

The Purple Palace

The woman with platinum blonde hair and green eyes put her little finger in her mouth.

'Hey!' she said. 'For an old guy, you're not bad-looking. She sipped some champagne from her glass. Then she smiled. She smiled, and suddenly her whole face changed. Before, she had looked like a naughty child. Now she was a beautiful woman. She had high cheek-bones below her beautiful green eyes. She had a long, straight nose and a wide mouth. Her shiny blonde hair was cut short. Her eyes were shining as she looked straight at me.

'Yeah!' she went on. 'You really don't look too bad. Do you know something, mister? I could fall for² a guy like you.'

What could I say? I'm in my early thirties – well, that's what I tell people. The truth is that I'm nearer forty, and the woman I was looking at couldn't have been a day more than twenty-three. I meet lots of women in my line of work², but I rarely⁴ meet anyone as beautiful as this one. And on the few occasions when I have met a real stunner⁴, she certainly hasn't wanted to have anything to do with me.

Still, the woman had a point². I'm not bad-looking – dark hair, brown eyes, good teeth, nice clothes. And I've kept myself in shape². I go to the gym three times a week. It's true that my face shows the marks of my time as an amateur⁴ boxer. There are some small scars round my eyes, and my nose isn't quite straight any more – somebody broke it in a fight.

'The only problem,' the woman continued, 'is your job. No one ever got rich by doing your job. And I like expensive things.'

She smiled again. She had another point! I was sure that she

spent a lot of money, and I certainly wasn't rich.

I'm a private investigator – that is, a private detective – in Los Angeles, California. My clients are often people who live on the edges of L.A. society⁴. Protection, security, blackmail, corruption, missing persons, small crimes⁴ – these are the things I deal with every day. Sometimes, I even have a murder case. The only jobs I don't do are divorce cases and marriage problems.

My life isn't easy, but there is usually enough money each month to pay the rent for my apartment and the rent for my office. But there isn't any place in my life for a woman who looks like a million dollars² and dresses as if she *had* a million dollars. And the woman I was looking at now was obviously one of those!

'Still, what the hell²,' the blonde said. She put down her glass of champagne and took a step towards me. 'Come on, Charlie, we're alone tonight. Kiss me.'

Charlie? My name's not Charlie. It's Lenny, Lenny Samuel. Some people call me Len. Still, I wasn't going to argue. I stood up and took a step towards the blonde.

'Hey, fella³, sit down!' a man's voice shouted.

The blonde smiled. I opened my arms.

'Hey, fella! I told you to sit down!' the man shouted again.

I stared into the blonde's beautiful green eyes. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

'Sit down! *Now!*' the voice said.

I turned around. The man standing behind me was taller than me, and heavier. I'm one-metre-ninety tall, and I weigh just over ninety kilos – all muscle! But this guy was bigger than me in every way. And he was angry.

'Sit down, fella!' he shouted. 'I can't see the screen if you stand there!'

I sat down and I looked up at the movie screen again. Now the blonde actress was kissing a man. It was a close-up shot¹.

The woman was thirty metres away from me and her face was five metres high. Her name was Gail Lane. She was the hottest actress¹ in Hollywood, and this was the closest I had ever got to her!

‘I’m sorry, fella,’ I said to the man behind me. ‘I guess I got carried away².’

I go to the movies a lot, especially when business is bad. And just then, business was very bad indeed. My last case had ended a few weeks before. Someone had stolen a racehorse from a beautiful woman. I’d found the horse, but I hadn’t earned any money. Since then, I’d tidied my office, cleaned my car, gone to the gym a lot, and waited for the phone to ring. It hadn’t rung. I didn’t have any new clients. So, most days, I went to the movies.

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The movie ended and the lights came on. I got up and went to the men’s washroom. There was a floor-to-ceiling mirror there, and I stood in front of it and looked at myself. It was true – I wasn’t bad-looking. I was wearing a black leather jacket, a bright checked shirt and a pair of new black trousers. My brown Timberland boots completed the picture.

I took out my dark glasses and put them on. ‘Cool³!’ I said to the mirror, and I walked out of the movie theatre¹.

It was just before midnight. I decided that I didn’t need the dark glasses. I walked round the corner to the parking lot³, and I got into my old grey Chrysler. Then I drove slowly past the bars and clubs, trying to decide what to do. It was too early to go to bed. But it was too late to start calling friends to see if they wanted to go out. I was bored. I wanted something to happen.

I was just passing the Purple Palace, one of L.A.’s most expensive nightclubs, when something did happen. A shiny, white open-top car suddenly pulled out from the sidewalk³. I hit the brakes² and the Chrysler stopped. But the white car didn’t

stop. It hit the side of the Chrysler with a loud crash!

I was OK. I got out of the car. The Chrysler was OK too – they don't make cars like that any more. But the white car wasn't OK and neither was its driver! The front of the car was badly smashed, and oil was running out from under the engine. The driver was still sitting at the wheel and there was some blood on his face.

The driver of the white car was wearing a smart suit and he had short, well-cut hair. He looked about twenty-five, but his hair was steel grey.

After a few moments, he opened the car door. He walked towards me with an angry face.

'I'm going to make you pay for this,' he said.

He tried to grab my arm. His breath smelt of whisky. Then he tried to hit me. He tried, but he didn't succeed. I used to be a boxer, and this man was drunk! I leant back, and the blow missed. I was about to knock the man to the ground, when he suddenly closed his eyes and fell over. I hadn't touched him.

I felt a hand on my shoulder.

'That guy's a fool,' a voice said.

I turned around. It was a woman with platinum blonde hair and beautiful green eyes!



'That guy's a fool,' a voice said. I turned around.

‘What Do You Want Me to Do?’

‘That guy’s a fool,’ Gail Lane repeated. ‘I’m sorry, mister.’ I opened my mouth to say something but no words came out. I was standing in the middle of a busy street in downtown³ L.A., with the hottest actress in Hollywood!

‘Say something,’ Gail said.

‘Hey! Well! Mmm – What do you want me to do?’ I managed to say.

‘Well, let’s start by getting my car off the road,’ Gail said.

‘Your car?’ I asked.

‘Yeah,’ she replied. ‘It’s my car. He shouldn’t have been driving it. He’s had far too much to drink. The parking attendant brought the car round to the front of the club, and Mike took the keys. I argued with him, but he wouldn’t let me drive.’

‘Mike?’ I asked.

‘Do you repeat everything someone says?’ Gail asked sharply. ‘Mike Devine is his name. Have you ever heard of him?’

I had. Mike Devine was the son of Joel Devine, who was a rich and successful movie producer¹. Mike had never done a day’s work in his life. But he was never short of money – his father made sure of that. As a result, Mike Devine had got into lots of trouble. There were always stories about him in the newspapers – stories about gambling debts, accidents, women, things like that. Now, Mike Devine lay in the street next to my Chrysler.

Gail and I pushed the damaged white car to the sidewalk. A crowd of people was standing there, staring at us. Then someone recognized Gail. Suddenly, people started to point at us and talk.

Gail looked at me. She smiled and her face changed, just like it had in the movie. She touched my arm.

'There is something else you can do for me,' she said in a quiet, warm voice. 'I can't stay here. People have seen me. I've got to get home. Will you help me, please?'

'Sure,' I said. 'Let's go.' I was delighted. I was excited! Perhaps Gail would invite me into her apartment. There would be soft lights and soft music. Anything might happen!

She smiled at me again. 'You're a nice guy,' she said.

We walked over to the Chrysler. Mike Devine's eyes were open now. There was blood on his smart suit. When he saw Gail, he stood up and held on to the side of my Chrysler.

'Get into this guy's car before the police come, Mike,' Gail said to the young man.

She pulled Mike Devine by his jacket, opened the back door of the Chrysler, and pushed him in.

'Oh,' I muttered. 'You'd like me to take him home too?'

'He lives at 9002, Hollywood Boulevard,' Gail said sweetly. 'Thank you for your help.'

'It's a pleasure,' I replied. 'Please get in.' I opened the front passenger door.

Gail looked puzzled for a moment, then she laughed.

'No, thanks,' she said. 'I'm taking a cab². Thank you again for your help.'

Her lips touched my cheek briefly, and then she was gone. She ran to the sidewalk, where the doorman of the Purple Palace called a cab for her. I watched her go, then I got into the Chrysler. There was a strange noise coming from the back seat. I turned round. Mike Devine was being sick. I opened the window and drove away. A few minutes later, Mike Devine was unconscious.

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9002, Hollywood Boulevard, was a tall new building with windows of black glass. I stopped outside it and switched off the

Chrysler's engine. A doorman came out of the building and walked up to the car. He was a short, heavy man with a small moustache.

'Hey, you can't park here, mister,' the doorman said.

I pointed at the unconscious figure lying on the back seat.

'Does he live here?' I asked.

The doorman looked at Mike. Then he opened the back door of the car, and stepped away as the smell reached him.

'Yeah, he lives here,' the doorman replied. 'Apartment 501.'

'Help me to take him up to his apartment,' I said.

Together, the doorman and I carried Mike Devine into the hallway and across to the elevator³. The doorman came up with us in the elevator, and waited while I found some keys in Mike Devine's trouser pocket. I unlocked the apartment door.

'OK,' the doorman said. 'Are you a friend of Mr Devine?'

'Well, no,' I replied. 'But I'm a friend of a friend. Why?'

'We're very careful about who comes in and out of this building. But if you're a friend of Mr Devine's friend, then I guess you can go in,' the doorman replied. 'But you'll have to give me your name.'

I gave him one of my business cards⁴.

'Huh! A private eye⁴!' the doorman muttered.

'A private detective,' I replied. 'But can you keep an eye on² my car?'

'OK,' the doorman replied and got back into the elevator.

I opened the apartment door and pulled Mike Devine into a big living-room. I knew at once that something was wrong. All the lights were on. Clothes and books were lying all over the floor. Paintings hung sideways on the walls.

'Where's the bathroom?' I asked Mike.

He muttered something and pointed to a door. I took him into the bathroom and turned on the shower – full power, ice-cold! Then I pushed him into the shower with his clothes on. He made a noise when the ice-cold water hit his face, but five