KENNETH STONE: She blew into my life like a gust of northern wind through my open door, her cold eyes piercing my curiosity as sharply as ice.

Hi ma’am. Is there something I can do for you?

I moved cautiously through the storm. She had a bad news way that suggested trouble, followed her around every corner. One had to wonder if she was leading it along.

BETTY WILLARD: I certainly hope so Mr. Stone. My name is Betty Willard and I have been falsely accused of plagiarism.

KENNETH STONE: I regarded her eyes’ sharp stare with uncertainty. This was serious. Plagiarism is using words or ideas without giving the author credit. It can give a person a rap sheet longer than the heel on her shoes. I tried not to let her see my suspicious.

It’s a damn shame. So you’re telling me you didn’t get this paper from someone else, a fancy new internet thing?

BETTY WILLARD: Of course not. I swear it.

KENNETH STONE: So you didn’t forget to use proper citations, lift a sentence or two?

BETTY WILLARD: It’s all there. Every word is my own. I’ve asked every detective in town and they all say it’s impossible to help me. I’m hoping a hot shot ace such as yourself will have the grit and know-how to prove them wrong. What do you say, gum shoe? Can you help me?
KENNETH STONE: Of course. I’m a detective. I’ll see what I can do.

She blew me a kiss as warm as a summer breeze and glided out of the room as crisp as autumn. It seemed that the seasons were about to change. I donned my coat and went out for a drive to clear my head.

How could a cookie like that have such a bum rap? It didn’t seem right to send a girl like her through the ringer. While I grabbed a bite to eat, I racked my brain around her paper. What was the instructor’s beef? All of the citations had been formatted correctly. All of the references were clean. What blotch existed within those double spaced lines that I couldn’t see?

I decided that if I was going to get that pistol off the hook, I would need to do some hard research. A new-fangled tool back at my agency might just be the ticket. I left a little lettuce for the waiter and be-bopped back to my office.

Holy mackerel. And then there it was. The answer was as plain as vanilla. I knew what I had to do.

Get me Ms. Willard.

Do you know what that is?

BETTY WILLARD: Well it looks like my paper. There are all of these strange markings on it. What does it mean?

KENNETH STONE: Panic painted over her as obvious as rouge. Men like me strive for the truth. We search for it in the nooks and crannies, bringing it out of darkness into light. But in that moment, I considered leaving this truth buried. Fortunately, the feeling didn’t last long. I had known too many dames with pretty gams and even prettier lies. Still, I tried to let this one down easy.

That my dear is an instructor’s view of the plagiarism checker. It says you’ve turned in this paper before.

BETTY WILLARD: That’s ridiculous. How could a system know something like that?

KENNETH STONE: Because the plagiarism checker scans the internet and keeps a database of everything that has been turned in before. Ma’am, your words are on record. They’ve got a good case against you.

BETTY WILLARD: This can’t be happening. I didn’t steal from anyone. These are all my words. I’m innocent. What should I do?
KENNETH STONE: You used your own work without citing it or asking your instructor for permission. I’m sorry but this counts as plagiarism, self-plagiarism. There’s only one thing you can do, Ms. Willard. Turn yourself in.

I watched her as she rolled out onto the street like a tornado, taking my temperamental heart in her spin. I told myself that it was probably for the best. No good ever came from mingling with rule breakers.

I closed the door on her forever, making sure that this time I kept out the chill.

[End of Audio]