

Who is Teddy Villanova? –A Serial Mystery: Chapter 11

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by [Paul Illidge](#) (June 2024)



The Great Society– Jack Levine, 1967

The driver let me off in front of Richie's condo, Gary waiting for me, a yellow plastic grocery bag in hand.

"Let me guess."

He opened the bag. Richie's worn alligator *winkle-picker* loafers which we'd found in the trunk of the Town Car.

Winkle-pickers (loafers with long, very pointed toes worn by 1950s rock and rollers) were Richie's preferred footwear during *Be Real* presentations. Kids loved the throwback winkle-pickers. Dressed in tight, dirty blue jeans and jean jacket, blond hair down to his shoulders, winkle-pickers on his feet, he'd prance around riffing wildly on the false version of reality drugs gave you, mugging into an invisible microphone like he was Mick Jagger: *We have to LEARN! sometime, we CAN'T! always GET! what we WANT!!* kicking his winkle-pickers high in the air to the beat of his own music, the adolescent crowds packed into the gymnasium screaming along with him *BE REAL! BE REAL! BE REAL!*

"Why the winkle-pickers?" I asked Gary as we rode the elevator to the eighth floor.

"I've got a hunch," he said.

Three lines of yellow police tape were still covering Richie's door. Gary checked. They didn't appear to have been tampered with. I handed him the key. We went inside.

Richie's condo was the thing he was most proud of in his life. He saw it as a demonstration of how far he'd come from his humble, impoverished beginnings (the means through which he'd been able to afford such a luxurious six-room apartment never spoken of). His taste as an interior decorator came as a shock when you saw what he'd done with the place. A Scandinavian look, blond wood, soft white tones, black and chrome furniture, large, colourful abstract paintings, bronze, marble and Inuit sculpture on pedestals.

Other than dead petals that had fallen from a dried out floral bouquet in the vase on his glass top dining room table, nothing seemed to be amiss. There were no signs of a struggle, nothing to indicate foul play, let alone evidence of a murder.

Gary wondered if his hunch had been wrong. Maybe Richie hadn't been killed here after all.

We went into the white, black and polished chrome kitchen, everything as meticulously neat and tidy as ever—except for an almost empty bottle of red wine on the counter beside the sink, French (the vintage Richie always kept on hand for visitors), five wineglasses nearby, four with leftover amounts of red in them, the fifth with maybe a third of a glass of white. I went over and opened the refrigerator. Half a bottle of Richie's favourite Italian pinot grigio. He only drank white wine.

"Business meeting before they went out?" I asked Gary, his phone out, snapping close-up pictures of the glasses and the wine bottle.

"Looks like it. Lisi, the Town Car driver, the two no-necks. And Richie."

Finished, he took a tea towel from a hook in the cupboard under the sink, pulled five small white kitchen garbage bags from a dispenser on the door, along with a roll of paper towels which he tossed to me, then proceeded to use the tea towel to take each wineglass by the foot, empty the leftover wine in the sink, handing the glass to me to wrap in a sheet of paper towel before placing four of the glasses in one of the white kitchen bags, the fifth, Richie's, in a separate one.

"Prints?"

"Can't tell the players without them."

"Along with the lobby and elevator security tapes, we can place Lisi and his crew here in the apartment, escorting Richie outside to the Town Car, before they drove him somewhere, shot him and stuck his body in the trunk until they were finished with you." He found a green garbage bag under

the sink, opened it and had me put the white garbage bags carefully inside, tied it up and set it on the kitchen table. He picked up the yellow grocery bag with the winkle-pickers in it.

Down the hall to the master bedroom, Gary brought me over to the mirrored sliding doors of Richie's clothes closet. He took the winkle-pickers out of the grocery bag, handing them to me to hold while he took two pair of winkle-pickers, one black, one metallic blue from the rack, set them on top of the rack, placing the alligator pair in between so the shoes were lined up along the edge, heels out.

"Notice anything?"

I know nothing about shoes; was about to ask for a clue when it hit me: the heels on the shoes were all even across the bottom, showing virtually no sign of wear.

It dawned on me: "Remember Richie's thing about your body being the right weight for your shoes?"

"Worn on the outside or inside of the heel a sign you're too heavy for them."

We looked at the shoes for a moment, remembering. "He was so proud of being the *right weight* for his shoes. All three pairs have perfectly even heels. How could a pair of Richie's shoes have turned up in the trunk of the Town Car if he wasn't wearing them?"

One step ahead of me, Gary had his phone out getting close-ups of the clothes closet, the shoe rack, with the even-heeled row of winkle-pickers sitting on top. He dropped the three pair of shoes into the grocery bag.

While Gary had a final look around, I went into Richie's office to check his computer. With Marti's threats to do harm to mine one day *when I least expected it*, every twenty-four

hours I sent Richie all my files for backup.

His laptop gone from the top of his desk as I expected it would be, this wasn't a cause for concern. Not yet at least. Leading the kind of life Richie did, security was paramount. As a result he kept a duplicate laptop he called the Twin, identical make and model, onto which he transferred both our files daily, the Twin kept in a false-bottomed suitcase at the back of his bedroom closet, the combination to open it on a slip of paper in the right breast pocket of his *BE REAL* performance jean jacket.

The key where it should have been in the pocket of the jacket, I opened the suitcase, the Twin resting safe and sound under the false bottom. I closed up, felt the strongest pangs yet of sorrow at losing Richie—

I jumped when a cell phone began ringing on the floor under the window in a far corner of the room, where it appeared to have been thrown.

I ran over and picked it up as it continued ringing, trying to decide if I should—

"Answer it!" Gary shouted from down the hall.

Unknown name, unknown number.

I picked up, but didn't say hello. An older woman's voice. Gentle. Sweet. "Richard?"

Silence. "Richard, dear, it's your mother..." Silence. I could hear congested breathing. "Are you there ... Richard?"

Gary dropped me off at the Mont Rémy. Hilario wanted to talk to me. After what I'd been through with the kidnapping, and now the fire at my home, he wanted to offer me a room for as long as I needed one. Free, as were meals and laundry, provided I played in the lobby lounge from time to time. He still hadn't been able to find a replacement for Johnny

Hutton, Jr., the musician's union having deemed the hotel a dangerous work environment after my abduction. It was impossible to book anyone. Business was suffering. A lounge needed music. It was one of the reasons people went there in the first place, was it not? To get away from the daily grind and their personal problems—

My phone rang. Hilario told me to take the call, handed me a room key, along with a wad of hundred-dollar bills, waving off my protests as he turned quickly for the reception counter where someone was waiting to speak with him.

"We're throwing a spontaneous celebration tonight at 6:00!" Victoria shouted into the phone. "A \$495 million-dollar deal that we didn't think we were in the running for came through! I thought it might be fun and productive for your writing if you came along. See people outside of the business context *partying it up!* You should come! We could chat! I don't think I came across too well earlier! I don't know where the real estate hustler came from! I've never done that before! Can you accept a sincere apology?"

"I can."

"It would give me a second chance to make a first impression, corny as that sounds."

"I like corny."

"So do I."

"Where am I going?"

"The Intercontinental Hotel on Bloor, two blocks east of the office."

"Dress?"

"You can wear one if you like," she joked, her shouted words with the hint of a slur to them, as if she might already have

started celebrating.

By the time I'd bought a new wardrobe, some shoes and basic necessities with the cash from Hilario, returned to my room at the Mont Rémy to clean up and dress, it was 7:30 when the taxi let me off in front of the Intercontinental. A sign in the lobby directed people to the company's private party on the 17th floor, the small ballroom.

The celebration well underway, two-hundred people, crystal chandeliers, hors d'oeuvres and four busy bars, the music was loud, conversation ebullient, the mood one of success and jubilation.

Smiling nods to the odd person I had occasion to meet the few times I'd been in the office, I made my way through the partying crowd in search of Victoria, plucking a glass of champagne from a passing waiter's tray, downing it in one thirsty sip to settle my nerves which were a jangle after the last twenty-four hours. I started after the waiter in search of another—only to be waylaid by a hand grabbing mine from behind and turning me around. Victoria brought her few-drinks-too-many smile close to my face.

"Disappointment was setting in that you wouldn't make it."

"I had a few things to take care of."

"Of course. I know you're in a fix right now. Anything I can do, you just tell me. I'm here to help," she kidded, swaying slightly, her eyes closing briefly until she spotted the champagne waiter threading his way through the crowd toward us. Stepping over, she snagged two classes as he passed, handing me one, raising hers for a sip, wobbling again until I steadied her.

"Why don't we get out of here," I suggested, holding her up.

"Otherwise—"

"I know. It looks bad. Stupid of me."

"You're celebrating."

"Don't rationalize."

"You're entitled. I'm not really enjoying myself anyway. How did you get here?"

"Walked over from the office. My car's parked there."

"I'll drive you home. Maybe take a look at that spare bedroom you said was looking for an occupant."

She managed a smile.

As far as I could tell, the only one to notice us heading for the exit was the senior partner emeritus, the one who fancied himself a wild-living Lothario like his architect hero Frank Lloyd Wright. He threw me a lascivious wink as we passed by.

We took it slowly along Bloor, Victoria offering embarrassed, *humiliated* apology after apology, as the inebriated will do, snuggling against me when she started shivering, having left her coat at the hotel or the office. She couldn't remember which.

As we jaywalked across St. George Street to the office she went silent, closed her eyes, wavered a second then collapsed in my arms. Traffic stopped in both directions. Victoria roused herself. We carried on to the sidewalk, where she paused to take deep breaths, pointing to her car in the reserved space to the left of the front door of the building. We headed across the interlocking stones, Victoria wobbling on her high heels, walking tentatively, a security spotlight blinking on just before we reached her car. She opened her clutch. Looked inside, probed with her finger. Swore.

"I left the keys in my desk."

"I'll get them."

"Take my pass card."

"I've got one."

"Of course you do."

"Will you be okay?"

She nodded. "I'm sorry about this."

"It's fine."

Floor level night-lighting in the lobby and up the stairs. The elevator not operating after hours, I ran to the fifth floor, cut through the design department to the partners' offices, the corridor dark except for the *Fire Exit* sign at the end of the hall—where a flashlight blinked on, someone running out of Victoria's office, aware of me, I was sure, a hand up shielding my eyes, the blinding flashlight, a burst of gunfire, a searing pain in my chest—

To be continued...

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Paul Illidge's most recent book is the true crime financial thriller *RSKY BZNS* (New English Review Press, 2022), a "fascinating story" (Frank Abagnale, Jr., author of *Catch Me if You Can*), a "gripping and intricate read" (Conrad Black). His book *THE BLEAKS* (ECW Press), was a *Globe & Mail* Best Book of 2014. Books in his *Shakespeare Novels* series *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*,

Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, are all available internationally at www.kobobooks.com

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