



LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 23

“How you set up his wife was the interesting part,” Denotta repeated, wondering just what planet this lady was from. She might have been recounting the latest episode from one of the soaps for all the emotion she displayed. “So, tell me. What did you do that was so interesting?”

“Well,” she began, leaning in close and lowering her voice. Even in the confines of the jail, she had a fresh, perfumed scent about her. “We needed his other wife immediately out of the way, but alive, so the body would be fresh when we were ready. We thought of killing her and freezing the body, but forensics has gotten way too sophisticated for that. So Tony suggested to her that they take a six-month trip to Europe. She, of course, was thrilled with the idea, and so everything was set. He handled the bogus travel plans, and she told all their friends.”

“So he didn't really make travel plans at all,” Denotta clarified.

“Right. He drugged her the morning they were to leave and had two of his men bring her to the Douglas State Hospital. He had already made arrangements for them to admit his deranged wife, and through a series of generous donations, they were persuaded to keep her drugged and her records sealed.”

“Then all that was left was me. Is that right?”

She smiled. “You were the best part—perfect for your role in every way.”

“Glad I could help out.”

“As I explained before, Price, I really didn’t want you to get hurt. I like you. Anyway, you probably would have gotten off.”

“How do you figure?”

“Well, the only real witness was the chauffeur, and I understand that he’s disappeared.”

“Oh, yeah? Dead?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. I leave the details to Tony.”

“Fair enough. No sense incriminating yourself further. But what about Tony’s alibi the night of the murder?”

“Oh, he was there. The party was quite large, and no one could keep track of everyone every single minute.”

“So, he left the party and came home to shoot his wife’s face off.”

“Yes. She had been brought to the house earlier that evening and was waiting for him.”

“Drugged?”

“Of course. She never knew what happened.”

“But who did I shoot?”

She giggled as if this were a very funny story. “You shot Tony in a bullet-proof vest. He needed your bullet as well as your gun to plant the evidence.”

“And our supposed affair?”

Her bowed lips turned up at the corners in a smug expression. “I thought of that part. You had been seen at all of the hotels when you were tailing Tony. I just went back later with James, the chauffeur, and signed our names to the books. He was about your height and build. I made sure no one got a good look at him.” She paused and gave him a coy look from under her lashes. “People tend to believe what I tell them.”

He had no doubt about that. “So, what now? Are you going to tell the DA what you’ve told me and make a deal?”

“I already have. I loved Tony; I really did, but not enough to spend the rest of my life in jail.”

“Were you given complete immunity?”

Again, the sly smile. “I had no idea what Tony was up to. When I found out that he had two wives, I threatened to leave him. He promised me he would solve the problem. I didn’t ask for details; I just followed his instructions. I’d always been a little afraid of him, you know.”

Denotta marveled at the neat way she had extricated herself from the entire murder. “What will you do after this?”

“Well, George, one of Tony’s partners, has been a dear. He assures me I’m quite a wealthy woman, and is helping me work out the legal details to secure my share of the business. I think he’s a little in love with me. Of course, he’s married—for now, anyway.”

The cold tone of her last statement was chilling, and Denotta felt sorry for George and his family, especially his unsuspecting wife. A loud knock at the door signaled that the visit was over. He took a mental picture of her to file away in a locked room of his mind and left.

Frank Daniels was waiting for him upstairs. “Did you hear all that?” Price asked, as he approached the police detective.

“Yes, basically what she’d told us earlier.”

“Earlier? But what about her being in danger, and my getting the whole story?”

“Oh, she is definitely in danger; that part’s true enough. And yes, we had her statement, but she liked you, and we were hoping you could get more. Maybe even enough to hang her on a lesser charge.”

“And she received immunity for her testimony?”

“Yes, but don’t take it too hard. Tony was a bad specimen. We needed to get him anyway we could, even if it meant losing her. She’ll be back. Her kind always is.”

The detective’s words weren’t a great comfort. Not that he doubted the accuracy of the statement, but had to wonder how many more people would have to be hurt before justice was finally served.

“Need a ride back to your office?”

“No, thanks. I’d like to walk.” The truth was that he needed to walk off the whole case and put it behind him—especially Rachel Stedman. He wanted to re-live everything from the moment she’d walked into his office, examine it, analyze it, and then lock it away in his mind forever. He’d never forget her; he knew that. He just wanted to find a way to live in peace with her memory and move on. Little did he suspect how soon that memory would turn to reality when Rachael Stedman once again re-entered his life.

The End.

End of Installment Twenty Three

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