



LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 6

Detective Frank Daniels shifted in the uncomfortable hospital chair as he waited for Denotta to regain consciousness. In his lap was the narrow file of reports and crime scene photographs detailing the known facts concerning the Stedman murder—an open and shut case with all of the facts pointing to Price Denotta as the killer. The only inconsistency was Price—a man Daniels would have thought incapable of cold-blooded murder.

A change in breathing, followed by a weak moan drew his attention to the bed. Denotta had been out for over an hour, missing the doctor's visit and the transfer to a private room. Frank moved to stand by the silver railing while Price made a valiant attempt to wake up.

“Welcome back,” Daniels said, as the other man's eyes began to clear and focus.

Denotta frowned by way of greeting. “So, it wasn't a bad dream, was it?”

“Afraid not. Do you remember our earlier conversation?”

“The one where you called me a liar and accused me of murdering Mrs. Stedman? Vaguely. Am I under arrest?”

“Not officially, but you might want to call a lawyer.”

“And tell him what? You don’t believe me, and you know me. Why would he?”

“Price, the DA will file for murder one and ask for the death penalty. A good lawyer might be able to get the charge reduced to manslaughter.”

Price shook his head and then groaned. “I didn’t kill her, Frank. Her husband did. There has to be some evidence proving what really happened. What happened to the second bullet? And what about the distance? She was shot point-blank while my bullet was fired from across the room. And who cracked open my skull? Whoever did must have seen what happened or, at least, spotted Stedman at the scene.”

Daniels retrieved the manila file folder and flipped through the reports until he came to the deposition taken from the chauffeur. “I entered the house when I heard the shot. Price Denotta was standing over Mrs. Stedman’s body, holding a gun. He didn’t hear me come in. I grabbed the poker from the fireplace and hit him hard. He fell, and I saw Mrs. Stedman lying on the floor—dead. Her face was gone. I called 911.”

Price muttered something unpleasant under his breath. “That didn’t happen. Why would he say that it had? Was he the only witness?”

“As far as we know. You see our problem, Denotta. All evidence points to you.”

Price was quiet for a moment, his fingers pleating the white sheet absently as he considered his options. “I suppose Mr. Stedman has an iron-clad alibi for the time of the murder.”

“He was attending a gala given by the mayor and his wife.”

“Of course, he was. And I suppose he can produce dozens of witnesses placing him at the party.”

“All eager to come to his defense.”

“So, why wasn’t Mrs. Stedman with him at the party?”

Daniels gave him a strange look before answering. “She had complained of a headache and begged off. The DA will try to establish that she was feigning the illness in order to rendezvous with you.”

Denotta’s face crinkled into lines of overt consternation, the information obviously taking him by surprise. “But that doesn’t make any sense. Why would she be wanting to meet with me?”

Daniels smiled. “Your reaction is convincing, Denotta, but it’ll never play in court. We have evidence of your affair with Mrs. Stedman, including eyewitness reports as well as the numbers of the hotel rooms you visited. And that completes the three components of a

successful conviction—method, motive, and opportunity. Unless you can come up with something soon, son, you're as good as dead.”

End of Installment Six

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.crm Myers.com