

Script: June 27, 2014 edition of Delmarva Today: Writer's Edition

Welcome back to Delmarva Today: Writer's Edition, I'm your host, Harold Wilson. Now for our radio drama: "Fair Warning," by Dennis Lawson.

PHIL: I was sitting at the table when she walked in. It was at Mr. D's beach house, Mr. Dino to you: one of his summertime poker games. She wore a black tank top, denim shorts, and black canvas sneakers. She was tall and gorgeous, a deep tan played along the lines of the tank top, her blond hair was all pushed up and off her slim kissable neck. I couldn't take my eyes off her. Except for the blond hair, she was exactly as I remembered. She crossed the dining room to a little bar, and with long elegant fingers, took the Hendricks gin off the counter, mixed a Tom Collins, scanned the room, looked at me like I was a piece of the furniture, and disappeared into the kitchen.

Dick Henderson, Mr. D's man, poured me a glass of whiskey.

DICK. "You know her?"

PHIL: I knew Dick. He was one of the most dangerous people I knew, so I tried to never give him much. "She looked familiar for a second," I said. I took a sip of my drink. Dick's light blue eyes weren't easy to meet. "Maybe I was just fantasizing," I said.

DICK: "I'd maybe fantasize about someone else. She's the boss's girl while his family is away."

PHIL: "She's not dressed like I'd expect."

DICK: "She's also a gun."

PHIL: He pulled a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket. I couldn't miss the bulge under his left arm. He jammed a cigarette in my mouth.

DICK: "Now stop talking about her."

PHIL: He waved a pudgy finger in my face.

That evening, the card table was set up in the living room. Mr. D was there, along with four other guys—two white-haired gents around his age, another who was probably mid-thirties like me, and then a young twenty-something who was about as young as I was when I first started the life. I'd been out of it for a while by then. Mr. D helped set me up in a legitimate business in Dover; a jewelry store and watch shop if you want to know. But that's not important. I was still called on occasionally to do a job.

Mr. D's place wasn't decorated the way you'd expect a beach house to be. You know, like fish nets and surf stuff. Instead, it was more what I'd call Italian-grandmother décor: Mediterranean landscapes, family photos from various decades, all taken at the beach or in the beach house, and enough religious knick-knacks to send you to the alter rail.

Dick sat on a chair in the corner, smoking and reading the paper; the bulge under his left arm always with him. The black tank top wasn't there. I'm sure she was around though...just staying out of sight. Mr. D was sipping a Tom Collins. I thought of that black tank top and those denim shorts and it took all my willpower to keep the jealousy off my face...to lose my money with a smile.

When I got up an hour or so into the game to refresh my whiskey, Mr. D followed me into the dining room.

MR. D: "Dick tells me you know Amanda"

PHIL: "I don't think so, Mr. Dino."

MR. D: "Phil, you've always been honest with me."

PHIL: "I was just checking her out. She reminded me of someone, that's all."

MR. D: "Who, Phil? Who did she remind you of?"

PHIL: Mr. D was a big man. Big in a lot of ways, but also just *big*; think Chris Christie big. His features were hard and his cigar was clamped in his teeth. "Just a girl who worked at a club in Philly," I said. His face relaxed and he patted my back.

MR. D: "Nah, couldn't be her, then. Amanda's not from around here."

Phil: *Yeah, well I knew that.*

Mr. D's beach house was on Virginia Avenue, in Rehoboth, a short hop from the boardwalk. When I got the invitation to join him for the poker game, I decided to make a little vacation of it. I'd spent the afternoon swimming, getting some sun, and scheduling a surfing lesson for the next day. The poker game wrapped up at around ten...one of the old guys cleaned up...and Mr. D was pretty drunk and sleepy by then. He didn't give me a hard time about "Amanda" when I said goodbye...didn't even mention her. Same thing with Dick...he said there was a new girl in his life, and he might drop by my store sometime to buy her something. And Amanda, well I had been hoping all night for another glimpse of her, but it never came.

That is, not until I was walking down First Street in the direction of Rehoboth Avenue...from nowhere she walked up beside me and poked a gun in my side.

AMANDA: "I'd like to have a chat. Where you gonna be tonight?"

PHIL: "Nice to see you, too Helen, or should I say *Amanda*?"

AMANDA: "I don't have time for this, Phil. Just tell me."

PHIL: "I'll be at the Frogg Pond, and then my motel room." No need for *my* gun. Besides, I was dying of curiosity. And I didn't think she'd kill me. Well, I hoped she wouldn't.

AMANDA: "Which motel?"

PHIL: "Crosswinds. Room two twenty-three. What are your plans for the evening, Helen?"

AMANDA: "Don't mess with me, Phil."

PHIL: She turned down a side street and disappeared.

The Frogg Pond is this great little hangout on First Street. It's the best place for karaoke among all the beach bars in southern Delaware. At least, in my opinion. I was sitting at the bar, nursing a beer, thinking about Helen, and watching a group

of women do a more than passable job of “Country Roads.” When they finished, the DJ...a short, beautiful, bouncy brunette...said that the next singer up was “Amanda.” And then, there was Helen, taking the microphone, as the opening strains of Alanis Morissette’s, “You Oughta Know” came through.

I had no idea she was there. She’s always been like that...it’s part of why she’s so good at what she does.

She killed it on the Alanis song. The crowd loved her. When the song ended, she walked away to a ton of applause and joined me at the bar. She asked the bartender for a tumbler of Wild Turkey, water on the side.

We sat quietly for a minute, while this young guy belted out “When Doves Cry.” It seemed like every woman in the place except Helen got up to dance. Prince does it every time.

AMANDA: “I’d love to catch up, but we have to talk business.”

PHIL: I took a sip of beer. “Go ahead,” I said.

AMANDA: “Dick Henderson killed my brother. It was six years ago.”

PHIL: “Okay. And?”

AMANDA: “Okay, so Chuck wasn’t innocent, and maybe he deserved it. He was part of a gambling ring in Jersey. His boss screwed over your man Dino. But Dick, that piece of garbage, executed seven other guys who just happened to be in his place at the time... including Chuck.”

PHIL: I wasn’t going to offer an opinion. I didn’t really have one.

AMANDA: “I’m not naïve, Phil, fair is fair. I just happen to think that what I’m going to give Dick is fair, too.”

PHIL: “So you worked your way into the inside for the chance to smoke him. Why tell me all this?” She took another sip of her Wild Turkey, but this time half the liquid disappeared.

AMANDA: “Dick isn’t an easy guy to find, Phil. Getting involved with Mr. Dino was the only way I saw to get close to him. I don’t want to talk about all the things

I've had to do. But tonight it should all be over. The easiest thing to do would be for me to kill Dick and then run. Not look back. But then I saw you, you saw me. What if tomorrow, Mr. Dino suspects you were in on it? You could be in big trouble. I couldn't take that chance."

PHIL: "Why? You ran out on me before. You could've done it again."

AMANDA: "No, I couldn't. That's why I'm telling you this; fair warning."

PHIL: I reached under my shirt for my gun, then poked Helen in the side with it. "I'm sorry, Helen. You can try for Dick another time. We're going to leave now, and you're going to drive out of Delaware."

AMANDA: "Put that gun away...I'm not going anywhere. You know why I left, when we were in Boston?"

PHIL: "Doesn't really matter now does it?"

AMANDA: "I was engaged. Look, when you and me got together, it was like nothing I had ever felt before. But I couldn't just run out. I was in too deep. I was trying to protect you."

PHIL: It was my turn to drink her Wild Turkey. "Well, Helen, how'd it work out for you guys?"

AMANDA: "We're divorced... finished, dunzo."

PHIL: "Yeah, me too." There was a new singer up now, a woman rocking out to "Separate Ways." Helen pushed my gun away.

AMANDA: "Don't you see? We've got a second chance, Phil. I know coming after Dick, doing everything I had to do...it was right, because it led me back to you; I can feel it. When I disappear, you can disappear with me."

PHIL: I shook my head. "No, I can't. I've got a life here," I said. I put my gun back in its holster. "Get out of here. Do what you need to do and get out. I can handle Mr. D. Just don't come near me again. Ever!"...She reached for my face. I pushed her hand back. "Stop it, Helen. Just go. Go!" She slid off her barstool. I grabbed her wrist. "Dick is dangerous, you know. He would pop you in a minute. It's a bad game. I hope you have a solid plan on how to take him down."

AMANDA: “Don’t worry, he’s got a woman in his life now. Been letting his guard down. Sleeping with both eyes closed, if you know what I mean. You wouldn’t believe how stupid a guy can be when he’s in love.”

PHIL: Not true. I knew all about that. I let go of her wrist. She turned around and, without a look back, melted through the crowd at the bar. I watched the door swung out and she was gone.

Back in my room, I sat at the little wooden table, drank coffee, smoked, and tried to sort out my thoughts. I was a bookmaker, when I first met Mr. D. Small-time stuff, to be honest. I wasn’t very good at it. When I screwed up, I would go to Mr. D for a “make up,” meaning he would cover my losses and I’d pay him back once my books were straight again. He always cut me a deal and he never threatened me. For one thing, he knew I was good for it. For another, I would do jobs as necessary to help dig him out of a hole.

That was how I got into the life with him. And when things got too hot, he set me up in my shop in Dover. Sure, I still had to work for him here and there. But I owed him for everything.

Yet, I betrayed him that night for Helen. And I betrayed Dick. When the sun came up that morning, he was going to be worm food. Guilt, I could live with guilt. I had plenty of things to be guilty about, believe me. This was worse though. This was fear. Maybe Mr. D would haul me in, see through me. Maybe he’d tie me back to Helen and understand what I’d done. Maybe I would be worm food next.

What got me through the night is that I kept hoping...hoping Helen would show up and try to romance me into seeing things her way. But I think she knew she didn’t have to.

I waited up all night for her anyway. I opened my curtains and watched the sunrise. I knew that wherever Dick Henderson was, he wouldn’t be opening his eyes to see this beautiful beach day. With that thought, I drifted off to sleep.

My surfing lesson was at eleven. The best thing, I figured, was to go on with my day as if I didn’t know anything. Of course, I wondered about the details. Chances were that Dick was in his car trunk and Mr. D was still asleep, not yet realizing that neither of his bodyguards were going to be around today.

I grabbed a towel and walked across the street to the coffee shop and managed to choke down half a cheese Danish. Then I met the surf teacher at his van. The way it worked was he picked up the students near the boardwalk, and then drove them to this little inlet where the waves were friendly.

Surfing was a cinch: after a only few tries, I got the hang of it, popped up, my feet went where they were supposed to go, and I was cruising toward shore. “Don’t look down,” I said to myself. “Don’t look down! Skim, skim the surface, there are no good things down there.” Then I saw Helen, she was standing on the beach in a two-piece bathing suit that hid nothing and suggested everything. She was taking pictures. Her hair was brunette again...a late-night dye job... and she was wearing big black sunglasses. As soon as I saw her I was off the board, flailing in the sea, being pulled down.

Struggling up through the surf, I watched Helen come to meet me. “How’d you know I’d be here?” I said.

AMANDA: “I’m good at what I do.”

PHIL: “And Dick?”

AMANDA: “Like I said, I’m good at what I do.”

PHIL: “Mr. D?”

AMANDA: “Things are going crazy. I should be three states away by now.... But... I wanted to see if you changed your mind about coming with me. You’ve slept on it. Come with me, Phil.”

PHIL: I knew, in that moment, that going away with her was all I wanted in this life. If they found us? Well... she was worth dying for. “We better get going,” I said. “You know, my wallet is in their van.”

AMANDA: “I’ve got cash.”

PHIL: I really was leaving everything behind. It hit me like one of the waves that had knocked me off the surfboard. “Cigarettes?” I asked. I dried off quickly and pulled my shirt on. She unlocked the door of a yellow Ford Mustang, an early 2000s model.

Amanda: “No. And I wouldn’t let you smoke in here anyway.”

PHIL: She slid behind the wheel. The car was still cool from the air conditioning. Helen pulled my head close to hers for a kiss that wasn’t nearly long enough.

AMANDA: “I need a few hundred miles before I can really celebrate.”

PHIL: Then we were on our way, Route 1 unrolling behind us, Tom Petty’s “Last Dance with Mary Jane,” blaring. Last dance. I almost asked her how Dick’s last dance had gone. Forget it, I told myself. Forget it. Think about this dance; the girl in the black tank top, the denim shorts, the oh so long blond hair trussed up, the thin kissable neck. This last dance; take it, I said to myself. Take it until the music stops...yes, take it, until they find you.

I’m not going to say where we stopped, or where we went. That’s not worth mentioning, except for the tumblers of Wild Turkey we shared, and shared again. Whiskey to forget, whiskey to wash away the past, whisky to numb the soul.

We framed one of those surfing photos and it’s on the living room wall. It hides a compartment with a gun. At least I think the gun’s still there. Another drink...listen, buy me one more drink will you, before we go.

A great thank you to our cast of characters:

PHIL: Jim King

AMANDA: Kara Dahl Russell

DICK: Matt Bogdan

MR. DINO: Tom Welsh

And thank you for listening to Delmarva Today: Writer’s Edition.