

The Other Side of The Street



Philippa Peters

An "Adult TV" Novel

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET

by Philippa Peters

I. THE GILDED CAGE

‘THIRD KIDNAPPING VICTIM RANSOMED!!!’ screamed the newspaper headline.

“With three exclamation marks,” said Detective-Lieutenant Al Dwyer to his partner, Detective-Sergeant Jim Givens.

Each of the men knew that there were nine victims of the gang, if it could be called such, that was making its illegal, criminal living from the affluent communities that surrounded Palermo and its beautiful, Pacific-side harbor and port. They also knew why the ransoms had been paid, and why the families of the kidnapped boys and young men wanted no publicity—not even that their sons had been kidnapped

and subjected to terrible ordeals before finally being bought out of their captivity.

“Still keeping our hats on tight about this one?” Givens asked grimly. “Still not enlisting the public on our side?” He climbed out of the front seat of Al’s sedan, hiding the paper against his forearm, as Police Chief Vincent Bruckmeyer came bustling out of the building and headed towards them.

Al Dwyer shook his head as Givens secreted the paper away behind the front seat. The secrecy about the kidnapped victims, their rights to privacy and such, was a very sore point between the two ‘sides’—the ‘regular’ detectives, members of the Palermo police, and the division of the FBI, the ‘Feds’, both supposedly investigating co-operatively what were federal crimes of kidnapping.

“What time did you set for the raid on *The Gilded Cage*?” barked Bruckmeyer, his voice loud, typical of the way he spoke to almost everyone.

“Around one o’clock,” murmured Al Dwyer.

“Anything else besides the raid tonight in that paper you bought, Jim?” Bruckmeyer asked over his shoulder.

Jim Givens swore silently to himself. “Nothing on that. Yet, separate story, separate writer,” he answered as they zipped into Central Palermo, with Dwyer’s driving speed making other drivers honk furiously at them. “Quotes the FBI that transvestism is an angle on two of the victims. Rich families with boys of that persuasion are cautioned to keep them off the streets or risk having to pay a fortune to see their sons again.”

“They wouldn’t recognize them if they did,” snorted Bruckmeyer. “It won’t take five minutes for some

television reporter to connect this raid to that conjecture. After all the progress you boys have made, this could cause the bent gang to pack up its frilly panties and head for sexier pastures.”

Police Chief Vincent Bruckmeyer watched Al Dwyer tap impatiently on the custom-made wooden steering wheel of his Impala. Al moved his thick body around on the car seat, fidgeting as he did so. His companions, Vince in the front, beside him, and Jim Givens, in the back, noted his unease and themselves became more on edge.

Across the dimly-lit street, loud rock music blared from the garishly lit night club. Occasionally, the door at the front of the club would open and a dark figure, usually female, would slip out of the place and into a side alley, sometimes stopping for a frenzied bout of petting with the male who'd accompanied her from the club.

“A little on account before finding a room,” Givens said, repeating what he'd said twice before.

“What time is it?” Bruckmeyer growled impatiently.

“Ten to one,” Dwyer said without even looking at his watch. The bust was due to go down about one. Bruckmeyer was obviously eager to start, still not telling the men why he'd ever chosen to be part of solving this strange kidnapping case, nor saying what this particular raid was all about, or what they'd learn from it all, if anything.

“They're all leaving,” said Bruckmeyer in an aggrivated tone. He opened the door of the car aggressively. “Come on. Let's get this thing over with!”

Givens and Dwyer rolled their eyes at each other but did as they were told.

There were two sets of heavy, metal-lined doors protecting the entrance to *The Gilded Cage*. Through the second doors, there was a narrow hallway, with a coat check to the left, now closed. A planter, with ivy-covered stems concealing the bars from view, acted as a sentinel to the long bar itself. At a table beyond the planter, a blonde woman in a red evening gown was totalling a number of receipts.

She glanced up and then froze, her hand posed in the air, as the three big men bore down on her. Bruckmeyer's hand, firmly holding the big gold captain's star in its black case, pointed towards the woman and then towards the bar. She rose, carefully placed the receipts on one side of the table, and made a slight, ironic curtsy to the police captain.

Bruckmeyer's face was like thunder as he followed her into the dark club. The only good lighting came from behind the bar itself. Two red-vested waitresses, both with blonde curls piled up high on their heads, were cleaning glasses and re-stocking shelves, their expressions turning to bright smiles as the new men approached.

The dark room was divided into many booths, each table therein protected from its neighbors by a small curtain. Even as Dwyer motioned Givens towards the rear exit, several figures got up from the tables and flitted down the narrow hallway in search of a way out. Cops are easy to spot in a place like this, thought Dwyer sourly.

Bruckmeyer cursed loudly. "Hold it right there!" his voice boomed across the club. The gentle hum of conversation died away. There was a crash of fallen glass as one figure stood and began to rush to the main entrance where Al Dwyer blocked her way.

The scene began to dissolve into chaos as more and more of the nightclub denizens tried to escape

the police. Givens was cursing loudly as he grabbed at a couple trying to scamper over the small stage and past him. "Stay put!" he yelled.

Bruckmeyer had specifically ordered that there be no gunplay. Givens cursed as his hand slid off a silky wrap and a slender, feminine figure disappeared past the crash bar and into the night.

Confusion reigned for several minutes until the sudden noise of police sirens howled out of the night at the front and the back entrances. The retreat was cut off. Several men and women were pushed back into the club by the arrival of uniformed men and women, a couple of minutes after one o'clock, Al Dwyer noted. Within seconds, the entrances were secured, the clients thrust back in their seats.

Givens pushed to the club's serving bar. The blonde in the tight-fitting red dress smiled wickedly at him, her lips as red as her dress.

A uniformed sergeant was berating the detectives. "One o'clock!" he yelled. "You called it for one! Why didn't you say you were going in early? We got chases going on in half the alleyways in this block. We're arresting bystanders, and we've probably let some go that we shouldn't."

By the twitching of the chief's jaw, Givens could see that he was about to explode. Bruckmeyer had put away his star, no longer really valid since he'd been promoted to Chief the year before.

"It's all right, Sergeant," Givens smoothly interceded. "We've got the ones we wanted. We heard they were about to leave and so we had to act fast."

Bruckmeyer glanced at Givens, giving no hint of surprise at the other's inspired lie; but then he had chosen Jim Givens for this because Givens was one

of the quickest thinkers on his feet in the Department.

“You said one o’clock,” said the sergeant stubbornly.

Givens shrugged. The blonde was now watching him tensely as he turned his attention to her. “Turn up the lights, Donna,” he ordered. She stared at him defiantly but then broke away.

“Jackie,” Donna said in a surprisingly low and gruff voice. A cute, dark-haired barmaid, in black tights and a white, frilly blouse that displayed her buxom wares very favorably, edged forward from the silent group behind the bar. “Light up,” the blonde growled. The brunette nodded and stepped to one side of the bar, reaching high.

As light flooded the room, the dark, mysterious ambiance disappeared. The walls were painted a drab, grey-white while the light fixtures were cheap and tinsely. Givens blinked rapidly like everyone else.

“You and your staff first,” Givens snapped at the blonde, as Bruckmeyer peered about, apparently mesmerized.

“Why?” growled the blonde, hands on her hips. “Whatya charging us with?”

“You’ll find out at the station,” snarled Givens as angrily as he could. Now, under the harsh lights, he could see the excessive makeup worn by the blonde and the blueish tint beginning to show about her chin.

“We have rights,” stated the blonde, her voice even more mannish, incongruous, with her feminine attire



and petite, womanly shaped figure. Now he could see that she wasn't a woman.

"At the precinct station!" bellowed Givens. The blonde stared at him for a moment as if she would defy him, her lips in a thin, shiny, red line. Then, she shrugged.

"Oh, Jackie darling," she said. The voice was higher, huskier, less masculine. The brunette with shoulder-length hair came to the front of the bar, her false eyelashes fluttering uncertainly as if she was unused to bright lights. "Start us off." She indicated to the red-vested waitresses to follow. "We're all going for a ride to the precinct house." She smiled at Givens and held out her hand with its extra long, vivid red fingernails. "Will you help us into the van, kind sir? Long dresses and high heels are such a trial going up steep steps."

Givens was about to grab the smirking, falsetto-speaking 'woman' in front of him when Vince Bruckmeyer stepped past him. He grabbed the blonde's arm and yanked her towards the sneering, uniformed police guarding the doorway. His jerk pulled down her sleeve and the front of her dress, revealing a black bra strap and the lacy top of a well-filled black bra.

"All right! All right!" the blonde lilted, her voice almost womanly. From behind the bar, six young waitresses, all in either fishnet stockings or black tights, in black micro-miniskirts, displaying rounded, feminine figures, minced after their employer to the doorway.

The uniformed sergeant raised an eyebrow to Givens who nodded at the customers. "Yeah, them too," he said as the sergeant shrugged. Twelve men and eight women had been detained in the club. Several more of each apparent gender were outside. "And

no, there ain't a real woman in the whole place. But separate them in the lockup. We don't want any making out in the cells."

They both looked at a brunette being helped to her feet by an older man, who put his arm about her waist as he led her with great dignity, as if she were his woman, towards the exit and the paddy wagon beyond. Givens returned stares with her as she swayed towards him, giving him a most attractive smile, which he would have loved to respond to with a smile of his own.

I was the fifth 'girl' to be interviewed by Bruckmeyer, and his two cronies. I presumed that he wanted to talk to me but it seemed like an odd way to do it, staging a raid on the place where I'd told him I'd be. There had to be more to it than just talking to me. What had Lieutenant Pam said to me when she'd finally persuaded me to do this job? Something about Bruckmeyer being very political and wanting to impress his sponsors in the rich villas of Southern Palermo.

But a raid on a well-known drag club? I supposed it would show that the Palermo police were doing something about the kidnapping of young transvestites—more than our friends among the Feds were doing, anyway. I stretched out my stockinged legs, re-arranged my dress about my thighs, and followed the desk sergeant, who'd come for me, into the interview room.

Bruckmeyer frowned, looking me up and down, as if he'd never seen a pretty man in a lovely, swishy dress before. I shook my long, wavy hair at him and wiggled to a chair, crossing my shapely legs. All the

men I met these days commented on my lovely legs. I was beginning to believe them that I did have girlish, pretty legs. Yes, I was still on the job Vincent had set for me, ten days before. The uniformed officer who'd brought me to the interview room knew nothing about that, about complimenting a woman on her looks. He left with a smirk on his face. Bruckmeyer courteously offered me a cup of coffee that he'd already poured.

"They, um, we, were pretty rough on you out there," said Bruckmeyer as I crossed my legs as women do. My dress rustled noisily, because of the stiff, crinolined underskirt that I'd worn and arranged to do just that. That seemed to affect the larger, older of the two detectives in the room with him as it had my 'client' earlier.

I nodded. I didn't like to speak too much, as that could destroy the illusion that I might be a female. I looked down and saw my nails about the cup, pink-painted and femininely manicured, thanks to Jackie, who'd done them for me earlier that evening, each of us primping while we waited for customers to arrive at *The Gilded Cage*.

"Not as bad as the Hill," I told him as Bruckmeyer had waited for me to speak. I wasn't sure, but I thought my voice was all right. It was hard to say. The people who came to the transvestite club didn't worry about little things being a bit off. My body wasn't off at all. I had a tiny waist, made tinier by my corset, ample though totally padded breasts, and brown, well-cut, femininely styled, shoulder-length hair.

It was my own hair. Jackie, again, had introduced me to a hairdresser who was a cross-dresser, as I was pretending to be. I had gulped a hundred times, but finally allowed Guy (Giselle when in drag) to cut,

perm, and color my hair. Now, with my thin eyebrows, I was called 'Miss' all the time, wherever I went shopping in Palermo, even without makeup on my face. I swore to myself that I was going to get a micro buzz cut as soon as this assignment was over.

I actually felt overdressed in that office. No, I wasn't going to call Vince 'Chief' or 'Mr Bruckmeyer'. I was acting like a woman. I'd do what a woman did, and call him Vince or Vincent as the mood struck me. I was in a lilac-colored, party dress, the shoulders puffed, the skirt flared and pleated, making it seem that I wore several petticoats. My light purple stockings matched the dress. I don't even want to say what I was wearing under the dress. Oh, all right, I was in dark purple panties and garter belt, matching my camisole underslip and bra.

"You've made progress," stated Bruckmeyer, which surprised me. I looked at him suspiciously through the mascara on my darkly painted false eyelashes and thought of Barbara, and the afternoon we'd spent at her apartment, laughing and fooling around. She'd taught me how to do my eyes, slapping at my hand all the time as I fondled her, telling me repeatedly to be serious. She didn't want me to get killed out there.

I re-crossed my stockinged legs, the dress rustling seductively. I was getting hardened to the sounds, sensations and fragrances of femininity that marked the world into which I had plunged. I noted how Givens reacted to me, almost in awe, as I mimicked a female while Dwyer looked stolidly at me.

"I want Jim Givens and Al Dwyer in on this," Bruckmeyer had said to me that first afternoon when we'd met, formally. Bruckmeyer's reaction to me then, in a woman's tailored suit, my hair parted in

the middle and drawn back in a long ponytail at the back, had been similar to that of Givens now.

We'd been at the lunch meeting with my boss, Lieutenant Pamela Wright, for over an hour. Bruckmeyer pressed her to lend Ross Barkley—he knew my name and what I'd done before for the Beacon Hill Department—to him and the Palermo police, as the FBI was getting nowhere. This was before she dropped on him that the 'Penny' sitting so prettily beside him was me, Ross Barkley, coming off my latest exploit: arresting a suspect, now charged with three murders, before he could murder me.

"I want you both to meet Detective Ross Barkley," Bruckmeyer introduced me formally, in the interview room, to Givens and Dwyer. "We got him from north of San Francisco to do this job for us. He was instrumental in breaking up the Marino syndicate in Frisco, among a lot of other fine jobs."

I saw the look in the other men's eyes when Bruckmeyer said 'San Francisco' and 'other fine jobs'. I wondered why Bruckmeyer didn't tell Givens that none of the jobs had involved dressing as a woman. I had only done that after I'd been transferred to Vice, where Lieutenant Pamela Wright had requested me. She told me frankly that she wanted me to act as transvestite 'bait', to capture a sadistic killer who'd been preying on men who liked to wear dresses.

We didn't arrest all the men who made passes at me when I was in drag, being monitored by Barbara and Fred, my partners. They loved to say outrageous things to me that I couldn't respond to over the wire I was wearing in my bra, or, sometimes, in my panties. They thought themselves really funny as they told me to 'sashay, darling, sashay'. I'd flushed out a few leads in investigating the lives of the dead queens,

but then the killer had been caught the old-fashioned way: someone had informed on him.

I'd just had to sashay past him, when we spotted him drinking at the Bijou and led him out to the parking lot for a little 'party'. Oh, how he'd cursed me, thinking I was a real tranny, as Fred dragged him through the gravelly parking lot to the waiting police car. Yes, I got the usual funny looks from the uniformed officers as they hauled him away, Barb going with them to make sure the charges were correct.

I'd gone back to my usual jeans, sweater and t-shirt, not cutting my hippie-long hair as I hung out in Haight on another intelligence case, when Lieutenant Pamela had asked me to do this thing for Bruckmeyer. It was to repay a favor to an old buddy who needed help with a case involving a killer of transvestites.

"Okay," the lieutenant had said. "I know it's an oxymoron to call you a woman. You know it's an oxymoron. But I saw you on the street. You were really convincing, Penny"— she used the girl's name I'd been using as a tranny, on the street—"even when you were giving Barb the finger behind that john's back, the one we arrested for soliciting."

The john had pulled a gun when we'd arrested him. I'd had to wrestle it away from him while Barbara and Fred came running. It was a laugh as two guys, coming out of the liquor store, dropped their beers and ran over first to help a lady in distress. They were mortified to find out it was me, a guy, and that I was a cop. They were even more mortified to find their liquor gone when they returned to where they'd set it down, to come and help a poor, defenseless woman.

As I drank the coffee Bruckmeyer had given me, I could see that Givens and Dwyer were wondering

how a deviate like me could ever have got onto the police force, even in degenerate San Francisco, which I wasn't actually a part of. I guess Bruckmeyer was trying to give me a good reference when he said I'd worked 'north of San Francisco'.

I could also see the detectives wondering how I could possibly be of help in this case. Frankly, I agreed with them. I didn't think that I was doing much to solve Bruckmeyer's problem, except to sit around in pretty dresses and have men fawn all over me as if I really was a drag queen.

I said that in my softest, most feminine tones to Bruckmeyer, who held doors open for me and helped me sit down in restaurants even though he knew I was a man. I was glad he did that. It made me angry with the men I worked with, who knew what I was, who slammed doors on me instead of opening them for me. I hated it when they didn't do things they would do for a woman, and treated me like one of the guys when I was all dressed up. When I was dressed as a woman, I wanted to be treated as a woman.

"I've kept all the right company," I said, smoothing my skirts as I re-crossed my legs without thinking of the impact on Givens of maintaining my feminine identity. "But either the organized gang members you want are keeping a very low profile or they've moved off this turf completely." *Or they don't really exist*, I thought but didn't say. Givens was staring in fascination at my high heels and, I guess, my legs.

"We picked up Judy Landon, as you suggested," said Bruckmeyer. I saw that both of the others were surprised by that. "And you were right. She, he, is in on all this. She, he, had been told to get clean for the last week of the month by Belinda Lee. We can't find anyone by that name. Have you had any luck?"