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**A MATCH
MADE FOR MURDER**

A LANE WINSLOW MYSTERY

CHAPTER ONE

November 1947

LANE'S FIRST IMPRESSION WAS OF the whiteness. The mid-afternoon sun, which she had always thought of as golden, bleached everything here to the purity of bones. The endless desert had given way to adobe and wood houses that seemed to lie low away from the sun, and then to the white of the station they were approaching.

Her honeymoon. It was ridiculous and wonderful. A year and a half before, she had arrived at King's Cove, a tiny hamlet an hour outside of the city of Nelson, in the middle of British Columbia, and moved into her beautiful house among her eccentric neighbours with no other object than to lose herself, and her memories, and put the war behind her. The danger of dropping out of airplanes into occupied France carrying weapons and encrypted messages began to seem more and more like a life that had happened to someone else. The misery of her first love affair had been swept away, almost against her own better judgement, by

Frederick Darling, inspector of the Nelson Police.

She looked at him now, his dark hair slightly tousled from leaning against the window, and her heart skipped. They'd had a bad start, she had to admit: he had arrested her over the death of a man on her property. He was extraordinarily reserved, not to say impenetrable, but he had come, very slowly and most reluctantly, to accept that she had some skills that were invaluable in some of his other cases. And she in turn had come to appreciate his profound sense of justice, and his philosophical turn of mind, perhaps a product of his surprisingly academic background. She had not expected a degree in literature from a policeman. She wondered if either of them had realized how completely they were falling in love. She smiled. She was pretty sure his sidekick, Sergeant Ames, had. She wouldn't have been surprised to learn it was he who had pointed it out to Darling.

"Not terribly punctual. It's gone two forty-five," she said, consulting her watch. The train screeched, as if protesting at having to slow down, and then stopped and hissed. People began to stand up, stretch, and reach for their bags. It had been a long day's ride from Los Angeles.

"You want precision on a honeymoon. How delightful!" Darling said. "It's hotter than blazes. I'm overdressed." He took his hat off the seat and fanned himself. "Well, shall we?"

A porter appeared as they stepped off the train. Lane paused and took a deep breath. She loved arriving in a place she'd never been. Warmth emanated from the tiles of the platform and off the white walls of the station, and a breeze made the movement of air almost sensual on her face.

"Can I get your bags, sir, ma'am?"

“That would be lovely, thank you,” Lane said. “What is the temperature today?”

“A balmy seventy-eight, ma’am.” The porter touched his cap briefly and led the way to the baggage car, pushing a trolley.

“You see, darling, a perfect summer day at home. My husband thinks it is too hot,” she continued to the porter, following him, her handbag over her arm.

“Oh, no, ma’am. This is just how we like it. Summertime? Now that’s a punishing time in Arizona. It can get up over a hundred. You just wanna crawl under a rock like a lizard. Vacation?”

“Honeymoon,” Lane said, embarrassed to feel her cheeks flushing.

“Well now, that’s something! Congratulations and welcome to Tucson. Will you be needing a taxi?”

“Yes,” said Darling, “thank you.” He reached into his jacket for some coins.

The station platform felt ghostly in the white afternoon despite chattering travellers getting on and off the train. Lane and Darling followed the porter into the station, where it took her a moment to adjust to the darkness. Inside, the shade contrasted sharply with the blinding light of the street visible through the windows. Sharp, she decided was the operative word. Sharp shadows, sharp light, sharp lines.

“Where shall I tell the driver y’all are headed?”

“The Santa Cruz Inn,” Darling said. He produced the coins and the porter tipped his hat, turning a beaming smile on Lane.

“You have a wonderful honeymoon, you hear?”

“**YOU MADE A** conquest there,” Darling remarked, settling in the back seat of the cab after asking to be conveyed to the Santa Cruz Inn. “I wonder how Ames is getting on?”

“Don’t be silly. We’ve only been gone four days. This is a complete vacation from mayhem. We’re going to get along like a house on fire because I won’t be interfering in anything. I plan to lie by the pool with an improving book during the day and make up for it by swilling cocktails in the evening. I hope they have cocktails.”

“They got cocktails, ma’am,” the driver interjected from the front seat. “You got the best there. All the actors go there. Very swanky. Pretty new, too. My sister Consuela works there, cleaning.”

“Oh, is it far?” she asked—the driver looked Mexican, and Lane had expected him to speak with an accent. She gave herself a stern mental correction.

The driver took a moment to honk at someone, slowed down to wait for a tram to go by, and then turned onto Sixth Avenue. “It’s a few miles out of town, just east, but I could drive you just a couple of blocks near here to see the old part of town.”

“Why not?” Darling asked, when Lane gave him a nod.

Lane looked at the town outside the car windows. They passed a massive pink building with a red-tiled roof and a huge mosaic green and yellow dome. A row of columns connected by arches provided a long, shaded walkway. She could just see the courtyard beyond the arches.

“What is that wonderful-looking place?” Lane asked.

“That’s the county courthouse. This here is the old part of the city, called the Presidio. The Spanish came here first, and

you've got some very fine houses in here. I'll just drive you along Fourth Avenue so you can see. It won't take a minute."

LANE THREW HERSELF onto the bed of their suite. "This is heavenly! We were right to pick this. All this lovely adobe. It could almost be Mexico. I feel like I have been transported to a completely foreign place. And this weather! It is hard to imagine that somewhere in the world it is this warm on the ninth of November. We'd be in our wool shirts at home."

Lane had seen the travel brochures for Tucson at the travel agency on Baker Street and had been attracted to the sunny desert landscape, perfect for a honeymoon as November ushered in the damp cold of a British Columbia winter. "We could go to a dude ranch," she'd said, spreading the brochures across the table one evening.

"Are we dudes, do you think? I have decidedly negative views on dressing up in chaps," Darling had said. "You know, I have an ex-colleague who moved there in '37. He might have an idea for a less energetic holiday. I'll write to him." And indeed, his ex-colleague, now the assistant chief of police in Tucson, Paul Galloway, had recommended the Santa Cruz Inn, adding that it was a favourite of Hollywood movie stars.

"You *have* been transported to a foreign place," Darling pointed out. While not of a demonstrative turn, he was quietly relishing the sunny warmth, not to mention a completely new sensation to him: the feeling of truly being on holiday, with no responsibilities and nothing to do but enjoy the company of his new and beautiful wife. He hung

his jacket in the closet and rolled up his shirtsleeves. His tie was already discarded on the dresser. He looked at the suitcases.

Lane smiled. "Let's not unpack now. Let's just get out the things we need for tea. I'm astonished they have a good old English tea here, and," she glanced at her watch, "it's on in fifteen minutes. I don't want to miss it; we can see who our neighbours are."

Darling kicked off his brogues and lay down on the bed, scooping her into his arms. "I don't care who the neighbours are." He kissed her in a way that suggested they stay put awhile, which Lane found almost irresistible.

"We should see if we can find Consuela, the cabbie's sister," she said through his kiss.

"I've never met a woman with less sense of occasion. You are not easy to love."

"I'm sure you knew that when you married me. Come, up you get! We didn't come here to while away our time in bed."

"I should have thought that was exactly why we came," Darling protested, swinging his legs onto the floor.

They walked along the brick path past neat rows of flowers and green lawns, to where a fountain splashed in the centre of a large lawn surrounded by palms and other trees Lane couldn't identify.

She clutched Darling's arm. "Oh, listen!" she exclaimed, holding up a finger.

He duly tilted his head. "To what, in particular?"

"That cooing . . . mourning doves! One of my favourite birds . . . we had them in England." They stood together in

companionable silence and became aware of several types of birdsong, the soft cooing predominating. Lane sighed happily. “They always sound so peaceful. I feel as if nothing bad could happen in a place where they are.”

The library—modelled, Lane decided, on some fantasy European manorial room with dark ceiling beams and a long wall of books—was abuzz with quiet chatter and the clinking of cups. The women were in bright summer dresses, some sporting wide-brimmed straw hats and others pert little numbers with wisps of veil set at becoming angles. A couple of younger men in pale linen trousers stood by the massive unlit hearth with their elbows on the mantel, smoking pipes. The place had the confident, quiet feel of money.

“Those two by the fireplace look just like the brochure,” Lane whispered. “Do you think they stay there permanently on the off-chance they’ll be photographed? Oh. What have you got? I missed those.” She pointed at a pair of tiny scones on his plate.

“They’re over there. You’re not having mine.”

Lane left the little round table they had managed to get and went to where the scones were laid out, wondering if it would be greedy to take two.

“This is gorgeous, sweetie,” said someone nearby. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen nothing . . . anything like this. You’re spoiling me, you know that?”

Lane turned with her scones and a woman, possibly in her mid-thirties, with frizzy, nearly white bleached-blond hair in a pre-war Bette Davis style. She was wearing a deep ruby shade of lipstick that Lane wasn’t sure about for the

time of day. The man she giggled at, the man she held up her china cup to toast, was considerably older. Lane would have said he was into his seventies. He was slight and perfectly dressed in white slacks and a blue blazer, and his full head of white hair was brushed and Brilliantined into a side part. She could see a heavy embossed gold ring on his right hand and a simple wedding band on his left.

“A bit spring–winter, that couple, wouldn’t you say?” she whispered to Darling, pointing surreptitiously with her buttered scone a few moments later.

“I would. But would it be any of my business?”

“Perhaps not, but we were interested in finding out who our fellow denizens are. I think it’s rather sweet, really.”

“I believe it was you who was interested in our neighbours,” he said. “I bet he’s being taken for everything he’s worth.”

“Or he’s taking her for everything she’s worth,” Lane said.

“She doesn’t look like she’s the one with the money,” Darling countered.

“Are you telling me the only thing women value is money?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Darling said, selecting a petit four. They chewed contentedly for a few moments, and then a young couple came up to them, smiling. The woman was lovely, Lane thought. Tall and slender with golden hair twisted into an elaborate knot. She was wearing a simple, graceful, cap-sleeved linen dress with pale-blue stripes.

“I think you folks are our neighbours. I saw you come in earlier. We were just leaving to go have a dip. Isn’t this grand?”

Darling and Lane stood up. "I'm Lane, and this is my husband, Frederick Darling. How do you do?"

"I'm Ivy Renwick, and this is Jack. We're from Wisconsin. We don't get anything like this place back home! We just came yesterday."

Darling nodded and shook hands with them. "We don't much either. We're from a little town in British Columbia."

"Oh, my! Canadians. You're a long way from home. What brings you out this way?"

Jack Renwick had pale, straw-coloured hair and very genuine blue eyes. Darling liked him at once. "Honeymoon," he said with a slight touch of apology.

"Hey! Us too. We got hitched just before I shipped out in '44, and we never got a chance to have a honeymoon, so we're having it now," Jack Renwick said.

"We should meet for cocktails and then have dinner one night. I saw Clark Gable checking out just as we were arriving. He was staying in one of the villas!" Ivy Renwick said. "What about tomorrow?"

AMBLING THROUGH THE garden later, Darling said, "I can't think when I've met a more perfect couple. I suppose we will have to follow through and have dinner with them tomorrow?"

They stopped by a little planting of cactus. "You say 'perfect' as if they were boring."

"I'm not saying that, but they do seem almost too good to be true and are probably regretting the impulse to socialize already. I know I am," Darling said. "Apparently the Native people in this part of the world could peel and

eat these things.” He was pointing at a cactus helpfully labelled *nopal*. “Which reminds me: Should we go for a swim before we get ready to go to the Galloways’ for dinner? I suspect the temperature starts to go down smartly when it gets dark.”

“SWEETIE, I’M GOING to the lobby. They have some jewelry in a glass case for sale, and I saw this gorgeous silver bracelet.” Meg Holden stood in the doorway of the villa with one hand on the doorframe, as if she were trying to still her own restlessness.

Rex Holden was stretched on the bed, his loafers and blazer off and his blue and white ascot loose around his neck. *The Greek Coffin Mystery*, an Ellery Queen that Holden had found in the library, was resting on his chest. He was gazing at his wife, his eyes narrowed in an attempt to bring her into focus. She was the prettiest thing he’d ever seen, he thought, as he always did, but this thought, comforting though it was, did not completely dispel his slight sense of disquiet. He had tried to trace this disturbance and had been wholly unsuccessful. His friends at the golf club in Phoenix were clear: she was too young, too dim, a gold digger who would run through his money, but Holden had not minded any of these things. In fact, it was what he had expected, and he had plenty of money for her to run through. Looking at her now, he felt himself almost grasp what unsettled him. It was something in the alertness in her body, as if . . . but then it was gone.

“Don’t go crazy. I’m not made of money.” He said this with patient affection.

“Yes, you are, silly!” She left the door and went to sit on the bed beside him and stroked his cheek, an activity that necessitated putting Ellery Queen to one side so he could look at her. “Just kidding. Anyway, it was so sweet of you to let me take some money to my aunt. She could never get her operation without it. I’ll be sure to be real careful about spending.” She got up and returned to the door and gave him a large smile. “I saw a real cute bolo tie with a horse head made of turquoise. Maybe I’ll get you that as a surprise!”

“I don’t think I’m going to be very surprised,” he said, but she was gone.

THE CAB PULLED up at a long low adobe house west of the university. It was built close to the property line, allowing only for a row of ocotillo along the fenceline. Four small, deeply inset windows punctuated the street-side wall, and a wrought-iron gate showed the way up some broad stairs of brick-red tiles. The wrought-iron lamp illuminating the entranceway cast a warm light. Before Darling could knock, the door swung open, and a tall man emanating lean power was upon them.

“Fred! As I live, it’s good to see you! Good trip?” He shook Darling’s hand vigorously and gave him a resounding pound on the shoulder.

Lane, standing just behind Darling, could not suppress a smile. She had never heard anyone call her husband Fred nor seen him in a social situation requiring shoulder pounding. She was surprised that Darling’s friend was English—had he told her that?

“Excellent, thank you. Good to see you, Paul. You’re looking well. May I present my wife, Lane. Lane, Paul Galloway. He did a brief stint in Nelson, where we worked together. He took me under his wing when I first got there. A London man. He is the assistant chief of police here.”

“For my sins. Chief is off on health leave, poor fellow, so I’m more or less in charge of the whole operation now.” Galloway had released Darling’s hand and now opened his arms as if he were planning to embrace Lane, his face wreathed in smiles. Instead, to her enormous relief, he offered a hand to shake.

“Mrs. Darling, what a pleasure. Fred, you dog! Where did you find this lovely creature? She must be a saint, putting up with your gruff self.” Still holding her hand and pulling her close, he said in a stage whisper, “Always took himself too seriously.”

Thank heavens, Lane thought, if this man’s unbridled enthusiasm was the alternative. She had just retrieved her hand when she became aware of a woman standing perfectly still behind their host. Lane nearly gasped at her beauty. She had jet-black hair, pale skin, and piercing blue eyes; she was wearing an emerald-green silk dress that was fitted to her slender waist and then hung in an exquisite flare of silk that seemed to catch the light. Blimey, she thought, I could be meeting Vivien Leigh.

“This is the wife, Priscilla,” Galloway put his arm around his wife’s shoulder and pulled her into the group. “My old chum, Fred Darling. He’s a police inspector now, up in Canada.”

Priscilla smiled and offered a hand. “You’ll have a lot to talk about, then. Please do come in. It’s still warm enough that we can have drinks on the patio.” She spoke with a clipped English accent, her voice pitched low.

Lane wondered if she modulated her voice and adopted this posh accent, which couldn’t quite hide her Cockney roots, deliberately, to add a little weight to her delicate frame. With a touch of regret, Lane reflected that Priscilla’s pretense made her seem more vulnerable, not less.

The house had a spacious rambling quality that made it feel, Lane thought, extremely expensive. The foyer was tiled and dropped two steps to a sunken living room full of English chintz furniture; it was in sharp contrast to the Spanish Colonial feel of the house itself, but together the two styles somehow seemed to work.

“Come, Lane. Let’s get the boys out onto the patio, and you and I will put the drinks together. Martinis? G and Ts? What’s it to be?”

“A couple of G and Ts,” Galloway said. “That do you, Fred? And don’t let Fernanda near them. Hasn’t got a clue,” he confided to Darling, leading him through French doors out to a patio illuminated with gentle light from candles set on a large dark wood table near a tiled fountain that burbled in the centre of the courtyard.

In the kitchen a plump, middle-aged woman in a blue uniform and white apron and cap was assembling something on the counter.

“Fernanda, did you put the glasses out as I instructed?” Priscilla wasn’t unkind, exactly, but she spoke in a

peremptory manner that caused Fernanda to turn toward her mistress but not look at her.

“Yes, Mrs. Galloway. They’re on the tray. I cut some limes for you.” A plate of cut limes, releasing their citrus fragrance into the kitchen, sat by the tray upon which glasses, a bucket of ice, and a bottle of tonic sat next to a luminescent blue bottle of gin.

“You’re very beautiful,” Priscilla said, turning to Lane and then beginning her preparations with the gin. “When did you come over?”

Lane glanced anxiously at Fernanda. It would have been unthinkable in her household not to thank the servants. Absolute courtesy had been her grandmother’s gold standard. She gave her a quick smile and was rewarded by Fernanda turning away to open the oven.

“I came over right after the war, in the spring of ’46. Gosh, only last year! I feel like it’s been ages since the war ended. I bought myself a little house in the middle of nowhere. You?”

“And collared a very handsome man. He looks kind, for a policeman. Is he?”

“Yes, very kind,” Lane said. She saw Priscilla’s neat sidestepping of the question about her own background and wondered suddenly if it was her husband who expected her to disavow her London roots. “What can I do?”

“Fernanda, are the canapés out?”

“Yes, ma’am. I put them on the table.”

“Can you stick a sliver of lime on each of the glasses, Lane, then we’ll be ready to hop.” Priscilla put the drinks on a small silver tray and led Lane toward a door that

opened onto the courtyard. “Are you planning to have children?” she asked.

“I haven’t given it a thought. We’ve only just got married.” Perhaps Priscilla herself was thinking about it, Lane speculated.

The courtyard smelled of orange blossoms from trees Lane could just see in the shadows beyond the light. Over them, the dark velvet night sky was beginning to populate with stars. Lane, looking skyward, was about to exclaim at the loveliness of the place when Galloway spoke.

“To old friends and new ones. Cheers.” The ice in the glasses gave a soft rattle, and the four of them touched rims. Galloway winked at Lane and drank.

“Not bad, Pris. You’ll get the hang of it. A touch more gin in the next one,” Galloway said, and then he laughed. “My girl used to pull pints in a London bar. Met her during the war. Makes a fine gin and tonic, I think you’ll agree.”

“Very good, indeed,” Darling said.

Lane smiled and lifted her glass, thinking the ratio of gin could not go any higher. She glanced at Paul Galloway and realized she was trying to place him in some social context. She had at first found his accent almost soothing—sounds of home, she realized—but there was something else. A sense of superiority, she thought, or was it simply confidence? She was surprised when she turned toward Priscilla to see her hostess looking flushed and angry, but in another moment, Lane attributed this to the uncertain light.