



Lady's Name

C.W. Myers

LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 3

Tony Stedman was a powerful man in the Southwest, who some said had his eye on an elected position, perhaps even governor. Because of this aspiring ambition and the fact that he usually traveled with an entourage of *yes* men and bodyguards, he was highly visible while at the same time, very private. Price Denotta watched him slide into the front seat of his chauffeur-driven limousine as his wife waved from the door.

From a weekend spent at the local library doing research, Denotta had learned that Stedman had inherited a vast fortune before the age of twenty-five, was audited twice for tax evasion, investigated for his suspected involvement in the abduction and murder of a local bank president, and rumored to have mob connections. From his photographs Denotta judged him to be about forty-five years old, attractive, athletic, and socially active. Besides being a majority stockholder in a number of different companies, he owned homes in several different states, nineteen automobiles, and a small jet.

The limousine dropped Stedman at his office building where he was met and escorted to the door by two men in dark suits. Two hours later

he returned to the limousine and left. Denotta followed at a discreet distance, weaving in and out of traffic until the car stopped at *Speedy Car Rentals* on the opposite side of town. While Stedman remained inside, the chauffeur left the limousine and entered the office. Ten minutes later he returned with the key to an avocado-green Pinto, and handed it to Stedman. When Stedman drove off in the Pinto, the chauffeur left in the opposite direction. Denotta gave the Pinto a five-minute start, and then followed.

Stedman drove almost ten minutes before turning into the driveway of an out-of-the-way motel, where he spent the remainder of the afternoon. Around five o'clock Mr. Stedman left the room, climbed into the Pinto, and drove it back to the rental store, where he was met by his chauffeur and driven home. Maybe Mrs. Stedman was right to be afraid.

Price watched Stedman enter his home around six o'clock and wondered if the day's excitement had come to an end. He was hungry, tired, and not looking forward to an evening spent watching the house settle. Reaching for the bologna sandwiches he had shoved into a brown paper sack that morning, he wondered if all night surveillance was even necessary. One shake of his coffee thermos told him that it was empty, and that decided it. He would leave tonight and show back up first thing tomorrow morning.

Before he could start the car, however, a piercing scream shattered the quiet of early evening. Price froze—his mind refusing to believe what

his ears told him was true. Just as he was deciding it must have been a screech owl, he heard the scream again. This time he didn't hesitate. With gun in hand, he leapt from the Mustang and ran to the front door. As he neared, he could hear the shouting from within. A man's voice, loud and angry, intermingled with the pleading cries of a woman.

Denotta grabbed the doorknob and twisted, surprised to find the door unlocked. What he saw when he entered the house was Stedman, standing over his wife with the Colt 45. The shot sounded almost immediately, its loud blast echoing through the hallway like a bomb. Mrs. Stedman slumped to the ground, covered in blood, her face gone. Then Stedman turned the gun on Denotta, and Price smelled his own death. With no time to think he pulled the trigger, and Stedman went down. Before he could react any further, he felt a hard crack on the back of his head, and the world went black.

End of Installment Three.

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