lied to me? No one but you believes that she even exists. She had nothing to gain by lying to me.”

“What did she have to gain by setting you up? She was involved in the murder, Price. She would hardly be opposed to lying. Did she leave any fingerprints at the apartment?”

“Fingerprints. Wouldn’t that be helpful! She wasn’t wearing gloves, but then again, I didn’t actually see her touch anything.”

“Doesn’t mean she didn’t. I’ll send the team over to check it out. Any idea what they were looking for?”

Price looked behind the desk, and spotted the file folder he had been searching for sticking out from under the radiator. The name on the tab was *STEDMAN*. “Any and all information I had on the case. Nothing that would justify the risks they took to get it.”

“Are you sure? Your mystery woman knew what you had uncovered. Right?”

“Yes, everything.”

“Then, either she thought there was more, or something you discovered was significant to the case. Think, Price. You may already have the key to solving the case and just don’t realize it.”

## End of Installment Seventeen

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