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Personal participation

POLICY QUEEN

St. Clair, Stephanie

Only Madame was speaking. The others sat silent while she talked, the words cascading from her lips in a furious stream.

The ^{two} dour faced gunmen were grimly attentive. The squat one at the left was only recently released from Danne-nora. Together with his pal, he sat and listened to the woman's tirade.

The timid girl, who was seeking a job as Madame's secretary, sat speechless with terror, her lips quivering like jelly atop a throbbing motor.

The jobless newspaper man smoked a cigaret. It was a time to appear nonchalant. Christ, what a woman! What a story! he was thinking.

Madame was on her feet pacing the floor, a slim figure, dark and sinister, clad as always in a pale gray dress. Her unstraightened hair was standing on end. Her eyes were flashing like orbs of polished anthracite.

WHAM! She brought her fist down hard upon ^{the} heavy plate glass table cover. The timid girl's face was a quivering muddy colored mass. The squat gunman blinked his narrow eyes. His pal stared ahead. The jobless newspaper man flattened the cigaret held tightly in his fingers.

"To think that dey should put it in ze paper that goddam Dutchman keel one of my ^{men}," Madame raved. "And put me on ze spot? Me? Me? Don't everybody know I ain't scared nothing? Run me out of beezness? Me?" The woman laughed. Her laughter was no less sinister than her boastings.

policy queen -2

"I'll show dese niggers how to hold on to ze game. I'll show them how to fight back. I'll show that Dutch Schultz ho can't muscle in and take ze numbers away from us like that. Yes, dey kéel Harris. But me, I ain't scared and dey know it. I ain't like dese niggers."

Madame never considered herself a nigger. "Moi? Je suis francaise," she would tell anyone. And though she had long been a resident of Harlem, she clung tenaciously to her French accent. Even in her fury, she never forgot it. where she was known as the "policy queen!" In Harlem, it was believed that she was a native of Martinique. This she denied vehemently. It was in European France that she was born.

But no one was questioninz her tonight. The gunmen were there to do her bidding. The secretary to take notes. The unemployed newsman had been trying to get her to be an angel for a proposed newspaper venture.

Turning suddenly to the secretary : "Take this. I'm going to write to that newspaper!" Madame like^{ed} to write letters to the editor.

The timid girl, more terrified than ever, tried to respond. But the words she tried to force through her lips were formless, meaningless sounds.

Noticing her terror for the first time, Madame laughed.

"What's matter?"

The girl was on the point of collapse. The gunmen relaxed their grim faces to admit a faint smile.

"Let me write the letter," the newsman volunteered.

"All right. Take this."

"Never mind. I know what you want to say and how it should be said. I'll write it. You sign it."

Becalmed, Madame acquiesced. The newsman went into the next room to type the letter. Madame continued to talk, The gunment listened. The girl was in a nightmare, unable to escape.

policy queen-3

The newsman wrote briefly:

To the Editor of The Amsterdam News:

In your issue of last week you wrote: "It is believed that the slain banker was one of a group of Negro operators which the 'policy Queen' has been trying to draw into a union to support her in her active crusade against the usurpers" and further that "the finger has been placed on" me.

This letter is to let you know that Martin L. Harris was in no way connected with any activity in which I may have been engaged. I assure you that had he been affiliated with me in any way, he would never have come to such an untimely and ill-fated end. The gangsters who killed Harris know better than to molest me or my associates."

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The jobless newspaper man took the letter into Madame. She read it slowly. Re-read it, nodding her head in approval.

"I guess that'll do," she said as she reached for pen and ink and signed in a bold hand

"STEPHANIE ST. CLAIR."