

*A FILM NOIR CLASSIC! It's 1937 in Pre-War San Francisco. When a nest of German and Japanese Spies is uncovered by Lily and Sally, the pair of modern women prove to be more than a match for both their pet hard boiled detective Phil D'Bourbon, and the for the Nazis! A fast paced tour de force with Chinatown Heroines, Pt. Reyes Fascists and Bourbon!*

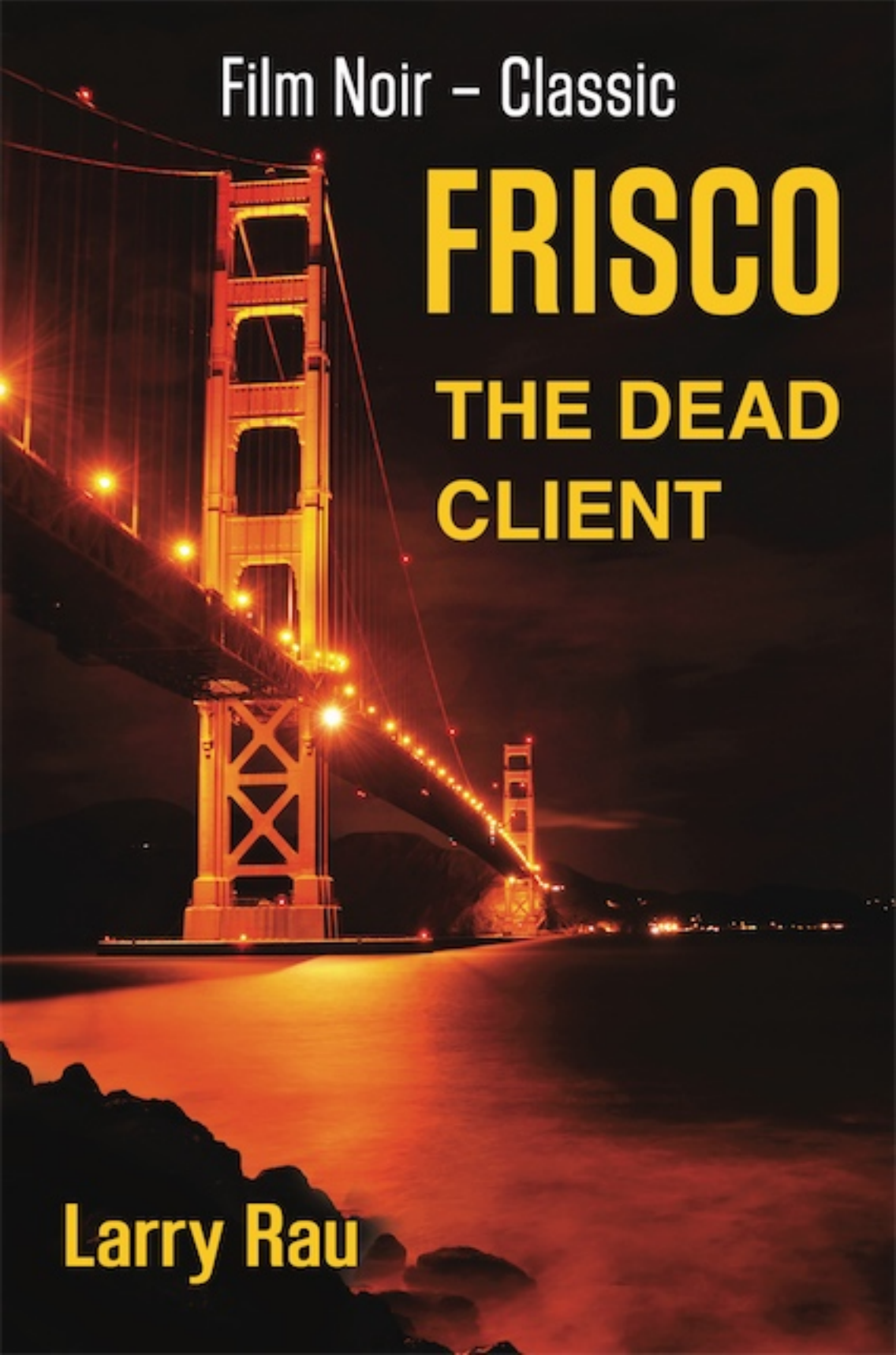
## **FRISCO The Dead Client**

by Larry Rau

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A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge at night, illuminated with warm orange lights. The bridge spans across the water, with its iconic towers and suspension cables visible. The lights reflect on the water's surface, and the sky is dark. The overall mood is dramatic and atmospheric, fitting for a film noir theme.

Film Noir – Classic

# FRISCO

## THE DEAD CLIENT

Larry Rau

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## Chapter 1

The girl in my Plymouth was dead. I had no idea how she got there, who killed her, nor why. Not even Schultz, my pal in homicide believed me. But I was telling him anyway.

I'd been sitting in my Ferry Building office with the lights off, sipping bourbon and listening to the steady electric hum of the Key System Trolleys running their loads of evening commuters home on the bottom deck of the Bay Bridge. I was puzzled about my tempting new client, and all the dough she'd just given me without explanation.

Sixty minutes later, I found her.

Sure, I knew better. I've been around the block in 'Frisco. You don't have to be a detective to know that when big money shows up on the waterfront that Santa didn't bring it. Her check pulled my feet out of the fire. My ex-wife, landlord, car dealer, and a couple of pawn shops all needed their bull dogs fed. But taking money from a dead client? That made it look bad, especially to a cop.

The girl knew I would've helped her anyway, even without the money. She'd made sure of that. Everything about the way she smelled and looked at me - the way she held her body just so - said:

"You want to get into some of this right here on the desk...and maybe I want you to."

She was scared and vulnerable, beautiful, rich and smart. Yeah, she knew I was gonna do whatever she wanted. She was good. Brother, I needed to get away from the foghorn next to my office just so I could think.

My red '35 coupe was waiting in the waterfront lot like a tugboat dog. The blue network broadcast from New York would be on the car radio in a few minutes. I'd figured on following the Belt Line tracks down the Embarcadero, then up Telegraph Hill to Coit Tower. I was dying to hear Benny Goodman's new quartet- Lionel Hampton's vibes. All I wanted was hot jazz, smooth bourbon, a view of the Golden Gate, and a quiet place to think.

I found the Plymouth's door handle in the dark, slid behind the wheel from the running board, and fumbled the key into the ignition. Like usual, the flathead motor started right up. I had things on my mind, but the lingering smell of her perfume seemed stronger than it ought to be. I was already distracted, and her perfume only made it worse. It wasn't until my dash lights illuminated the cab that I saw the girl slouched against the passenger door.

A lot of stuff went through my mind fast. Maybe she's gone to sleep? Maybe she's hiding or hasn't got any place to go? Maybe she got amorous or just passed out drunk? At first, I just give her a polite nudge, then a shake, but nothing happens. She's too pretty to slap, but she doesn't look good in the moonlight, not like she should.

She's wearing a wool suit with long buttoned sleeves, and a silk blouse that I don't remember plus she's limp as yesterday's bass. I'm looking for a pulse desperately, but I can't get at her wrists. I'll take a pulse anyplace I can find it and pretty soon I end up with my hand on a half warm tit with no heartbeat underneath it, then I know I've got 115 pounds of trouble on my front seat.

"That's when I went back to my office and called you."

"So this is exactly how you found her, and you don't know nothing about it?" Morris Shultz squinted at the corpse, illuminated by the spot-lights on his un-marked car.

"Nothing, except there was a wadded-up package of Black Jack Gum lying on the ground by the passenger door, but that's all there is to go on except her name on the canceled check, and that she

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smoked Camels. Other than that, I can't tell you a thing except she didn't wear a brassier and it's a damned waste."

"How's that?"

"Like I said, she didn't wear..."

"Oh never mind!" Shultz interrupted. "What did she hire you for in the first place, that was worth that kinda money?"

"I wish I knew Schultzy. She was telling me this story, but it was like she was gonna piss her panties the whole time. She kept looking out the window, I didn't know what for. All I got was she had some information that she was afraid of. She didn't explain what it meant, but she was convinced it was dangerous. Right in the middle of telling me, she looks out my office window, sees the Ferry Boat coming in from Berkeley, and takes off like a scalded crab. It was the damnedest performance you ever saw. She leans over my desk and gives me a real long look at her tits, gives me these great big wet puppy eyes, takes my hand and presses a check for one thousand bucks into it, and coos..."

"You'll help me... won't you?"

"One Thousand bucks!"

"You say it was an act?"

"Who knows, either that or she was the sweetest girl that ever died. The money was real, and obviously she had a reason to be afraid." I nodded toward the dead client.

"I don't know what the reason was yet, or who killed her - just that I owe it to her to find out."

"Well Pal, you've had quite an evening; a grand you'll never have to work for, some justifiable necro-feel-ia, and now you're involved in a suspicious death. Not a bad day's work. In fact, nothing you do surprises me anymore."

*Larry Rau*

"Aw Morris, you're just jealous because she was cold by the time you got here."

"You disgust me sometimes, Bourbon. Just keep out of it until we have a cause of death and I tell you that you're in the clear, or I come to cuff ya."

"Listen Schultzy don't let it keep you up at night. You disgust me all the time. That's what I love about ya. You're the most reliable cop in 'Frisco."

## Chapter 11

We threw Magdalena into the back of the truck. She crossed herself, gratefully eating the Focaccia we tossed to her. Sally drove the truck like a fucking demon.

"If we get stopped, I'll just shoot that bitch. I'm in the mood. Look, you drink and drive Phil. I have work to do."

She pulled over and we switched seats. I admit, I felt a lot better when she was done. We figured nothing could shock Magdalena. We didn't care anyway, but the feeling didn't last.

We saw the smoke from 20 blocks away. By the time we were a block away it was obvious we'd been fastened with a threaded device. The cottage had burned to the ground long before we arrived. Cordons of police and obvious black sedans full of the kind of people we didn't want to meet were everywhere.

Sally yelled: "Let me hit the pay phone on the corner, by the park...I've got a rat to smoke out!"

Something was dead wrong here, and now Sally wanted to use the telephone again. I played it cool, waiting. The damage had already been done, probably by one of us. Sally didn't explain. I didn't ask. I still trusted her with my life. She hung up the heavy black receiver and ran back to the truck without waiting to hear a word.

"Which would you like to shoot up first Honey? FBI Office or German Consulate?" She didn't appear to be joking.

"What a lovely twin you are." I told her. "Such delightful choices. You make the ideal playmate."

She shot me "the look".



"What a quaint way of putting it."

"Yes, quaint and old fashioned. Just like doilies or the double cross. The question is... who is playing both sides of the street. Who and why?"

"When we know that, we can quit this madness, and think about going on our honeymoon."

"Is that a fact? You're the second person to tell me that today, and I flat don't trust the first one." I wasn't smiling like I should be.

"You mean the General?"

She tried the big eyes, but I wasn't buying it.

"Well, before you called him, we were doing OK. So right now, honey the only thing I don't suspect is what is inside that bottle of bourbon. And believe me I plan to go someplace right now to check that out. Very thoroughly."

"Can I come along?"

"Sally I wouldn't consider letting you out of my sight. Not for a second, my flying princess."

"Well, that doesn't sound very nice, Phil!"

"Just consider it a trial honeymoon."

That's when Sally took a whack at the side of my head with her purse. She did it so playfully I forgot to duck. I also forgot where she carried her gun.

When I came-to San Francisco was dark. Fog rolled in off the Bay coating everything with a cold soggy mist that choked off the stars and street lights. My hair and my shirt were wet but not with fog. Magdalena and the twin, whoever she was, were gone. The piss was their way of saying "good bye". Now I was back where I

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started. Broke and in a whole lot of trouble on the 'Frisco waterfront.

I headed back to the Ferry Building to clean up. Back to where the whole mess began. It was 3 A.M. on a Sunday Morning, when nothing moves on the waterfront and all the bars have closed early. The parking lot where I'd found the sweetest girl who'd ever died was empty. I left it that way and kept going.

I followed the Belt Line tracks down to Red's Java House, nosed the Dodge in facing the Bay and left it. I hoofed my way back to my office in coveralls. The Folgers' plant filled the air with the smell of the coffee I needed desperately but knew I wasn't gonna get.

The janitor was ok. I was lugging a basket of food and the tommy gun. He helped me get them up to my office fast. I slipped him a five spot. We both had to make a living. Like I said, he was ok.

I cleaned myself up in the office bathroom, put on a fresh suit, and then took one last good look at the fog, before falling asleep on the office couch. I was rocked to sleep by the same deep vibrations of the fog-horn Bee-oh-ing powerfully into the night which kept lonely company with a half million other souls clinging to the shadows of life around the bay.

The steam whistle on the 7 am ferry woke me from a pleasant reverie about Sally, so that my waking became a bad dream I couldn't quite wash out of my hair. I mindlessly watched the crowd pile off the Ferry Boat Poppy just in from Berkeley. Hung-over, half asleep, certainly very sad and confused about the sweetest girl who ever died, I just stared out the window- but couldn't think.

The candlestick phone rang itself silly on my desk until my hangover got the best of my better judgment. I answered, "Yee-A-AZZ" in a faked a southern belle accent. I said nothing more.

"Watch who gets off the ferry." Lilly clicked off instantly.

Sauntering among the morning businessmen and smart secretaries, the tall Kraut with the black gloves, strolled off the

ferry just as nice as you please. Around his neck was a camera in a leather case I recognized as Sally's Leica. On his arm, a tallish slender blonde was making happy conversation. They pushed before them a somewhat reluctant looking woman with a Mediterranean look about her. The happy woman, and the man in black gloves, each kept one hand in their overcoats.

I'd made a sling for the Thompson with two belts. I got it over my shoulder and threw on my overcoat. My hat and scarf would cover my face well enough. I knew the stairs of the ferry building like you know your own toes. I took them down 3 at a time.

The side fire door opened into the flow of passengers. I hid behind it like a pissed-on spider. When the trio had just passed me by, I slugged the happy pair in the back of the head, using the hard walnut butt of her Tommy gun like a bat.

At gun point, Magdalena helped me drag them back into the building where the door shut and locked itself automatically. I got their guns before they'd revived enough to resist. I kicked the Kraut in the head, which put him out again. I liked him much better that way. I let the two women do the heavy lifting while I covered the lot of them. We took the service elevator up without being seen.

I guessed we had 30 or 40 minutes before the police started poking around. The janitor would steer them wrong and tip me off. If everything went ok, I'd get what I wanted out of them. Either way, I had to leave without being seen before cops came knocking on my office door.

I made the women shove the desk and couch against the office door. There was no other exit except through the window. The dock was four stories straight down. Some of them were probably going to leave that way. I just didn't know who yet. I didn't much care anymore.

I took the big flashlight out of my desk and hit the twin hard across the temple. After she crumpled to the floor unconscious, I dragged her into the bathroom. I did something wet and disgraceful, then locked her in. She shouldn't have abused my trust, whoever she was.

I turned on Magdalena, who took an involuntary step backwards.

"Did they really torture you with wires and batteries, Magdalena? Or are you just another one of these homicidal foreign agents? I've got more of those than Carter's got pills."

"You saw my body... do you think I enjoy that?" She kicked the semi-conscious German where it would do the most good, to make her point.

"You'd have to be as sick as that mother fucker on the floor." I hadn't answered her any more than she'd answered me.

"Why did you ask me that again, Phil? She made me go along and they both had guns! What choice did I have? Would *you* just die for nothing?"

I was rummy enough that it almost sounded convincing.

"Spare me the shit. He's the only one I'm interested in. Either you're useful to me or you're not! Can you get anything out of him, if we let him taste his own medicine?"

"I am a walking torture encyclopedia. But are you sure this is what you want me to do?" Magdalena's expression and body language didn't change, but I was too tired to notice.

"Hell no! But I'm ab-so-fucking-lutely sure *you* will do it. Right now! The Nazis picked this game, so I'm playing by Spy Rules from now on. In fifteen... maybe twenty minutes the cops will come knocking on that door. Before then, I'm getting what I want. I'm deciding who lives. I'm deciding who dies!"

"That mean me too?" She tried to give me the doe eyes, but it looked like a bag of shit from where I was standing.

"You too Maggie. So be useful for once! So far you've been nothing but stupid yapping baggage."

"Ok Phil, I am doing this for my babies. May God forgive me."

# Larry Rau

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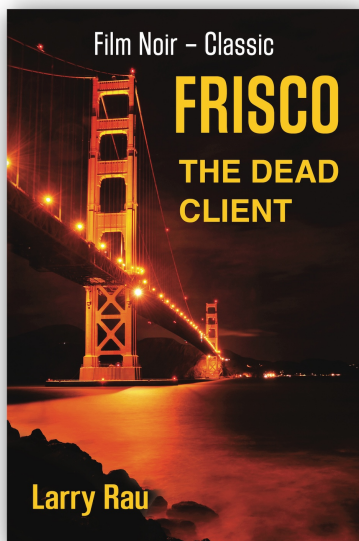
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