

The woman in lane two seemed to be having problems. What was wrong? The water around her was turning red.

It was two hours later, and I was still in my wet clothes. Sergeant Mc Connigal had come from the city police to question the witnesses to the murder. He had already talked to the officials, who had the best view of the pool, and now he was talking to me, Victoria (V. I.) Warshawski. He knew me already, of course.

I told him about my part in the events. Before leaving him, I asked what he had learnt about the dead woman. Her name was Louise Carmody, he said; she was twenty-four, and she worked for the Dearborn Bank. Nobody knew of any enemies.

Alicia was waiting for me in the hall. She looked worried. 'Can we talk?' she said.

After I put on some dry clothes.'

We went back together to my apartment, and I had a hot bath. When I joined her in the living room, she was watching television.

'No news yet,' she said. 'Who was the dead girl?'

'Louise Carmody, from Dearborn Bank. Did you know her?'

'No, I didn't. Do the police know why she was shot?'

'Not yet. What do you know about it?'

'Nothing. Will they put her name on the news?'

'Probably, if her family has been informed. Why is this important to you, Alicia?'

'Oh, no special reason.' She looked very anxious.

I didn't believe her. She was hiding something.

Alicia, do you know who did the shooting? At first you were in lane two. Then they changed the swimmers' positions, and nobody knew who was in which lane. I think they were shooting at you, not Louise. Who wants to kill you?'

'No one!' she shouted. She was silent for a minute. Then she said, 'Sorry. It was just such a shock. I'll try to control myself.'

'Good. I'll get some supper.'

I came back with some food, but Alicia didn't want any. She was watching the local news, and her face was white. The swimming-pool murder was the top story, and the name of the dead woman was given.

After that Alicia didn't say much. She asked if she could spend the night with me - she lived an hour's drive out of town. I left her in the sitting room and went to bed. I was still angry that she didn't want to talk to me.

The telephone woke me at 2.30 a.m. A male voice asked for Alicia. 'I don't know who you're talking about,' I said.

'If you don't want to wake her, give her this message. She was lucky yesterday. We want the money by twelve o'clock, or she won't be so lucky a second time.'

I heard the sound of the telephone being put down. Then I heard another similar sound - the telephone in my living room. I got there just as the apartment door was shutting. Alicia had heard the message, and now she was running away. I could hear her feet on the stairs.

I woke up at eight with a bad cold, the result of sitting around in wet clothes. And I was anxious about Alicia. She had clearly borrowed a very large sum of money from someone, if he was ready to kill her. But who?

I telephoned her office; the secretary said she was sick and was staying at home. I tried her home telephone. No answer. Alicia had one brother, Tom, who worked for an insurance company. When I spoke to him he said he hadn't heard from Alicia for weeks. Their father in Florida hadn't heard from her either.

In Chicago there are some big criminal groups. Two years before, I had given some help to Don Pasquale, the leader of one of them. Now he might be able to help me. I telephoned Ernesto, who works for him.

'Did you hear about the murder of Louise Carmody at the university swimming pool last night? She was probably shot by mistake. They wanted to kill Alicia Dauphine, who is an old friend of mine. She has borrowed a lot of money from someone. I thought you might know something about it,

Ernesto.'

'I don't know her name, Warshawski. I'll ask around, and let you know.'

I couldn't think where Alicia was hiding. Perhaps she was in her own house, but not answering the telephone? I decided to go and have a look.

Her house in Warrenville is near the local school. I left my car outside the school, and walked to the house, past a field where some boys were playing football.

Her car was in the garage, but I couldn't see any sign of life in the house. A cat came out of the trees towards me; it seemed to be hungry. I went round to the back, and there I found that someone had broken in through the kitchen window.

Oh, why hadn't I brought my gun with me? My cold had affected my brain. Feeling nervous, I climbed through the window, and the cat followed me.

In the kitchen and the living room everything was tidy. And in Alicia's study, her computers and electronic equipment were all in place. Clearly, the person who broke in had not come to steal things. Had he come to attack Alicia? I went upstairs, followed by the cat. There was no one in any of the rooms.

As I began to go down the stairs again, I heard a strange sound. Where was it coming from? I realized it was above me. In the ceiling there was a square hole with a wooden

cover, leading to the space under the roof. Someone was pushing back the cover. An arm came down, and the arm was holding a gun. I ran down the stairs two at a time.

A heavy noise - someone jumping down to the floor. The sound of the gun being fired, and a pain in my left shoulder. I fell the last few steps to the bottom, but managed to stand up and get to the door. Then I heard the angry cry of the cat, the shout of a man, and a loud crash that sounded like someone falling; downstairs. As I opened the door, the cat rushed past me. She had saved my life.

I walked with difficulty to the road, where the boys playing football saw me and came to help. The man with the gun escaped, but they got me to a hospital.

I here a young doctor took the bullet out of my shoulder; my thick winter coat had saved me from serious damage. They put me to bed, and I was happy to stay there.

When I woke there was a man in a suit sitting beside the bed. 'Miss Warshawski? I'm Peter Carlton, FBI.' He showed me his card. 'I know you're not feeling well, but I must talk to you about Alicia Dauphine.' 'Where is she?'

'We don't know. She went home with you after the swimming competition yesterday. Is that correct?'

'So the FBI were following her! Why are you interested in her?'

He didn't want to tell me. He only wanted to know exactly what Alicia had said to me.

Finally, I said, 'Mr Carlton, you tell me why you're interested in Alicia, and I'll tell you if I know anything connected with that interest.'

He spoke slowly. 'We believe she has been selling Defence Department secrets to the Chinese.'

'No!' I said. 'She wouldn't do that.'

'Some of her designs for plane parts are missing. She's missing. And a Chinese businessman is missing.'

'The designs may be in her home. They could be on a computer disk – she does all her work on computer.'

He told me they had looked through all her computer material at home and at work, and had found nothing.

I told him everything Alicia had said. And I told him about the attack on me - perhaps the man hiding in her house had stolen the disks. He didn't believe me. I was getting tired, and asked him to leave.

Next morning both my cold and my shoulder were much better. The doctors agreed that I could leave hospital.

When I got home I telephoned Ernesto about Alicia. He told me she had borrowed seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars from Art Smollensk. Art Smollensk, the king of gambling. I didn't think Alicia was a gambler, but I didn't know her well these days.

The telephone rang. It was Alicia, talking against a background of noise. 'I saw the news - thank Cod you're safe,

Vic! Don't worry about me. I'm all right.' She put the telephone down before I could ask her anything. Where was she? I thought about the noises in the background. They seemed familiar ... from a long time ago ... Suddenly I remembered. It was the sports hall of our old high school.

And the swimming teacher, Miss Finley, was a close friend of Alicia's.

The school is in a poor part of South Chicago. I here was a guard at the entrance; I showed her my detective's card and said I needed to see the girls' swimming teacher. She let me in, and I found my way to the sports hall, where a lot of girls in orange shirts were doing exercises.

Then I walked through the changing rooms to the swimming pool - when I was at school, we called it 'The Old Swimming Hole'. A few students, boys and girls, were swimming up and down. Alicia was sitting on a chair by the wall, looking at the floor. I joined her.

'Vic!' She looked frightened. 'Are you alone?'

'Yes, I'm alone. What are you doing here?'

'I'm helping Miss Finley with the swimming. She teaches Spanish too, and she's very busy. Is something wrong, Vic?'

'You are in deep trouble. Smollensk is looking for you, and so is the FBI. You can't hide here for ever.'

'The FBI?' She really seemed shocked. 'What do they want?'

'Your designs. They're missing, and the FBI think you sold them to the Chinese.'

'I took the disks home on Saturday evening ... oh my God! I must get out of here before someone finds me!'

'Where can you go? The FBI and Smollensk are watching all your friends and relations.'

'Tom, too?' She was starting to cry.

'Especially Tom. Alicia, tell me everything. I need to know. I've already been shot once.'

She told me. Tom was the gambler. He had lost everything he owned, but he still couldn't stop. Two weeks ago he had gone to his sister for help. 'I have to help him. You see, our mother died when I was thirteen and he was six. I looked after him, and got him out of trouble. I still do.'

'But how does Smollensk have your name?'

'Is that the man Tom borrowed money from? Tom uses my name sometimes ...'

'And the designs?'

'Tom came to dinner on Saturday, and he went into the study. I guess he took the disks I had been using, thinking they might be valuable. He knows that my company does a lot of work for the government. It was a gamble — and a gamble that he could sell them before I found out.'

'Alicia, you can't be responsible for Tom for ever. I think



we should call the FBI.'

At this point Miss Finley came in. She was surprised to see me. 'Have you come to help Alicia?' she said. I found she knew most of the story. She thought it would be wrong for Alicia to tell the FBI about her own brother.

They went off together. After some time I went to look for them, and found Alicia alone in an office.

'Miss Finley's teaching a Spanish class,' she said. 'Listen. The important thing is to get those disks back. I called Tom, and he agreed to bring them here. I told him I would help him with the money.'

She didn't understand. She didn't see that if the Chinese businessman had left the country, he would have the disks with him. Tom had sold her disks. He no longer had the material.

'Where is he meeting you?'

'At the pool.'

'Now please - you go to Miss Finley's class and I'll meet him at the pool.'

She agreed in the end, but she refused to let me call the FBI. 'I must talk to Tom first. It may all be a mistake.'

I sent the students out of the pool area, and put a notice on the door saying it was closed. I turned out the lights and sat down in a dark corner, my gun in my hand.

At last Tom came in through the boys' changing room. 'Allie! Allie!' he called.

A minute later another man joined him. He looked like one of Smollensk's group. He spoke softly to Tom. Then they went to look in the girls' changing room. When they returned I had moved towards the doors to the main part of the school.

'Tom!' I called. 'It's V. I. Warshawski. I know the whole story. Give me the disks.'

His friend moved his arm. I shot at him and jumped into the water. His bullet hit the place where I had been standing. Another bullet hit the water by my head. I went under the water again. As I came up I heard Alicia's voice.

'Tom, why are you shooting at Vic? Stop it!'

There were some more shots, but not at me. I got to the side of the pool and climbed out. Alicia lay on the floor. Tom stood there silently, while his friend pushed more bullets into his gun.

I ran to him, caught his arm, and stepped as hard as I could on his foot. But Tom - Tom was taking the gun from him. Tom was going to shoot me.

'Drop that gun, Tom Dauphine!' It was Miss Finley, who taught difficult boys in a rough school. Tom dropped the gun.

Alicia lived long enough to talk to the FBI. Tom told his story to the police. He had wanted Smollensk to kill his

sister before she said anything about him. Then the world would think she had sold her country's secrets.

The FBI arrived five minutes after the shooting stopped. They had been watching Tom, but not closely enough. They were angry that Alicia had been killed while they were on the case. So they said her death was my fault - I hadn't told them where Alicia was. I spent several days in prison. It seemed like a suitable punishment, just not long enough.