



Lady's Name

C.W. Myers

LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 16

“I didn’t intend for you to be hurt by our little charade,” the woman said, without lowering the weapon.

Price moved further into the apartment and closed the door. “Meaning what?”

The woman he had known as Mrs. Stedman shrugged. “Meaning...” she hesitated. “I didn’t expect things to go so far.”

“What did you think would happen when you framed me for murder?”

Her laugh tinkled across the room. “I didn’t mean *that*.” Her subtle emphasis on the last word chilled the room.

He wanted to believe that he had misunderstood the implication of her words, but knew he hadn’t. “My death won’t be easy to explain,” he tossed out, wondering if she could really kill him in cold blood. He wanted to imagine that a woman so beautiful was incapable of such a cold act, but experience had taught him otherwise.

“You’re right, of course. Your untimely death would cast a shadow of doubt on your obvious guilt, whereas your disappearance would serve to strengthen the case against you.”

Price wanted to say something to refute her words—something that would serve to illuminate the imperfection in her plan and convince her to spare his life,

but nothing came to mind. There was nothing wrong with her plan. He did, however, doubt her ability to pull it off, and that gave him hope. “I must commend you,” he said, hoping she would relax her guard. “You had me fooled from the beginning. How long had you and Stedman planned the murder of his wife? Months? Years?”

Her red lips twitched into a small smile, reminding him again of her flawless good looks. “About a year, I guess. We knew what we wanted to do almost from the beginning.”

“You just needed a patsy?” he guessed.

“You were certainly a godsend.”

“Meaning I fell for your obvious charms?”

She shook her head slightly. “That and the way you accepted everything I told you as fact. A background check would have ruined us.” She glanced at her watch and motioned toward the door with the barrel of the pistol. “Let’s get going.”

It was Price’s turn to smile. With a show of confidence, he ignored her directive and walked farther into the room, stopping in front of the couch. “I must respectfully decline,” he drawled, turning away from her to sit down.

“What are you doing?”

She was now using both hands to hold the gun—police style, and he didn’t doubt that she meant business. “Seems to me you have a problem,” he said. “If you kill me here, I’m almost certain to be dropped as a suspect, throwing suspicion again on Stedman. If you shoot me here, same thing. What you need is for me to be out of the apartment without having spilled any of my blood, and I would like to know how you plan to manage that.” From the expression on her face, he knew that she would like to know as well.

“Don’t make me kill you. I will, you know, if I have to. The plan would be blown, but no one would know about me.”

“You’d let Stedman take the fall alone?”

“I didn’t pull the trigger,” she said, beginning to edge toward the door.

Price knew that once she left the room, she might be out of his life forever. Nevertheless, trying to stop her was not an option.

“But who are you?” he asked, not really expecting an answer, but desperately wanting to know.

“I told you who I am,” she said, before closing the door. “I’m Mrs. Tony Stedman.”

End of Installment Sixteen

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