

Who is Teddy Villanova? –A Serial Mystery: Chapter 7

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



Street Scene #2, Jack Levine, 1938

When I opened my eyes, I was lying in Molly's bed in my underwear, Tomcat Sawyer curled up on the duvet staring at me. He meowed, welcoming me back to the land of the living, 3:45 p.m. according to the clock radio on the night table. I'd slept for twelve hours.

Sore in places I never knew were part of my body, I dozed for fifteen minutes or so—until the clock-radio exploded in buzzer

mode.

Molly apparently heard it, opened the door and flew in. "Sorry about that!"

She rushed over, shut the alarm off, sat down on the bed and laid down, quietly cuddling up to me. "Just like old times," she said, kissing the tip of my nose, the only part of me that wasn't sore.

Old times being the two years we attempted to flout the rules of friendship by converting ours into *something more*, without a clue as to what that something was, neither of us having spent much time in *something more* relationships. We led completely different lives, inhabited very different worlds (Molly a hedge fund legal counsel while I was a starving ghostwriter moonlighting as a cocktail pianist), yet when we met at my brother's company Christmas party two years before everything collapsed, there was a click between us (which we admitted later we both felt) when just after we were introduced we burst into laughter at the two drunk men standing next to us arguing vehemently over the correct use of *instantly* and *instantaneously*.

Later on, my brother asked me to play some Christmas carols. By the end of the intro to "O Come All Ye Faithful," Molly had come faithfully over to the piano, sat down on the bench beside me and started singing. Others joined in. Good golly, I joked to myself as I plunked away, joyful and triumphant. How could I *not* want to know more about Miss Molly?

She stroked Sawyer, got up from the bed and went to her closet. "A few of your clothes are still here. I'm sure we can find something to tide you over until you get home. I'll drive you."

"I can call a cab."

"Don't be silly."

"What about Early?"

"Gary says he's going to be all right. He came through the operation fine, but he's not out of the woods yet. If there's no infection in the next 48 hours, he'll probably recover. As to your nemesis Lisi, Gary said he could book him because of his priors, but he's part of the *bigger picture*, more useful running around out there than sitting in a cell. He also talked with this Victor Bruno, who claims he has no connection to the killing of Richie Havenhurst whatsoever. He says he has no idea who Richie Havenhurst even is, or was. As far as Bruno's concerned, somebody must have planted the body in the trunk of his Town Car. He mentioned a couple of names that he said you would recognize. Detectives on the drug squad who apparently were doing business with Richie until he couldn't keep his end up."

"Marks and Engels. The pair that followed me here when I came to feed Sawyer the other day. They waited for me outside the building and ambushed me. Gary's onto them. He had a hunch they'd be tailing me, so he tailed them. He arrived in time to whisk me away."

"Good old Gary. Where would you be without him?"

I'd been asking myself that in the last seventy-two hours. Feeling I was putting him in danger that he didn't need to be in. He didn't need to get caught up in whatever *this* was that I had somehow become involved in. I didn't want it to affect his job, him taking chances, taking things so personally. Gary was like that, though. Some things were more important to him than his job.

After a quick stop at Paradise Gardens to drop off the suitcase, where an elderly gentleman in birder clothes, binoculars and cameras slung around his neck, engaged Molly in conversation while she was waiting for me by her car.

She waved when she saw me come out of the mausoleum, bid the

bird-watcher a quick goodbye and returned to the car. The birder gave me a friendly wave. I waved back.

"Apparently," Molly explained with an air of excitement as we drove away, like she might just have got a scoop, "he spends most of his birding time in this part of the cemetery because the best sightings occur here. Lately he's noticed people paying a lot of attention to the Villanova mausoleum. He doesn't know whether they're police or not, whether a Villanova cold case might be opening up, or whether it's just *scoundrels* up to no good, what with the rumours of the fortune inside the mausoleum, *floor to ceiling cash, more than ten million they say in memory of that dear little Villanova boy.*"

"Maybe he has photos of these scoundrels."

"What else would he do waiting for the birds to show up?"

When we reached my place, Marti and his much younger, purple-hair, black makeup, face-pierced girlfriend Delora, were sitting at the top of Hugo's front porch stairs, drunk and getting high. Marti kept his eyes on Molly and me, passing Delora the tequila bottle in return for the joint.

Stoned eyes on me while he had a toke, Marti squinted through clouds of exhaled smoke, a threatening smile letting me know there was going to be a price to get past him today. He leered at Molly, repulsive as ever.

"I smell *pussy*, Delora!!" he shouted. "Can *you* smell pussy?"

"*Mm-hmm. Sweet, sweet pussy.*"

Off to one side of the walk was Hugo's friend and next door neighbour Case Batterji, a retired former physics professor, appealing to me with frightened eyes: *Marti and Delora aren't letting me get through either.*

"Not working today, Marti?" I said, stopping at the bottom of

the stairs. I motioned for Case to come over.

"You owe me five-hundred bucks, asshole," said Marti.

I ignored him, started up the stairs, Case behind me, Molly following.

"Paki and Pussy!!" Marti shouted. "Can't you *smell* it?"

Delora answered by making sniffing sounds, took a swig of tequila, stared hard down at Molly. "Here pussy, pussy," licking the air with her pierced tongue.

Marti wasn't budging. I stood in front of him for a few seconds, not sure in my weakened condition which of the three legal moves Gary had instructed me to use in circumstances like this—went straight to #3: lifted and crossed my right leg fast over my left and brought my knee down on Marti's throat so hard his skull bounced off the step, his tongue shot out and he started gagging. Delora, gaping in black-eyed terror, made way.

Molly stepped onto the porch, Case behind her, visibly relieved.

I released Marti, stood up and joined them.

"*Pussy!!*" he screamed behind us as we went inside. "*Pussy!!*"

We came into *Respighi's* shortly before six. Greeted Sal and Rosa. Ordered drinks. Molly was meeting her sister for dinner so wouldn't be staying.

After this pussy episode, Molly said that I absolutely had to move. Hugo's was just too dangerous.

She further explained: "You've taken to protecting Hugo's security over your own."

"I can't let the man be terrorized."

"I realize that. But only up to a point. Hugo's is a madhouse. Drunks walking around with loaded guns day and night? Breaking into your apartment and stealing stuff. Letting others break into your apartment. And a vintage motorcycle stationed in the living room. These people are just waiting to kill each other when the time is right. You don't want to be standing in between when the guns go off."

"I'm keeping my head down," I told her. "Besides, Gary says Marti will be back in prison before we know it—"

Her cell rang. She stood up and stepped away from the table to take the call.

Some friends who worked in media stopped by the table on the way to theirs to say they were sorry to hear about Early. Any ideas as to motive? Did it have something to do with Teddy Villanova? They'd heard rumours in the newsroom that someone was planning to break in and steal the Teddy Villanova fortune. Did I think there was any truth to that?"

Molly returned to the table before I could answer. She said hello to our friends (they had been her friends before they became mine), grabbed her purse and coat and excused herself, glancing back at me as she hurried for the door holding a thumb and extended baby finger up to her ear: *Call me!!*

I tried her several times while eating dinner. Didn't leave messages. She phoned back just before 9:00 as I was sitting down at the piano. *By popular request*, according to Sal when he introduced me.

My media friends applauded. Other diners joined in. *Showtime!*

On my break, I called Molly. "What's going on?"

"My sister called from the restaurant where we were meeting for dinner. She was sitting having a drink while she waited

for me when who should rush up to the table and take a seat across from her, but your brother. He started chatting her up about giving *us* a second shot. Starting over. Learning from mistakes (they had gone out at one time). Lynne was in shock. She had to excuse herself.

"She headed for the corridor leading to the washrooms, turned and watched him: without even looking around reaching across the table, grabbing her purse and rifling through it, coming up empty since Lynne had removed her cash and credit cards under the table the moment he sat down. She left the purse behind when she went to the washroom, just to see if prison had changed him.

Apparently it hadn't.

She apologized for running out. She wanted to get to the restaurant. Lynne had sounded scared.

"This is him sending smoke signals, Molly. He tries to rob Lynne, knowing she'll tell you, you'll tell me. This is how he communicates that he's back in town. Let the games begin."

I finished my second set a little after eleven, went and sat down with my friends. Sal treated us to liqueurs, Drambuie for me, warmed up in a snifter—

WHAM!!

The restaurant's front door banged open. A man ran in asking if he could use the washroom. Sal said he could. When he came out he said he was surprised we were still inside, what with all the excitement underway down the street.

Hundreds of onlookers, spotlights illuminating the street in front of Hugo's so you could see inside the second floor bay window—my living room—Hugo and Case blindfolded, wrists tied behind their backs, the two of them standing with their noses pressed to the glass so they were fully visible to everyone in

the street. Both smiling, Delora held a shotgun on Case, Marti had his pointed at Hugo.

Apparently the standoff had been going on for nearly two hours. A guy and his girlfriend had taken two hostages.

I worked my way through the crowd, explaining to a cop at the police tape that I lived in the house and needed to talk with the task force commander. I could identify the four people in the window. And give the police background on what was happening.

The cop took me to the ETF armoured command truck. Things were busy. Radios squawking. SWAT police in black helmets and gear behind the two armoured vehicles with assault rifles ready for the signal to deploy—the drama unfolding under the bright glare of police spotlights, tense crowds up and down the street looking on in rapt silence, like we were on a movie set waiting for the director to yell *ACTION!*

The commander stepped from one of two armoured trucks parked directly across from Hugo's. I made it quick telling him about the four people involved, adding that Marti and his girlfriend were drunk and high, Marti an ex-con, a psychopath by nature, my point that he should be taken seriously, he was capable of doing anything—

Three shots came from my bathroom window taking out a couple of police lights. Marti and Delora had moved down the hall. Back in my living room, Case and Hugo remained blindfolded, noses pressed to the window, their lips moving.

Things had suddenly escalated. The commander had to go. He asked that I hang around. He had further questions.

Another shot rang out, this one shattering a second-story window in the house behind us. A woman's screams filled the air, hung in silence for a moment—until it was broken by the sound of the Vincent *Black Shadow* roaring to life behind the

closed living-room curtains.

The commander turned from the task force team, waved me forward.

"What's going on there do you think?"

I stepped in front of him for a better look as the front door opened wide, nothing visible in the foyer for a few seconds ... until Marti, astride the *Vincent*, wheeled it up to the doorstep, revving the engine menacingly, Delora perched behind him, one arm around his waist, the other chugging from a vodka bottle.

Marti revved the engine higher, higher still, even higher before he popped the clutch. The *Vincent* streaked forward, shot off the porch, bounced on landing and accelerated fast down the walk, soaring above the stairs and out over the street, Marti and Delora with their eyes closed, heads thrown back shouting *PUSSY!!* for half a triumphant second before the speeding motorcycle slammed sideways into the side of one of the armoured SWAT vehicles then fell to the ground, Marti and Delora's bodies pinned underneath, dead by the look of it.

Three of the SWAT team and three police converged on the *Vincent*, working to extricate Marti's and Melora's bodies. In the process of barking orders to the rest of the SWAT team to enter the house, I cut the commander off and pointed to the second-story window where Hugo and Case had been standing. They had disappeared in clouds of smoke that had quickly filled the room, flashes of flame licking at the ceiling.

Someone in the crowd shouted there was smoke coming from the open bathroom window down the hall, smoke pouring out below as well from the still open front door, the place was going up in flames from a fire Marti had set before zooming off to his death.

The commandant ordered fire gear, breathing apparatus and fire

extinguishers.

Four SWAT officers raced across the street, ran up onto the front porch and disappeared into the building. Just as they did, my living-room picture window shattered in the heat, black smoke pouring out, the crackle and snap of burning wood as flames licked at the eaves, no sign of Hugo and Case.

I lost track of time after the fire trucks arrived, though details are clear in my memory. When the SWAT officers came onto the front porch, two each helping Hugo and Case down the front walk to the street where an ambulance was waiting, a huge cheer went up from the crowds who had followed the unfolding scene spellbound.

The commandant allowed me to go over to the ambulance. While one officer cut the ropes around their ankles and hands, another went to cut their blindfolds off. Case raised his hand to prevent it. Hugo put up his hand. He wanted his left on too.

I shook his hand and said who I was. He let go of my hand and clutched my arm tight as they laid him on the gurney.

"You saw the whole thing?"

"I did."

"I don't want to know. Except if this is the end."

"It's the end, Hugo."

"Case!!" he called with a jubilant smile just before they strapped on an oxygen mask.

"Hugo!!" Case called back, just before they strapped on his.

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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