

Who is Teddy Villanova? –A Serial Mystery: Chapter 2

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by [Paul Illidge](#) (September 2023)



Street Scene No. 1, Jack Levine, 1938

David?" a woman's voice. "Can you hear me?"

I could, a pleasant voice, though far away, like it was coming through a seashell. My head was aching and my mouth felt dry. It was hard to swallow. I opened my eyes.

"Well hello, stranger." She was standing beside the hospital bed, unhooking the I.V. bag, removing the line from my right

arm: a nurse about my age, wearing plum-coloured scrubs and a cheery smile. "We filled the tank and changed your oil. You're all set to go."

"Clean the windshield?" I managed.

She laughed. "I'll get right on it."

I laughed, though not too hard; I was sore in most parts of my body. "The name's not David, by the way."

She shrugged. "Of course it isn't. We couldn't find any I.D. in what was left of your tuxedo—which I bundled, bagged and put in the bedside table in case you were wondering—but we had to put something down on your chart besides X. I suggested David because your curly hair reminded me of that statue by Michelangelo in Florence. You know the one I mean?"

"I do," I said, my throat dry, my voice raspy.

"I'm Tilley, by the way. Like the hat," she added, smiling. She set the I.V. apparatus on the bed, took a bottle of water that was sitting on the bedside table. Opening it, she offered it to me after elevating the head of the bed. "This will help."

"Were you here when they brought me in?" I asked after a good long gulp.

"Actually, we don't know who brought you in. You just appeared." She read the confusion in my face. "It was a little after two. I was sitting at the nurses' station on my break reading. Something thumped against the other side of the counter. I looked up and across the hall. The elevator doors had just closed, the car heading down. There you were, unconscious or dead drunk, strapped to the gurney that someone had obviously pushed off the elevator. Any idea who the phantom Samaritan might have been?"

"I couldn't even guess."

"I had the resident examine you. Exhaustion and dehydration was the verdict. We put you on a drip, cleaned your wounds, took X-rays—nothing broken—and let you sleep."

"I wasn't drunk."

"We knew that."

"The gun was still in my belt?"

"Un-huh. But I took care of it before anyone noticed."

"You didn't call the police?"

"Why would I do that? It's none of my business."

"Very professional of you."

"Thanks."

There was an easy silence.

"So, if you're not David ... "

"Sorry. It's Teddy. Teddy Villanova."

Tilley made a face, a twinkle in her eye. "You don't look like a Teddy Villanova."

"I don't?"

"Does this have to do with the gun?" she asked, sitting down on the side of the bed, a quick look around before she leaned in. She lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "I slipped it in with the remains of your tuxedo."

"Remains?"

"It was pretty badly torn up."

"I can imagine."

"Funny," she kidded, "I wouldn't have pegged you as the

dangerous type."

"Well, not in my weakened condition ... "

Laughing as she got up from the bed, she pulled two quarters out of the pocket of her scrubs and set them on the bedside table. "There's a payphone in the visitors' lounge down the hall. Is there someone who can bring you clothes, and some I.D.?"

"There is," I said ...

A woman in an emerald green dress suit, matching heels and green feathered fascinator with a veil was talking on the payphone when I came into the lounge. There were chairs against the walls on two sides of the room, a loveseat against another, each with a view of the TV mounted in a corner of the ceiling across from the door. The seven o'clock local news broadcast was in progress. I sat down on the loveseat and started watching. Latest details on the investigation into the murder of the Shermans, a pharmaceutical tycoon and his wife who had been found strangled, tied to chairs on the deck of their indoor swimming pool.

The woman in green finished using the phone. I got up and walked over, picked up the receiver, and deposited two quarters.

While the phone rang, my eyes drifted to the TV. A night shot of Keating Channel in the port lands. Spotlights illuminating the raised drawbridge, police cars lining both sides of the channel, red and blue lights flashing. A barge crane was hoisting a black Lincoln Town Car out of the canal, swinging it left, water spilling out the open doors as the crane lowered the vehicle onto the back of a flatbed police tow-truck on the pier.

I hung up, pressed coin return before anyone answered, retrieved the quarters then walked over to the TV so I could hear the reporter talking to a man who had witnessed the accident. It was the driver.

“—We were behind him trying to make the bridge when out of nowhere this guy, swerving all over the place, obviously drunk, speeds past us, nearly hits us, crashes through the barrier and sails off the top of the raised bridge.” The camera went to a close-up of the Town Car as he talked: the driver’s door open, no sign of a body inside. “I hope the guy’s all right,” said the man. “I really do.”

“—Police divers began searching the channel shortly after dawn,” said the reporter, winding up her story. “In the meantime, the driver remains missing. Anyone with information is asked to call police.”

A feeling that someone was behind me, I turned. Tilley had come in while I’d been watching the news. She held a brown paper bag in her hand. “They need your bed,” she said. “I thought I’d give you this now.” She walked over. “I’m off duty, so, I’ll say goodbye.”

“Thanks,” I said, taking the bag with the *remains* of my tuxedo. “Thanks for everything. I hope you didn’t have a pool on my name being David.”

“As a matter of fact we did. Michael was the popular favourite.”

“Always a safe bet.”

“Let’s hope they find that Missing Man.”

I met her look. “I’m kind of hoping they don’t.”

A nod, a knowing smile, she turned and left me to make my call.

I couldn't tell Molly very much when I talked to her. The woman in the green-feathered fascinator returned to the lounge, from the look on her face intent on making another call, so we kept it short. Apparently she and Hilario had stayed at the hotel waiting for word until about six, when Hilario went home to grab a few hours' sleep, leaving Molly to phone him the moment she heard anything. He'll be so relieved. Had he contacted the police? No, as it turned out. But if there had been no word by noon, he was going to file a kidnapping report. There was plenty of surveillance video, plus he'd taken the name and contact information of everyone on the main floor of the hotel at the time, all of whom had agreed to be witnesses.

I gave her the combination to my locker in the staff change room, asked her to bring my clothes and let Hilario know right away that I was all right.

She arrived at the hospital half an hour later with the clothes, and a message from Hilario that he'd call me later in the day about playing that night as I was scheduled to.

Taking her through the evening's events as she drove me home, at the point where Mr. Briefcase revealed that it was my brother tied to the chair, Molly stopped me.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about last night!" she said. "Rumours on the street are that he's back in town, but in hiding. How weird. What do you think they wanted him to write down, his banking information? Where he's got the money stashed? And you were supposed to pry it out of him based on what, your *deep fraternal bonds*?" she said with a sarcastic laugh. "That's ridiculous."

"The whole thing was ridiculous."

"Unless they saw you jump from the car ... "

"I don't think they could have. It happened too fast."

"So they'll figure you're dead."

"Missing and presumed to be."

"Won't *they* be surprised," she said.

We drove in silence for a moment.

"I'm trying to figure out the guy in the chair," Molly said. "Who would he have been? Was he one of them, do you think, or did they abduct him too?"

I laughed at the thought. "He did seem pretty terrified. It was an intense situation. I didn't recognize him at the time, although when I saw him in the news clip at the hospital, I remember thinking he looked a lot like a guy my brother hung around with in high school named Tommy Riley."

"Tommy Riley, as in Riley & Boles? Lawyers?"

"That's right. You would have known Riley when you worked for my brother."

"Of course. Wily Riley. He came to the office two or three times a week to advise your brother on 'investment matters.' That was the joke. I'd like to see that news clip. I can tell you that if anybody knows whether your brother's materialized, and would be the first to try and flush him out before word gets around, it's Riley. He claimed something like ten million at the bankruptcy hearing, didn't he?"

"Twelve."

"That might explain last night."

It took me a second to realize what she was suggesting. "Except wouldn't Tommy have been afraid I'd recognize him?"

"He would have, unless he wanted you to recognize him." She

glanced over. "Maybe your brother let him in on the family secret at some point. They grew pretty close."

"Not that close ... "

"Maybe he figured it out. Assumed that you'd come to your brother's rescue."

"Riley's not smart enough to have figured out something like that. I mean, this is a guy who had himself tied to a chair, Molly, his mouth duct-taped, put himself in a room with a psychopath like Lisi with orders to shoot him if he didn't put down information that he himself knew he didn't have, then shoot me for not having it—what kind of plan is that? It escapes me. Were they hired hands following a script? Mr. Big the wise-guy boss? The gorillas his enforcers? A borrowed room in a trucking office in the port lands that just happened to have a two-way mirror? Am I just over-thinking this?"

An understanding smile, something Molly specialized in. "With your brother, it's hard not to." She paused. "I'll tell you what I think. I think he had something, or maybe even a lot to do with what happened last night, at least up to the point that Lisi attacked you." She flicked on her turn signal, we had reached my street. "He probably started the rumours himself. I wouldn't put it past him. You know how he loves smoking people out ... "

Detective Gary's dark grey unmarked car was parked in front of my house when we pulled up. Molly let me out then drove further down the street in search of a space. Detective Gary was Hugo my landlord's name for Lieutenant Gary Donovan, head of the police fraud squad at the time my brother "took a powder" as Gary liked to phrase it. We spent a fair amount of time piecing together the case against him four years ago, became friends in the process and stayed in touch after the case petered out for lack of evidence.

Gary knew more than anyone else the toll my brother's exploits

had taken on me and my parents, our relatives, our friends. He let me know when we finished working together that I could call him from anywhere, anytime, if I ever needed "assistance." I'd needed it a few times at Hugo's for domestic incidents between him and his son Marti, an abusive bully—a No-Good, Hugo called him—who had done prison stints for drugs, theft and fraud and, according to Gary, would be doing more, it was just a matter of time. It was Gary who I was hoping to call in the superstore before I passed out.

He was leaning against his car in his blue jeans, black leather coat and sunglasses eating an Egg McMuffin, a coffee beside him on the front hood. He picked it up and had a sip as I walked over. He noticed the bandages on my face, the slight limp in my walk. "You get in a fight with your piano last night?"

I laughed. "Something like that. What brings you by at this hour?"

"Sources say your wayward brother is about. I thought I'd better forewarn you."

"Molly says there've been rumours."

Gary shrugged. "I'm not holding my breath."

"Until last night I would have."

"What happened last night?"

Molly came up the sidewalk, carrying the grocery bag with my tux and the gun in it.

There was a violent shout from the back of the house, followed by an angry tirade in Finnish, amply peppered with English obscenities: Hugo going at his son Marti, the "No-Good"; more heated than usual that morning, with Marti firing back obscenities of his own, and death threats, both of them drunk, as they often were at that time of day, still loaded from the

night before.

Molly, Gary and I turned to look down the driveway. Hugo had risen from the yellow-and-white aluminum lawn chair posted outside his garage doors, his double-barrel shotgun raised and pointing at the much taller Marti's chest, Marti with his hand around the barrel taunting Hugo that he'd better hurry up and shoot before he took it away from him, mocking him for not having the guts, daring the old man to pull the trigger.

Quickly wrapping up his McMuffin, Gary handed it to me, brushed his hands on his pants and hustled down the driveway before things escalated, which they were bound to.

Molly and I headed inside, upstairs to my apartment. Hugo lived downstairs on the main floor, Marti above me in the third-floor loft. I had two bedrooms and a small study on the second floor. This latest outbreak of hostilities had begun one night a week earlier when Hugo caught Marti, desperate for booze and drug money, trying to steal his 1948 Vincent *Black Shadow* motorcycle (with its V-twin engine the fastest of its day) out of the garage. Hugo had told me there were plenty of interested buyers. It would fetch fifty- to sixty-thousand at least, according to his insurance agent. But it had sentimental value for Hugo. He'd escaped to Sweden on a Vincent when the Soviet Union invaded Finland in 1939. It was something he wouldn't let go of at any price.

Marti would have made off with the cycle that night, except for a string Hugo had put on the rear fender and attached to three empty kerosene cans on the shelf above it. When Marti went to wheel the cycle out of the garage, they came crashing down, waking Hugo, who stood in the entrance to the garage moments later with his shotgun and, not knowing it was his son, fired, both barrels. Marti by some miracle walked out unhurt. However that was enough for Hugo. He took to sitting outside the garage during the day as well, resolved that next time he wouldn't miss.

While Molly made coffee, I went to my study and turned my computer on. I had to print some pages up to show my publisher at our eleven o'clock meeting. As I was walking out, I noticed the door to the closet where I kept my manuscripts, writing files and personal records wasn't closed all the way, which is how I always left it. I opened the door, not bothering to pull the cord on the light, because it was already on. Someone had been in. The two Bankers boxes containing the files I'd compiled on my brother's *financial operations* over the years were missing.

I ran out to the back deck. Gary was still talking to Marti and Hugo down below, Gary holding the double-barrel now.

"Take it away from him!" Marti railed. "Restless use of a firearm!" angry, slurring his words. "Restless fuckin' use, man!"

Gary cracked the shotgun open and had a look. "Relax, Marti. It's not loaded."

"It will be next time!" fumed Hugo.

"-Gary, can you come up for a minute?" I called down.

Marti with a look of panic on his face went to step around Gary. "I have to be someplace."

"And would you bring Marti with you?"

"I have to be somewhere," Marti muttered, walking away.

"Right," said Gary snagging the back of his coat. "Upstairs."

Marti had been warned repeatedly about sneaking into my apartment when I wasn't home. Watching TV. Helping himself to stuff in my fridge. Snooping around, taking things then returning them on subsequent visits like it was a game he was playing. A power thing, as most things were with Marti. Harmless enough, in that it didn't happen all the time, but

creepy in its way with a borderline psychotic like Marti. Mostly I put up with it for Hugo's sake. He was a wonderful landlord; gentle, friendly, understanding and, a godsend for me, artist-friendly when it came to things like overdue rent. I hated the way Marti preyed upon him, bullied and intimidated him to the point it sometimes went beyond mean and became abusive. I intervened if I was around and things got out of hand, backing Marti off with the phone in my hand ready to dial Gary. That usually did the trick, Hugo standing behind me warning his no-good son that he should beware: "Your day is coming! Just wait!"

And that morning, it looked like it finally had. I took Gary into the study, showed him where boxes AJP15 and AJP16 were missing (AJP being my brother's initials).

Gary brought Marti into the room, stood him in front of the open closet and told him to take a look at the boxes on the shelves.

"Ya?" said Marti.

"You broke in and took two of them."

"Why the fuck would I do that?"

"Break in?"

"Ya."

"That's what I'm asking."

"I didn't break in!" said Marti, "I have a key—" then recognizing that he'd been tricked. "*Fuck!*"

"So who was it you let in, Marti?"

"Who says I let anybody in?"

"One guy? Two guys?"

"How the fuck should I know?"

"Think about it, Marti."

"Don't have to."

Gary shot him a flat glare. "Okay," he said, pulling Marti's hands behind his back before he knew what was happening, slapping the cuffs on and pushing him out of the room.

Suddenly remembering better, Marti stopped part way along the hall. "Some guys came by about three-thirty."

"How many guys?" Gary pushed him to keep walking.

"Two. They rang my bell, so I went down. They said I was to let them into the apartment, so I did."

"Just like that," said Gary.

"Pretty much."

"Anybody wants in, you just let them in?"

"They didn't look like people you say no to."

"How'd they know about the closet?"

"I don't know. I stayed by the door."

"For how long?"

"Couple minutes."

"How much did they give you?"

"Nothing."

"Marti ..." said Gary, yanking his cuffed hands up toward the back of his head, what cops call the torturous Guantanamo position.

Marti winced. "*Nothing! I swear!*"

Gary stopped walking, lowered the cuffs. Patted Marti's back pockets. Nothing. Stuck his hand in the one front pocket. It came up empty. Tried the other, pulling out some folded bills. "Let's go," he said, handing me the money.

Marti stayed put, turned to me in a panic, pleading. "They said they'd taken you to the hospital! You were hurt. You needed something from your apartment. There was five-hundred in it for me if I let them in--"

Gary pushed him toward the top of the stairs like he hadn't heard and didn't care.

"How did I know what they wanted for fuck's sake?"

They started down the stairs.

"The one guy said he was your brother!" Marti yelled up to me. "That's the only reason I let them in--*fuck you, man!!*"

Out they went. The coffee was ready. Molly and I filled our cups and sat down at the kitchen table. I still had Gary's Egg McMuffin.

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*,

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