

# Twice Dead

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Also by Raud Kennedy

Mad Rabbits  
Stick Out Your Tongue  
Sex on the Beach  
Streaking Venus  
Top of the World  
Black Oak  
Glimpses

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# One

Every morning when I woke, I asked myself where I was from, but the answer never came to me. I'd been found laying on the side of the Massachusetts Turnpike a few miles outside of Boston, broken and bleeding. I guessed a car had hit me, but I didn't know, nor did I know what I'd been doing out there in the dark. It had been summer, or else I would've frozen to death in the snow. I'd been brought into the hospital with no ID or anything, just a cheap suit on my back and the claddagh ring on my finger. That was what the nurses started calling me instead of John Doe, Claddagh, or just Clad, and it stuck. The ring had been turned holding the heart toward the inside, which meant there was someone out there missing me, but I didn't know who. Maybe she was blond, maybe she was brunette. Maybe I'd meet her someday.

That was almost two years ago, but I still wore the ring and I kept the bloodstained suit in a bag in the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet in my low rent office

in Boston's Garment District. The Garment District was next to Chinatown and what used to be the Combat Zone, Boston's red light district. They'd closed the strip clubs and twenty-five cent peepshows but the streets were still littered with those selling whatever they had, their bodies, their drugs, their family heirlooms, whatever. This kept the rent low. Unless you were Chinese and fresh off the boat, then your Uncle Charlie packed you in twenty to a room and charged you your first born.

The office had two rooms, an outer waiting room, and an inner office with a wall of eight foot tall windows. I kicked my feet up on the windowsill, crossed them at the ankles and wondered as I watched the snow fall on the people struggling below if I were like I used to be before whatever had happened to me.

Boston was getting the most snow this winter since the big one of '78. That was what I read in the papers because I wouldn't know. I didn't remember. The plow crews piled it wherever they could find room. On some corners there were ten feet of gray, dirty snow, and when they ran out of places for it they brought in the dump trucks, hauled it down to the harbor and dumped it in the bay. The environmentalist didn't like that, though, something about the salt that had been spread on the road. The sidewalks were single track deer paths running through urban woods of concrete and brick. You had to stand aside to let the approaching person pass, so if you were in a hurry you had to walk along the edge of the street where your chances of survival with Boston's drivers were against you and at the least you'd get sprayed with muck.

I lit a Lucky and blew smoke at the window. Not a single soul had walked through my office door in three weeks, and my stomach was feeling raw. My pale skin

looked vitamin deficient from all the spaghetti and Ragu I'd been eating. I'd come up with at least twenty different ways to season the sauce, but in the end it all tasted the same, red muck. For all I knew it was Soylent Green. With the last of my money I could've bought a giant New York steak at Grill Twenty-three, or paid the phone bill. I paid the phone bill, but my mouth still watered for that steak.

I heard the waiting room door open and close and there was a knock at my inner office door. I dropped my feet to the floor and swiveled around in my chair. The silhouette of a man wearing a hat showed through the door's frosted glass window.

"Come in," I called.

The door slowly opened, creaking on its hinges, and a Beacon Hill blue blood stepped in. He gave my sparse office and me a perfunctory look, before closing the door behind him. I doubted if I'd passed the guy's smell test to be invited to one of his society cocktail parties. The customer was the sort of upper class twit who spelled theater the way the English did with the R before the E instead of at the end. He was in his early fifties, silver hair, South Palm Beach tan, and had blue eyes. He wore a dark suit under a camel hair topcoat and paisley scarf, a blue shirt with a white collar and French cuffs and gold cufflinks.

Anyone could have all that, but what gave away his old money status was the annoying tic he had of clearing his throat before he spoke. "Are you Claddagh?" His voice was high and tight like his face. He clasped his gloved hands behind his back, leaned forward and fixed me with eyes that were glossier than one would've expected. Maybe it was the cold outside, or maybe it had been a three martini lunch at the Harvard Club to boost his courage to deal with the uncomfortable.

I stayed put in my chair and stubbed out my cigarette in the large glass ashtray I kept on the desk. I could tell from the pinched expression on the guy's face that the last thing he wanted to do was shake my hand, and if I offered, the guy would leave his gloves on. Whatever, I didn't care.

"That's what the painter said the letters on the door spelled," I said and jerked my chin at the customer chair on the other side of the desk. "Take a seat."

He leaned over the chair and inspected it for cooties, then shot his cuffs and pulled his trousers up at the knees and gingerly, very gingerly eased his Brooks Brothers fanny into the wood chair. The pinched expression on his face didn't leave and I started to wonder. Maybe I should've offered him a blow up donut pillow to sit on.

I lit another cigarette and filled the room with fresh smoke and waited for him to speak, but he just sat there looking around the room uncomfortably, so I blew smoke directly at him. "Let's start with your name," I said.

But I already knew who he was, Lathe Windsor. He was a regular in the society pages of the Boston Globe. He had a habit of dirtying his image by causing drunken scenes at various blue blood social functions, then repaired his image by making large donations to the lady of the house's pet charity; More Flowers for Newbury Street, Spruce Up the Public Gardens, or some other ridiculous rot that didn't make a difference to me or anybody I knew. The last time I was in the Public Gardens was when I was chasing a fourteen year old punk who'd taken up purse snatching as a way to get his parents' attention. Most kids took up smoking pot or snorting coke, but the smart ones were inventive. I figured a six month stint in Juevie would fix this kid, but daddy-war-bucks disagreed, bailed the little shit out and

paid off everyone his son had trashed. Six months in Juevie would've been a lot cheaper.

Windsor cleared his throat. The Queen Mother was here. "I am Lathe Windsor, the Third. You may have heard of me. I'm in the papers quite a bit, but you don't look the sort who reads the financial pages."

"I know who you are. You can trace your family lineage all the way back to the Mayflower. Lucky you. At least my ancestors had the sense to fly." I waited for a response, figuring Windsor should've huffed and puffed, or at least cleared his throat again, but he stared silently down at his gloved hands. I felt sort of sorry for him. Maybe Windsor knew what a phony he was, and maybe the three martini lunch wasn't for courage, but his daily pill to deal with what he'd made of his life.

I stubbed out my cigarette in the ashtray, lit another and slid the pack across the desk. Windsor picked up the pack, fumbled getting one out with his gloved hands, and stuck it in his mouth. I didn't want to watch him fumble around trying to get it lit, so I half stood and leaned across the desk and lit it for him with my Zippo.

Windsor inhaled, and for the first time the pinched expression left his face. He smiled, making him look like a cadaver as he said, "Thank you."

I gave him my twenty dollar grin and blew smoke through my teeth. Wasn't I nice, I gave the poor sap a cigarette. I always underestimated the power of nicotine. "Mr. Windsor, what brings you to my office?"

Windsor inhaled oxygen through his cigarette and practically reached for an imaginary drink. I kept a bottle in the third drawer of my desk, but that was for when I broke bad news to clients, not to get them to tell me what they wanted to hire me for.

"You can speak freely," I said. "Whatever you tell me will be in strict confidence. Sort of like confessing to

your parish priest.”

Windsor gazed at me over his cigarette with his glossy eyes for a moment, then looked back down at his gloves. “You seem like a man who can keep a confidence.”

I wasn’t much of a conversationalist to start with, but I was getting bored sitting here watching him breathe through his cigarette. “Come on, Mr. Windsor, I’m sure you’ve got other things to do today than sit in my office checking your gloves for loose threads.”

Windsor cleared his throat. An announcement was coming. “I’ve a rather delicate matter I’d like you to look into.”

The word delicate stuck out like someone’s wife at a bachelor party. I usually tried to avoid the domestic cases because people got loony when I showed up and produced photos of their spouse having a romp with the busboy, or more likely their best friend. At this point though, my stomach was doing the answering for me. I could already feel the Grill Twenty-three booth wrapped around me, see the glass of Laphoag scotch in my hand, and smell my twenty ounce sirloin steak on the grill in the kitchen. It was so close and the money for it was in Windsor’s wallet.

“Tell me about this delicate matter.”

Windsor blew more smoke and looked more closely at his gloves. “It’s rather delicate.”

“So you said.” I did some smoke blowing of my own, kicked my feet up on my desk, crossed them and leaned back in my chair. “Look, Mr. Windsor, I’ve pretty much heard it all. Whatever you have to tell me will pale,” I paused to tap my temple with my index finger, “to what I have locked up in here.”

Windsor stubbed out his cigarette and took another from the pack. This time I tossed him a book of matches and let him fumble lighting it. “Yes, I suppose you’re

right,” he said when he got it burning, then cleared his throat. “It’s my wife. I’m worried she might be having an affair.”

That word, affair, meant trouble. Extramarital activities were never delicate but as messy as things got. “What exactly makes you think she’s having an affair?”

“You’d have to meet my wife to understand.”

“Do you know with whom she’s having this supposed affair?”

“I’ve no idea.”

“What is it you want me to do?”

“Find out if she is or not.”

I’d taken on worse cases without needing the money half as bad. But this sort of case was never as simple as it first looked. I’d turn over one rock, and that would lead to another, and another, until I would finally wish I’d gone hungry and had never taken the case. But my stomach spoke, “It’s three-fifty a day, plus expenses.”

Windsor set his cigarette in the ashtray, took his billfold from his inside breast pocket and started dealing hundreds. “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, one thousand. Is that enough, Mr. Claddagh?”

The bills were crisp and new, reeking of ink from the New York Mint. I gave Windsor my hundred dollar grin and gathered up the bills as he returned his billfold to his pocket. I held one bill up against the light to make sure it wasn’t a phony, then folded and tucked them away in my wallet. Once again I was saved from the poor house.

Windsor was amused with my hunger for the bills, and I felt like I’d been played. He was used to playing people with his money, but I didn’t give a damn. I was just glad I hadn’t been born with a silver baby rattle up my ass like him. “I’ll need a photo of you’re wife, your home address, and a description of what you know of her habits.”

Windsor took a 3X5 photo from his side pocket, set it face down on the desk and scrawled his address on the back of it with a pen that would've paid my office rent for two months, then slid it across to me.

"That's my home number and address, and my office number," he said. "I'd prefer you called me at my office."

"I understand. All you need to do is keep to your usual routine and make like everything is okay. I'll call when I have something."

"Of course," Windsor said, stood and moved to the door, then cleared his throat. "When should I expect to hear from you?"

The client might be a total asshole, but I still never liked this part. A lot of my clients were used to dealing with black and white truths in other people's lives, but not their own. "It depends on her libido, Windsor. If she is having an affair, and they got it on last night, it could take a week before she gets horny enough to risk it again. But if it's already been a week since, maybe tomorrow or the next day. Then if she thinks you're a sap and they're cozy and comfortable, maybe it's every night." I dropped my feet to the floor and stood. "I'll find out what I can."

The pinched expression returned to Windsor's face. "Thank you, Mr. Claddagh," he said, then pulled off his right glove and offered his hand. The experience was making a humble man out of him.

I shook his offered hand and walked him out. When the office door swung shut, I bought myself a drink from the desk bottle and watched the smoke curl toward the ceiling from the butt Windsor had left burning in the ashtray. I stubbed it out, lit a fresh fag, and looked at the address Windsor had scrawled on the back of the photo. It wasn't on Beacon Hill like I'd expected, but way out in Chestnut Hill, a suburb of Boston where most of the

houses were surrounded by stone walls and hedges, making it very private. It was almost the kind of place where you were buried on your own land. Maybe Windsor had something to hide. He wasn't the most typical of the blue blood clients who stooped to hire a PI. I turned over the photograph and saw why. Windsor's wife wasn't a she, but a he. Good old Lathe Windsor the Third was taking a walk on the wild side. His wife was a blond, blue eyed Robert Redford type, but about twenty-five years younger. If I had passed him on the street, I would've taken him for a gigolo.

I bought myself another drink from the desk bottle, spun my ass around in my swivel chair and watched the snow fall. So much for the easy life, I thought as I tossed the shot back. But it was a simple job paying good money, and all I had to do was a stake out. But I wasn't in a big hurry. It could wait for a fresh start tomorrow. Right now I was going to go over to Grill Twenty-three and have that steak, and I planned to share my newfound wealth. I picked up the phone and called Katarina, my secretary back when business was more flush. We had an on again off again thing going based on the heft of my wallet. It wasn't because of her, she was just as willing as a guy to pick up the tab, but I had a hang up about freeloading on my friends. I'd rather hunker down and cook spaghetti on the hot plate at home than do that. When Katarina stopped working for me, she took a job answering the phone at a local rock station. I'd listened to it a few times to see what it was about, but jazz and blues were more my thing than songs about teenage angst.

"WSOL, how may I direct your call?" Kat sounded tired.

"You getting your beauty rest these days?"

“Hi Clad. Not really. WSOL’s Christmas party was last night and I didn’t get home until early this morning.”

“I hope you’re hungry. I’ve got a new client, a well healed one.”

“Grill Twenty-three?”

“Nothing but.”

“Pick me up at home anytime after six?”

“I’ll be there.”

The short winter day was over, and it was dark as I weaved my way through the narrow deer paths in the snow to my car. I drove a big GM Caprice Classic, the car favored by cabdrivers for its big engine and ability to be beat to hell and still keep running. It guzzled gas like a kid does soda, but it always started and its nondescript appearance blended in with the other jalopies on Boston’s streets which made it hard to spot when I was doing a tail job, like I was going to be doing tomorrow.

I pulled up in front of Katarina’s about a quarter past six and got out to buzz her apartment from the building’s main entrance. I left the car running to keep the inside warm for her. She wasn’t the delicate sort, but she was originally from Florida and winter wasn’t her favorite season.

“I’ll be right down,” she said over the intercom.

I went back to the Caprice and waited. Katarina lived in Brookline, a neighborhood north of Fenway Park where I’d spent a lot of afternoons watching the Red Sox lose in the ninth inning. The Sox losing was almost a Boston tradition. They’d pull ahead only to lose their lead in the last few innings. At least they hadn’t thrown the pennant like the White Sox.

Katarina came out of her building bundled up in a long wool coat and white scarf, but from the heels she was wearing I knew the dress was going to be a treat. She was model tall, but more curvy than is fashionable in the