

Who is Teddy Villanova? –A Serial Mystery: Chapter 6

Find all available chapters [here](#).

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



Man with the Stained Glass Eye– Jack Levine, 1952

Still in my clothes, I ordered a cab to Paradise Gardens, grabbed the keys to Early's cottage and went outside to wait

for the taxi. Fear, shock and exhaustion combined as we sped through the night, in suspended animation it felt like, where the line between reality and dream vanishes. I didn't know where I was.

Gary had let the on-scene unit know I was coming and should be allowed in the cottage. Apparently a blue-and-white on patrol through the cemetery shortly before midnight had spotted Early's front door wide open, all the lights on inside.

The damage was severe and extensive in every room. Clearly someone had been violently searching for something but hadn't found it. Early had taken the bullets, rather than talk.

I'd known Early Glover since I was six. The house we lived in at the time backed onto Paradise Gardens, a two-hundred acre back yard as Early described it. He ended up becoming the wise, kindly grandfather my brothers and me never had. Never a father, Early taught us things he thought young men, as he called us, should know. He asked us questions, made us give him honest answers. He was someone you could trust about anything. You just knew you could with Early. He had that way about him. He was always smiling, even if angry, something we kidded him about as we got older. *Why?* you could ask him. "*Life!*" his inscrutably jubilant answer. I couldn't imagine my life without him.

Trying not to look too anxious to get inside the cottage, I made my way calmly through the rubble field spread across the living room, and headed upstairs to the small spare bedroom that served as Early's office. It had been ransacked of course, no stone left unturned as they say.

Relieved that, as far as I could see, a particular area on the pine-paneled walls remained untouched, I crouched down, located the knot on the panel behind which we hid both the key to the locked closet across the hall containing both the Fund's books and legal papers, and more importantly, the key

to the mausoleum.

I pushed the pine-knot. A five-by-five inch square of panel on a spring mechanism clicked open, a small jewellery box behind it. I lifted the lid. The keys were still there.

The uniforms out front bid me a pleasant good night, no mention of the small suit-case I carried out with me. I hopped back in the taxi. The driver sped to the hospital ...

According to a doctor signing papers at the trauma unit nursing station, Early was still in surgery. She said it would be a while before they could tell me anything. There was a waiting room down the hall.

I remembered it. It was the one from which I'd phoned Molly to come and get me after my night in the hospital.

A nurse stepped out from a room I was passing without looking where she was going. We collided.

It was Tilley, the nurse who had taken such good care of me the night I'd mysteriously appeared here on the trauma unit beaten up and carrying a gun. She apologized, as did I, both of us laughing.

I explained about Early. Yes, she'd heard about him.

"You keep dangerous company, Teddy Villanova," she said with a half-kidding smile. "If that's your real name."

"It is and it isn't," I said "It's one of a number of identities I use. I'm a ghostwriter. It's for liability reasons, so they tell me. And lately for security reasons."

She took two business cards from her uniform pocket and held them out to me. "They told me to let them know the moment you showed up. They were asking about your friend Mr. Glover's condition. I wondered why that would be."

She handed me the cards: Marks and Engels.

"Well, I've showed up," I said. "What now?" I looked at her to see what she wanted to do.

She started walking. "You be careful, Mr. Villanova. You don't want to make a habit of showing up here."

Back down the hall we went, around a corner to a room where a uniformed cop was sitting on duty outside. He followed Tilley and me into the room, explaining this was the room they were bringing Mr. Glover to after his surgery. They'd been told to expect me.

"You can wait if you like," said Tilley. "I can get you some coffee. You look like you could use some."

The cop spoke up. "They told me it could be three to four hours before he's out. And the anaesthetic will have to wear off. Why don't I have Detective Donovan call you when they know something?" He took in my wrinkled clothes, haggard appearance and the small suitcase I was carrying. I must have looked like a vagrant

Tilley walked me to the elevator.

"I have to say you've been one of the more interesting patients we've had recently. But I really hope we don't see you in here again anytime soon. You've only got so much luck, after all."

"The way things have been going the last few days, Tilley, I can't make any guarantees."

The elevator chimed. The doors opened.

"Any sign of the Missing Man?" she asked, smiling.

The doors started to close.

"Still on the run," I said, returning the smile . . .

Almost 2:00, I had the taxi driver let me off at Paradise Gardens, but at the less used east entrance. I left the road as soon as I passed through the gates, heading for the tree line that bordered the cemetery, a dark night, no moon, all quiet. I clutched the suitcase under my arm, sticking to the shadows under the trees, taking a roundabout route to the mausoleum in case someone was following me. Like whoever had attacked the cottage and shot Early returning to finish the job.

I avoided Early's cottage. The two blue-and-whites were still there. Every few minutes I stopped out of sight and listened. Night sounds. Memorial fountains splashing, an owl hooting. Nothing out of the ordinary.

So far, so good, I slipped out from behind the cedar trees by the serenity garden, ran across the open lawn past the sundial so anyone looking would see me and make a move, but be unable to catch me before I slipped away into the darkness.

I ducked behind a boxwood hedge directly across from the **VILLANOVA** mausoleum, listening for sounds, watching for movement.

The coast seemed clear, but I waited five minutes more just to be sure.

Out from behind the hedge, running crouched over as fast as I could across the lawn, between and over headstones, stumbling, recovering, leaping up the three steps to the mausoleum door—

A hand materialized on my left, snatching the suitcase away, while someone to my right slammed a fist into my stomach so hard the punch keeled me over, a kick the groin dropping me to the ground.

“—Gimme the fuckin’ keys, Johnny!”

I recognized the voice. It was Lisi, Victor 'Mr. Big' Bruno's enforcer.

"They're in the suitcase."

"The key to the suitcase!"

"Here," I took the key out of my pocket and handed it to him. He tossed it to his partner. I heard the lock snap open.

"—What the fuck is *this*?"

"What the fuck is what?" asked Lisi.

"It's empty."

"Give it here."

I heard the lock close. Lisi removed his foot from my cheek and before I could lift my head he brought the suitcase down hard on my head once, twice—

Four flashlights flicked on illuminating the front of the mausoleum. I recognized the two uniforms from the cottage, plus two more brought along by Gary Donovan, who walked up the steps to the door of the mausoleum. I had phoned him from the taxi, sure that I was being followed.

Lisi glared, wanting to kill me, fuming as the handcuffs went on. "You're playing with fuckin' fire here, Johnny."

"Johnny's scared," I threw on the sarcasm.

The cops led him and his partner off into the darkness.

Gary searched with the flashlight. He spotted the open suitcase and picked it up.

"What happened?"

I pointed to the boxwood hedge across the lawn. "It was the only way I could delay them till you got here."

We walked over. Gary picked up the account books, legal documents and keys from where I'd left them under the hedge, returning them to the suitcase, except for one of the keys to the mausoleum, which he handed to me. The one I'd given Lisi was a decoy key Early used for just such situations.

"You want to put them inside?"

"Change of plan." I could hardly stand. My head was throbbing from the suitcase blows. I felt a blackout coming on, my legs giving way—

Gary held me up with a steadying arm. When my head cleared I nodded. We began walking.

"Hang in there, pal," said Gary. "I've got an idea ..."

To be continued...

[Table of Contents](#)

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

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)