



*Paper Mill Press*

## **P.I.**

Merrick MacNeil

I sit, waiting in moon light. The street looks calm now, washed over with blues and grays. I can still smell the flowers in her perfume. I was late, I should have come straight here. I got the call at eleven o' clock.

She said "I need your help. Pick me up after work. I'm off at twelve. Don't be late." She needed me, and I let her down. I got in my truck and went right to her place. No sign of her. The door has been locked from the outside, probably from when she went to work. I look under the door to see her mail. Days worth. She must have been steering clear of her apartment. She would only do that if she thought she was being watched. Why didn't she say something sooner? I could have stopped these guys. Now I need to find her before it's too late. I go back to the scene. The rain's starting, I'll need to work fast. Burned rubber strips on the asphalt. Also on the ground a broken bracelet. A parking meter, not far, has a smudged print in blood, still tacky to the touch. She didn't bleed much, not here anyway. The tire markings give me a direction, east. There's an old warehouse, storage building down by the docks. If I needed to take someone alive in this city, I'd take them there. I stop a few blocks away in case they're watching for cars. The bat from my truck comes with me, I don't know how many of them there might be. I could walk but I'll swim and come in from the back. It's more silent. The door's locked, but the lock is cheap and I know what I'm doing. I make my way through the dark. I see a light coming from down the hall. Foot steps echo, a man and a woman. I'm not too late. He's breathing deep, and his feet are heavy. He's out of shape and old. I get closer.

He says, "I can do it in pieces or we can do it all at once."

She says "Let's get this over with." That's my girl, brave to the last. Never let them see you weak. I'm getting closer now. I can hear her groan and strain. I turn the corner, bat cocked, muscles tensed, ready. But I was shocked.

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“What the fuck Ned?! You scared the shit out of us! What’s wrong with you? Where did you get a bat? Why are you soaked?!” Her eyes flashed with fear then faded to concerned confusion.

“Sara, sorry I... I’m, um, you’re okay?” I had miscalculated.

“You know this whack job?” asks the fat man.

“He’s just that guy I know with the truck that never showed.”

“Why are you here Sara?” I needed the truth, whatever it was.

“My apartment’s getting fumigated, so I had to get my futon from storage, for at my brothers. I thought I needed your truck but my boyfriend got off work early. Now, why are you here in the middle of the night, like this?”

“I... just wanted to help.”

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