

“Sleep Don’t Come Easy”

Smart and sexy Lady P.I. Vera Miles knows how to use what she’s got to get what she wants from most men but her world is turned upside down and pulled from both sides when a handsome drifter with amnesia stumbles onto her doorstep claiming to have killed someone. His soul won’t let him rest until he finds out who and why. Everyone involved appears to be reluctant and scared of the case that gets more puzzling at every turn. The flip side of this *who dunnit* quickly slides from bad to worse when Vera gets too close to the truth. Woman’s intuition warns her that she should be scared as well. Although reluctant, she is forced to live on the edge of love and life after discovering just how slick the surface is when, ***“Sleep don’t Come Easy.”***

When Vera’s visitor wandered into her office, he wasn’t at all what Vera expected. There were no manicured nails, no expensive timepiece, no exquisitely tailored Italian suit to marvel and no seventy-dollar salon-styled hair job to impress her. At nine-fifteen in the morning, the visitor’s five o’clock shadow wore him like a two-day hangover refusing to let go. A slight grin almost came over Vera when she envisioned Ms. Minnie tucking tail and running from what she used to call ‘common folk’ before the crafty P.I. remembered the last time she underestimated a stranger’s strength and guile. It was a slight miscalculation in judgment that landed Vera flat on her back with a pint-sized-bail-jumper leaving tracks on her chest after knocking a door off the hinges to make his getaway. With no intentions of being the same fool twice, she saddled this stranger with a long once-over from head to boot heel. Other than the barely noticeable scar that lay along the ridge of his right eyebrow, the man’s face was as handsome as it was perfectly symmetrical. Had it not been for his long, thick blond mane in desperate need

of immediate attention, he could have easily passed for a male fashion model, only without the fashion. Movie stars would have stood in line for a chiseled jaw line like his or paid through the nose for a surgically enhanced reasonable facsimile.

His faded Wrangler jeans were authentic, the first pair of those Vera had seen since leaving her hometown of Waskom, Texas, a speck on the map near the Louisiana border. Every so often, she'd run across some store bought tourist who paid too much to look the part. This drifter's twice-broke cowboy boots were the genuine articles. Hand sewn and full grain leather throughout. His weathered Stetson hat and the reddish tint in his tight skin were both bona fide. Vera could tell that he'd acquired the leathery complexion from long days under a sweltering sun, not hours in a tan-in-the-can ultraviolet chamber. Growing up country in a small farming town, Vera could still differentiate fake ranch hands and fake tans from a mile off. Her visitor was the real deal.

An initial assessment double-crossed Vera. Everything about this man screamed second hand, loud and clear. From his well-worn denim jacket, with faulty insulated lining, and plaid cotton shirt, she guessed that each stitch of his clothing had previously belonged to someone else before he'd shoved a fist full of wrinkled dollars across a thrift store counter to claim them for his own.

Although never having been physically drawn to white men herself, Vera had to blink twice when he asked if it was all right for him to sit down. Motioning with her hand, Vera conveyed to him that it would be fine with her for the time being. He nodded thank you and then took a seat across from her desk.

“So, tell me Mister... what can I do for you?” Vera asked, before their names had been exchanged. Procedurally, Ms. Minnie would have photocopied the potential client’s I.D. before passing it on to Vera. It was a security measure to verify she was meeting with the person he or she claimed to be. However, there was no recognition of protocol this time around because Vera’s trusty receptionist wouldn’t have anything to do with this client including a suitable introduction.

“Rags, Ma’am. I’ve never been a Mister anything,” the cowboy answered eventually, while adjusting his posture as if Vera was a new schoolteacher mispronouncing his name. “Everybody calls me Rags.” His twang sounded airbrushed or watered down, less Texan than Vera expected. She picked up on hints of a formal education and polished diction trapped beneath a farm boy veneer. The dry coarseness surrounding his voice threw her for a loop. If she hadn’t been looking at him when he spoke, she would have been willing to bet her life that those words came from someone else, someone much older and less appealing.

“Look, it would help if you told me your real name,” Vera advised him. “I like to know who I’m dealing with.”

“Unfortunately, Ms. Miles, I don’t have the answer to that.” He leaned forward with a hopeful expression, tucked behind a mask of uncertainty. “You see, I can’t seem to remember anything past two years ago when...” he said, before his words trailed off. Moments later, he made up his mind to continue on ahead with his jagged explanation. “I’m afraid I might have killed someone but I can’t recall much about it.”

I’m afraid and I might have sounded even more like the products of a formal education to Vera but she had run across slews of scholarly criminals before so she took a

moment to reconsider that notion as well. Suddenly, she wished she had listened to Ms. Minnie's ancestors, when they whispered to her earlier. A strange white man had all but admitted to killing someone and there Vera was trying to figure out what to do next. Having been caught off guard, she lowered her right hand from its resting place on the desk. As soon as she began to ease the drawer open, Rags's eyes melted into pleading green pools of sadness.

"Please Ms. Miles, don't. That won't be necessary. I didn't come all this way to hurt nobody." The cowboy easily sniffed out Vera's move before she had the chance to pull it off. Because his words appeared as authentic as his boots, she decided to return her hand to the place where she'd moved it from. "I just need to catch up to some answers and I believe you're the one who can lead me to 'em."

"Me, why me?" she asked utterly confused.

Rags shrugged his square shoulders. "I can't rightly say. I just know that I hit town, walked around for a few days and ended up here."

Vera sat motionless, thinking she must have been crazy to let the thought of getting involved in this case run around loose in her head. Since putting on a game face was as natural to her as putting on a coat of lipstick, she was smooth and effortless. "Look, Mr. Rags or whatever your name is, I would like to help you out but I'm a businesswoman. Charity doesn't pay the rent, which means you'll have to find another agency with a pro bono program to climb into that bed you've made. I don't have time to hear anymore of what's troubling you."

“Troubling me?” he repeated, with a whiff of disbelief. “Ma’am, I can deal with trouble but this is something bad. I can’t hardly get no sleep and it won’t let my soul rest at all.”

Vera was intrigued but not enough to go out on a limb that didn’t appear to have a bag of money dangling from it. “I am very sorry for you Sir but I-.”

“I have money,” Rags offered abruptly.

Vera’s eyebrows arched dramatically. “How much, money?” she asked, in a direct manner that didn’t allow room for being lied to.

“Will two-thousand be enough for you to hear me out?”

Vera eased back against the chair then nodded slowly. “I’m listening.”