



Lady's Name

C.W. Myers

LADY'S GAME

A PRICE DENOTTA MYSTERY

INSTALLMENT 2

Price Denotta stood staring at the large Colonial style house with its wide front verandah, its large white columns, and its manicured gardens. All that was missing was Scarlett O'Hara in her long green gown, fluttering her fan and sashaying across the lawn. Who couldn't be happy in a place like this?

Price moved away from his faded blue Mustang toward the front steps of the stately manor, wondering what would have happened if he had agreed to stay here as Mrs. Stedman's cousin and for a moment, regretted his decision. His tiny apartment would seem smaller after visiting here. At the first chime of the doorbell, the door opened into a hall, large enough for a barbecue, and a starch-capped maid.

"Come in."

He did, following her into a high-ceilinged, gold flocked, drawing room with a floor-to-ceiling fireplace at one end. Mrs. Stedman sat in front of the fireplace like the Queen Mother holding court. He removed his hat in lieu of a bow, wondering if a timely tug at his forelock would be expected.

“Mr. Denotta,” she said, extending her hand, “How good of you to come,” she added, as if he were an invited guest. “I think we’ll start with the top floor and give Mary time to make us a cup of coffee. Did you wipe your feet at the door?”

Her baby blue suit fit her like a glove—with high-heeled shoes dyed to match. He halfway expected her to don a white glove and inspect the handrail for dust as he followed her up the winding circular staircase. Maybe there was a good reason her old man wanted to kill her.

When she stopped at the third floor, he was sure his ragged breathing would return to normal—eventually.

“I invented you a cover,” she whispered, unnecessarily. “You’re my new decorator.”

He could smell the subtle scent of her floral perfume as she leaned forward, placing her hand on his arm—a gesture suggesting intimacy. He took a step back.

“What did you want to show me, Mrs. Stedman?” he asked, reminding her of the reason he was there, “besides the house of course, although it would be hard to convince anyone that this house was in need of re-decorating. How long have you and your husband lived here?”

“Fifteen years,” she told him, opening a bedroom door.

Something in his mind yelled a warning, a jarring, discordant note that he filed away for later. The bedroom was green—shades and accents amid bright summer flowers—covered in mounds of expressive pillows. She walked to the bedside table and opened a drawer.

“See.”

He moved beside her and looked down. A Colt .45 stared back with menace. “Is it loaded?”

“I haven’t touched it. Mary found it last week when she was cleaning. I know it wasn’t here before.”

“How often does she clean?”

“Up here? About once every two weeks.”

“And you’re sure it wasn’t here two weeks ago?”

“Yes, I’m sure. He’s going to kill me, I know it.”

Her voice broke, and he found her distress touching, in spite of his better judgment. She was an attractive woman and her fears might be genuine, but she wasn’t telling him the whole truth—of that he was sure. What could she be hiding that meant more to her than her life?

End of Installment Two

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.crmyers.com