

The Daily Double

By Warren Bull

“She’s not dead yet,” said the red-faced sweaty man plopping down across from me in my favorite booth in the diner. “You’ve got to do something. You said you’d take care of it. Tony assured me you were the one to talk to. My wife’s driving me crazy.”

I glanced up from my racing form.

“Whatever you’re selling, I don’t want any. Scram.”

He leaned toward me and raised his voice. “Look I paid you to...”

I put up my hand and gave him a cold stare.

“I don’t know who you think I am, but you’re mistaken. There are a lot of short men who dress well in New York. Maybe I resemble someone you know. Before you blab your personal business all over the place, think about if you want people to overhear you.”

He looked around. None of the surrounding booths were occupied. He lowered his voice.

“I’m not wearing a wire. You can search me.”

I took him into the bathroom and did just that. He was clean. We returned to the booth.

He looked like he was going to burst into speech, but I managed to go first.

“I don’t know you.”

He interrupted. “I’m Terry Williams.”

“I don’t know what you want. I could have Gino throw you out of this place and give you a beating to help you remember not to bother people you don’t know.”

Williams took a breath and spoke more slowly. “Please don’t.”

“Because I am such a nice guy and because I am in a good mood. I’ll give you five minutes of my time. You implied that you had hired someone to provide certain services to solve a family problem involving your wife.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Williams, “only I paid the fee entirely, but the services were not provided.”

“First, understand that you did not pay me for those services. Let’s say you know a guy who knows another guy who knows still another guy who can provide something you want. Men like that do business, especially with a civilian, through cut outs. You tell a guy what you want. He tells another guy who tells the service provider. Somebody else gives you the price. You make the payment to a different cut out. You never see the same man twice; you never, ever meet the service provider.”

I leaned over the table toward him and continued. “Pray that you never do. If you roll over for the police, all you can say is that you asked for help from one guy. He didn’t take any money from you. A second guy gave you a price. He didn’t say what it was for. You paid a third guy who might have looked a little bit like me. He took your money without discussing what the payment was for.”



“Thanks for the explanation,” said Williams, “but the contract was not fulfilled.”

“Did you have second thoughts? If you call it off, you forfeit the payment.”

Williams said, “I didn’t call it off, but it didn’t happen. I want my money back or I want the thing done.”

“You work in an office don’t you?”

“How is that relevant?” asked Williams.

“Humor me. You tell people what they should sell and buy, or how big a loan they can get. You sell advice.”

Williams nodded. “Something like that.”

“For your money, although I don’t have it, I’m going to give you some excellent advice. Get up. Walk out. Don’t look back. All you’ve lost to this point is money. If you keep pushing, you’ll lose something much more important. Something that cannot be replaced.”

Williams said, “My wife...”

“Get marriage counseling and live with her, move out or get divorced.”

“I can’t get a divorce.”

“You’re not thinking clearly. You can get a divorce. People do. I’m sure you have good reasons for not wanting a divorce, financial, family, maybe religious reasons. ‘Don’t want to’ is different than ‘can’t.’ I can pass your message on, but if I do, I promise you’ll hate the answer.”

Williams frowned and shook his head.

“You didn’t live this long and become as successful as you are by being stupid.” I said. “Don’t be stupid now. Listen, the service provider did you a favor by not following through. I bet you had a strong reason for wanting to be rid of the problem. I bet you whined about it all over the place. How long do you think it would take for the cops to figure it out? Once they start looking, they’ll find you made a substantial withdrawal of cash. Can you account for every penny of it? I bet you can’t. You come running down here sweating and breathing hard. You’re not tough enough to stand up to a police interrogation. You’d say something you shouldn’t and end up in prison. You wouldn’t like that.”

I looked at my wristwatch.

“Your time is up.”

I picked up the racing form and ignored Williams. He was silent for a few minutes. Then he left. I was considering a trifecta in the fourth race when another person sat down across from me. I recognized Julia Williams just before she erupted into speech.

“He’s not dead yet. You’ve got to do something. My husband...”

My first thought was that there might be hope the Williams marriage. They seemed so well matched. My second thought was that I needed to find a new diner.