

^K MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORIES MONTHLY

AUGUST
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"Nudists Die Naked"
by
Richard S. Prather

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BRYCE WALTON
— and others

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STORY
NEW!**

A New Johnny Liddell Story by **FRANK KANE**

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THE BOYS were waiting when Ed brought Red Hands into the Burger Barn. Ed was thin and his face stuck up out of his wet trenchcoat like an owl's. He reached up and slapped Red Hands on the back and led him over to a stool at the counter.

"Sit down, Strangler."

Everyone was looking at him. No one was saying anything. Anders, who was leaning over the smoking griddle, turned at the same time

Red Hands

BY BRYCE WALTON

that he flipped over a burger.

"What'll you have, Strangler?"

Red Hands heavily turned his knobby face toward Ed.

Ed grinned. "Well, go on, Strangler, put in your order."

The rain ran down the glass where the neon light sputtered.

What was the trick this time, Red Hands wondered. He looked out into the dark and wished he were back out there, back out there alone.

They were always playing tricks on him, and there was nothing he could do about it. He only had a toy gun . . .



"Maybe he don't have no money," Pete Hines said.

"You got any money?" Ed asked.

He kept on thinking. He could think faster than he could talk, but it still took him a while to work up to saying anything.

"What time is it now?" Pete Hines asked. He looked at the clock on the wall with the beer ad in the middle of its face. "Seven-twenty-five. Guess Strangler'll be getting his order in by eight-thirty or so."

"Think you can figure out what you want to eat by eight-thirty?" Ed asked.

He lifted his head up and down.

"Pie," he finally whispered.

"Well, by God!" Hines said. "Can you beat it? Strangler wants pie!"

"That's something now, ain't it," Anders said.

They were beginning to laugh. The trick was coming up now any time.

Anders leaned his belly against the counter and looked at Red Hands from about ten inches away. "So you want pie, do you?"

He nodded slowly. The pies were under a mirror so that every pie looked like two pies, and, in between the pies, Red Hands could see the blur of his own huge shapeless face, and his wide sloping shoulders. He still had his hands under his coat, that was heavy and soggy with rain.

"Now you wouldn't be wanting cherry pie, would you, Strangler?"

"Yeah," Ed said. "You wouldn't want *cherry* pie now?"

"Cherry pie," he said. His voice came heavy out of him.

"Well, I'm damned," Anders said, and scratched his bald head. "Can you beat it? Strangler wants cherry pie."

They laughed louder. The trick was almost here. What was it this time? It was always different and you couldn't ever guess what it was going to be next.

Anders didn't cut the piece of cherry pie. It was already cut. He put the plate in front of Red Hands, and then put the fork down beside it. He took a napkin from under the counter and put that down beside the fork.

"There. It's on the house, Strangler. I wonder what would happen, Strangler, if sometime you came in here and ordered something else besides pie? Cherry pie?"

Red Hands sat there and listened to the rain. Finally, slowly, he took his right hand out from under his coat and lifted it and put it down on the counter beside the fork.

Everyone in the place was looking at his hand. It was huge and reddish purple. Both of his hands were like that. Reddish purple with the tissue stretched and webbed with the way it had scarred up after the accident. He could never remember much about that accident when he'd been burned in the steel mill.

Old Mrs. Meerman said his hands were hexed.

But that was only after what he'd done to Art Larson and Jim Schu-

maker with them last year.

He turned his hand over and took hold of the fork and pushed the fork down into the pie. His mouth felt full of water as he stared at the red sweet juice squeezing out.

They were all leaning closer to watch him.

He knew that the trick had something to do with the cherry pie.

He looked at Ed, then at Anders. Then he looked at Pete Hines.

"No — no — not hungry."

Ed moved around and then Red Hands had to look at Ed. Ed's mouth was thin. "You go ahead and eat the pie, Strangler. We been looking forward to having you in for a little snack."

Red Hands looked at him.

"Fine way to do when it's on the house," Anders said.

He'd better go ahead and eat the pie. If he didn't they would just have some other trick waiting and that would be worse. Get it done and then he could get out. He had to keep from getting mad too. The way he had done with Art Larson and Jim Schumaker.

Ed pulled the gun out of his coat pocket and put it on the counter beside the cherry pie.

Red Hands stared at it and his hand shivered a little. It was the prettiest toy gun he had ever seen. It looked almost like a real gun. Big and silver. It was a lot prettier than the cap pistol he had traded the school kid out of.

"You eat the pie and you can

have the gun, Strangler," Ed said.

"He'll eat it all right," Pete Hines said. "He'll sure go to town with that pie now."

"I don't guess there's anything Strangler likes better than a toy gun," Anders said.

Red Hands dug his fork into the pie. He dug and sawed at it.

It took him a while, but he knew what the trick was.

The bottom crust of the pie was cardboard.

"Here, maybe you need a knife," Anders said. He handed him a knife.

Red Hands sawed on the cardboard crust with the knife but the knife didn't help much either.

He felt sweat running down his face as he hunched over the pie and kept on sawing. He didn't dare look up at any one. He stared down into the cherry pie.

"Well by God," Pete Hines said. "Anders — that seems like a real tough crust there."

"It sure does," Ed said.

Anders looked insulted. "No one's ever had any complaints about my pies before." He leaned close to Red Hands. "You got any complaints about my pie, Strangler?"

He didn't look up. He just shook his head. He had chopped the pie until it was all over his plate and spilling over onto the counter. He kept sawing away at the triangle of cardboard.

"Hell, don't pay no attention to table manners," Ed said. "Pick it up in your hands and go to it."

"Sure. We ain't particular about table manners."

"Go on," Anders said. "Pick it up and take a good sweet mouthful. You think you're at a Church supper or somewheres like that?"

Red Hands dipped his hand down. It was larger than the plate. He got the piece of cardboard halfway to his mouth and cherry filling fell down the front of his coat. He got the cardboard into his mouth and scraped cherry filling up his coat and held it in his hand and then he took his other hand out of his coat and held onto the cardboard.

He was chewing on it, trying to tear off some of it.

He felt a draft of damp air.

A voice said, "Having a good time, boys?"

"Well, if it ain't the Sheriff."

Red Hands felt a hand on his arm. A light friendly touch. "Let's go home, Allan."

Red Hands sat there. He felt like crying sometimes when Sheriff Tate called him Allan. Nobody else ever did that but Sheriff Tate.

"Come on," the Sheriff said.

Red Hands stared at the torn piece of dripping cardboard.

"Put it down," the Sheriff said.

"I don't guess you're that hungry, are you, Allan?"

Red Hands stood up and wiped his hands on his coat and his patched pants, leaving streaks of sticky red.

He went out into the rainy dark. They would be mad at him. They hadn't gotten to laugh.

Sheriff Tate's tall slouching body turned slowly in the doorway as he looked back into the inside of the Burger Barn.

"Take it easy, boys," he said softly. "Sometimes a practical joke don't turn out so practical."

He came on out and shut the door and took hold of Red Hands' arm. He held out the pretty gun. It was as big as a real one and had a silvery shine out in the rain.

"This yours?"

Red Hands nodded and took the gun and as they walked along he rubbed it and moved it around and made the cylinder revolve.

"Let's go get something for your hunger, Allan, instead of for a laugh."

They went to the Chick-Inn and he ate and ate and then Sheriff Tate walked with him for a long way out to where the air turned smoky by the dumpyard where Red Hands lived.

It was so dark he couldn't see anything much but the blurry eyes from the street lights.

"I sure like guns," he said.

Sheriff Tate didn't say anything.

"Guess they're teasing you a lot these days, aren't they, Allan?"

"Uh-huh." He averted his dull eyes.

"It make you very mad?"

"Uh-huh. But I'm careful, like you said, Sheriff Tate. Like you told me to do. After what happened with Art and Jim."

"That's good," the Sheriff said.

"Those guys are sure hard up for entertainment these days." They walked on a ways, and then the Sheriff asked, "You still want to go to the sanitarium?"

Red Hands stopped and rubbed at his eyes. "Nut-house . . ."

"Sanitarium, Allan. Let's call it that."

He couldn't say that word. He'd been in the nuthouse for a while after what he did to Art and Jim with his bare hands. Art had put a length of burning wood in his shoe while he was asleep on the floor in the poolhall, and he had woke up yelling with his foot blistered, and he hadn't known what he was doing for a while after that. But Art was in a hospital after that.

And then Jim Schumaker put a live snake in his pocket, and after that Jim went to the hospital too. They were real bad off. They thought maybe there for a while Jim was going to die.

"Sure . . . sure I'd sure like to go back, Sheriff Tate. Can't I go back?"

"You really want to go back?"

"Please, can't I go back to the nuthouse?"

"I'm trying to fix it so you can go back. But you've been a good man, and you've been staying out of trouble, and I appreciate that, Allan."

They passed the corner of the dumpyard. A mist was drifting through the piles of rubbish. Sheriff Tate walked on. "Take it easy now, Allan. Just try not to get mad, and

I'll be working to send you back to the — the nuthouse."

Red Hands looked after him until he was gone out of sight.

He had been sitting in his shack made from old boards and smashed tin cans for almost an hour. He'd just been sitting there before the old stove made out of an oil drum cut open. Sitting and thinking about how nice it was in the nuthouse where nobody teased him and nobody laughed at him.

He heard a knock on the door.

He got up slow and heavy. He never did have any visitors. Nobody ever came down to the dumpyard to tease him.

He opened the door that swung heavy on hinges made from pieces of leather from an old thrown-away piece of harness. A little rain blew in.

Ed was standing there grinning. He came in and shut the door.

"Jesus, it's hot in here, Strangler."

Ed struggled out of his trenchcoat and looked around for some place to hang it. There wasn't any place to hang it. He held it out to Red Hands who took hold of it and stood there holding it. He felt the heaviness hanging in the coat and he felt the hard object in the coat pocket against his thigh.

"Well, put it somewheres so we can sit here and have a little talk, Strangler."

Red Hands turned around and looked a while, then went over and

started to put the coat on the old mattress he slept on. In the candlelight he saw the blue shine of the metal and as he bent over he opened the pocket a little and he could see how pretty it was. He knew it wasn't a toy gun. It was much too heavy to be a toy. And a lot prettier than a toy gun too. A lot prettier than any gun Red Hands had ever seen except some of those real ones in the hardware store he'd seen when he went in there sometimes just to look.

"Just drop it there. Hell, that's all right, Strangler."

Red Hands dropped the trenchcoat, then turned around. Ed was spraddling his legs as he sat down on an old apple crate. He reached into his hip pocket and pulled out a bottle of gin and started peeling the seal off and screwing the lid off of it. He pushed the bottle toward Red Hands. It was almost a full bottle.

Red Hands hunched his huge shoulders and slowly moistened his lips. He stared at the bottle shining in the candlelight. He almost forgot about the prettiest gun in the world over there in Ed's trenchcoat pocket.

"Come on, have a swig, Strangler."

"No. Sheriff Tate, he says no —"
"The hell with him."

He pushed the bottle into the red hand.

"Go on, have a good snort there, Strangler. You're old enough. That big nosed Tate — just trying to get rid of you anyway. Shipping you off

to the crazyhouse. You know what that is, Strangler? I'll tell you — it's like sending a man to jail. Don't be fooled by Tate's smooth talk. He's trying to send you to jail. Why to him, you're just a common criminal, worse than a thief!"

Red Hands had drunk the gin when he'd done that thing to Jim Schumaker — but — but he tilted the bottle up and the sound kept gurgling until Ed jerked the bottle out of his hand.

"Christ almighty, Strangler!"

Ed held the bottle up and looked at it. It was half empty.

Strangler stared at the bottle, and spun the toy gun round and round on top of the orange crate he had made into a table.

He forgot everything about Ed except that Ed had paid him a visit, that Ed was nice, that Ed brought him a bottle of gin, that Ed had that pretty gun in his trenchcoat pocket.

He reached out.

"More," he said.

"Hold your horses, will you, Strangler?" He took the long drink himself, and Red Hands scooped the bottle out of the air.

He drank the rest of it and dropped the bottle and wiped his massive forearm across his lips.

"You wondering why I'm here, Strangler?" Ed asked after a while.

The candle sputtered.

Ed looked quickly toward the door. Red Hands kept looking at Ed.

Was this a trick maybe?

"I know you don't like tricks, Strangler. I mean — well — hell now, the guys like to cut up once in a while. We all like to have a little laugh once in a while, don't we?"

Ed leaned toward Red Hands.

"How'd you like it, Strangler, if nobody teased you in this town no more? What if you had money, lots of money, and no one ever teased you? You wouldn't have to go to the bughouse. You could live here and nobody would tease you and you'd be rich. Rich, Strangler. How'd you like that?"

Red Hands kept looking at Ed. Ed shifted around.

"You know why people pick on you, Strangler?"

"I got a cog loose. I got bats in the belfry. I got screw loose and all crazy mix up —"

Ed shook his head. "That ain't the real reason. The real reason they pick on you is because you live here in this dumpyard, you live in a garbage dump. Hell, they'd pick on anybody that lived in a garbage dump. That's the reason they do it."

"No bats — ?"

"No moola, no folding green stuff, Strangler. Hell, there's been Kings crazier than you, and Kings just the same because they had millions of dollars. Now you listen, Strangler, and listen good to your friend, Eddie Crowell. I like you. I don't want people teasing you. I've done it, but I never liked doing it. I guess I did it just because you seemed to like it. But now I know

you don't like it. So I'm making you an offer.

"You help me, Strangler. You help me, and between the two of us, we'll be richer'n the craziest god-damned King that ever got his head cut off."

"Don't need money in nuthouse. Happy in nuthouse. No money —"

Ed grinned. His eyes were very bright. They looked like the eyes of one of the rats that came out of the dumps at night.

"Now you listen to me, Strangler. Listen to Uncle Eddie, and you'll have enough money to *buy* the bughouse . . ."

"I own nuthouse?"

"Sure. Hell, you can buy the bughouse and you can be the King. King of the bughouse."

He could be King of the nuthouse, and he could have a real gun maybe too. The prettiest gun in the world.

Ed talked for a long time. Red Hands had never sat and listened to anybody talk so long. He was clenching and unclenching his fists. He was beginning to see himself riding in a car covered with gold right up to the nuthouse.

He could buy all the gin he wanted too. He could buy thousands and thousands of toy guns, and real guns. He could . . .

"How?"

"Well I'll tell you, Strangler. You listen close. Steve Miner — you remember Steve Miner?"

"He go to jail."

"That's right. They sent him to a nuthouse too, only they call it the State Prison sometimes too. Only he ain't like you, Strangler. He didn't want to go there. And he's due to get out any day now and he's glad to get out, and he sure as hell won't want to go back."

"Steve Miner, no good."

"He wasn't sent away because he wanted to do Tate a favor, that's for damn sure. He's a thief. A low-down dirty thief. He was sent up because he stole enough money to make both of us Kings. And most of that money was never found. But a friend of his spilled the beans, see. And I happen to know where he's got that money buried . . ."

"Buried?"

"That's right, Strangler, and I know it's buried. Miner's getting out soon, but he ain't going to be able to spend that money nohow. He'll be watched all the time, and soon as he tries to dig it up and spend it — well, there he is, right back in the bughouse."

Red Hands tied it all together. Buried money. Dig up. Be King. Rule nuthouse. Have all the pretty guns.

"I know where that money is, Strangler. The way I know is just because Steve Miner's friend can't hold a jigger of gin one-fourth so good as you can hold a bottle of it. Now I'm going to tell you where that loot's buried, Strangler, and you're going to dig it up."

"Dig up." Red Hands felt good. He had already thought of digging up.

Then he thought of Sheriff Tate. He mumbled and shifted his shoulders.

"You wouldn't be stealing it, Strangler. Not when it's already stolen money. Ain't that right? It'll just stay there and rot. Miner won't be able to dig it up either. . . ."

Ed leaned forward. "Ain't that right, Strangler?"

"You dig up?"

"Me dig it up! Why I can't do that. I would if I could, but this friend that spilled the beans, he's scared maybe I know, and he's watching me. He'd never think you'd do it, Strangler. And I'll be in town talking to the boys while you're doing it, and that way nobody'll know who done it."

Red Hands thought about the pretty guns . . .

"You afraid to dig it up, Strangler?"

Red Hands listened to the rain and he looked at the fire that was dying down and almost out. Now the only light came from the candle on the orange crate. His face puckered up, and his head felt heavy.

"You afraid to dig it up, Strangler?"

Red Hands raised his hands.

"Okay then, it's a deal."

He told Red Hands where the money was and just how to go about digging it up. It was in the old barn out in back of Miner's place. It was

buried under the boards in the Northwest corner where the corn-crib was.

"That's one reason they never did look under there, Strangler. Miner had a wagon-load of corn dumped in there. But most of that corn's been stole since then, and the rats has run off with the rest. That's where it's buried."

Red Hands nodded slowly.

"You get it and bring it back here, Strangler. You go over there right now and get it. You bring it back here and hide it in the dump where you'll know where it is. You do that, and you wait and I'll be back here to see you maybe tomorrow night."

All the time Red Hands had been thinking about the gun in the trenchcoat. He tied it up now, finally got it tied up together. Get pretty gun. But Ed not know. Not see if it was dark. Dark, put out light, get gun.

"Hand me the coat now, Strangler. I got to be going into town. I'll be talking with the boys and you'll be digging up the money and that way nobody ever know who done it."

Red Hands moved and the orange crate tipped over and the candle fell down and went out.

Red Hands slipped the prettiest gun in the world out of the trenchcoat pocket and put the toy gun in there in place of the real gun. Red Hands had thought about it all the time Ed was talking, thinking and figuring how he ought to do it.

"Christ, get some light in here, Strangler!"

Red Hands was holding the trenchcoat and he stood there a while before he realized he had to put the coat down so he could pick the candle up and get a match lit, but Ed already had a match lit. He put it to the candle and lit it.

Ed put his raincoat on and hit Red Hands on the shoulder.

"You go right on over there, Strangler. I'll be talking to the boys over at the Burger Barn."

Red Hands took the prettiest gun in the world out from under the mattress and looked at it a long time. It was prettier and prettier shining blue and heavy in the candlelight. Money, dig up, buy all the guns in the world and be King of the nuthouse.

He walked fast, heading across town toward Steve Miner's place through the dark rain.

He could see it all as he walked. Buying out all the stores that sold guns. Buying out Woolworth store, all the Woolworth Stores if there were any more than one, and have thousands and thousands of toy guns and real guns of every color and shape there was. He'd fill up all the rooms in the nuthouse with the guns and give a gun to everybody.

It wasn't fair for someone with a lot of money to hog away all the guns to themselves.

He thought about what Ed had

told him:

"Now you be quiet, Strangler. You be as quiet as a fly creeping on a wet blanket. And don't use no light. And if anybody hears you and tries to stop you, well, you know what to do. You can do what you did with Jim and Art, 'cause if anybody tries to stop you, they'll be no good thieves, some friend of Miner's. Steve's a thief and no-good criminal and everybody knows that . . ."

The grass was wet. It was thick and the weeds were high out in back of the Miner place. Nobody had lived there since Miner went away to the nuthouse. The windows had been broken out of the house, and the barn was about to fall in.

Red Hands felt his way inside the barn. He could smell his way. He could smell the old manure smell mixed with mouldy hay. He felt the smooth pole with horse hair caught in it, and he moved on along the wall.

He knew where the corner was where Miner had cribbed his corn. He could smell it. That smell of rotten corn and rotten cobs mixed with the smell of rats' nests. Wasn't any other smell like that.

He found the sagging door into the crib and he could hear the rats running and he saw their eyes darting as they ran into holes.

Rain dripped onto the floor through a hole in the tin roof.

He got the tire tool out of his pocket and stood there. The boards were rotten under his feet. He could rip them up with his hands. He pried one of them up a little and got his fingers under it and pulled.

The wood was soft, spongy and it crumpled in his grip. He heard the gun fall somewhere out of his pocket as he bent over and pulled more boards up.

And then he heard a hinge creak. He turned his head slowly and looked up into the beam of the flashlight.

Behind the light, dimly he could see the gray-white face. It looked like a cat's face without any hair on it, sort of pinkish gray. Those eyes were even yellowish and shiny like a cat's too and he snarled sort of like a cat.

"You goddamned half-wit! How the hell did you know —?"

It was Steve Miner. He remembered that face. Steve Miner . . .

He was coming back from the nuthouse. Only he was already back. He had come back before he was supposed to . . .

He heard Miner making crazy choking sounds and Miner was down on his knees digging under the floor and in the beam of the light Red Hands saw the stuff flying around in the air . . .

"Oh, Jesus, Jesus the stinking rats, the stinking goddamned dirty stinking rats . . . they got the money . . . they got the money . . ."

He was rocking and sort of moan-

ing and looking at the hole in the floor. There was stuff like green confetti everywhere and dimly Red Hands knew they had made nests out of all that money . . .

Red Hands felt the board break over his face and the splinters in his skin before he realized he was being hit.

The board had nails in it, rusty nails.

Red Hands covered his face and bleated.

And then he remembered. ". . . you can do what you did with Jim and Art . . . they'll be no good thieves . . ."

He took hold of the foot that was coming at his face, and he gripped it by the ankle. He got up onto one knee and kept on squeezing the ankle harder and harder.

Miner dropped the board and began to yell, and then he was twisting and flopping on the floor like a fish on the end of a pole.

Then Red Hands saw the gun in Miner's hand, the gun coming up out of the rats' nest and the green confetti. That was no toy gun. That was the prettiest gun in the world only it was a real gun, the gun Red Hands had dropped by mistake, and it was pointing at Red Hands.

Red Hands let go of Miner's leg and fell toward him and got hold of Miner's wrist. He twisted the arm around, he twisted it back . . .

The rain drops made hollow sounds on the tar-papered roof.

"Well, Allan," Sheriff Tate said "I've got some good news for you."

"What?"

"I got an answer from Louisville. They're going to take you back to the nuthouse."

"Nuthouse?"

"That's right, Allan. I told them how you were treated here, and how good you were at staying out of trouble, but how hard the guys made it for you. Well, they're going to take you back. I've got the ticket right here, you can leave on the train tomorrow afternoon."

Red Hands rubbed at his eyes.

"Your friend, Ed, he'll be taking a long trip too. To Leavenworth. He just got into some real trouble, and now he's in jail. But he's still up to his old tricks, Allan. He killed Steve Miner but he keeps trying to pin it on you, keeps saying you did it." Tate grinned. "But he can't explain how you'd come to have Ed's .38 revolver. Now trying to do a thing like that, I'd say that was a real dirty trick."

Sheriff Tate brought out the toy gun and held it toward Red Hands. "Found this at the other end of the dumpyard, Allan. You want it?"

Red Hands shook his head. No, he didn't want it. He didn't even like toy guns any more. He didn't like any kind of gun since that one had gone off and killed somebody.

In the nuthouse nobody ever carried a gun, anyway.

The Happy Marriage

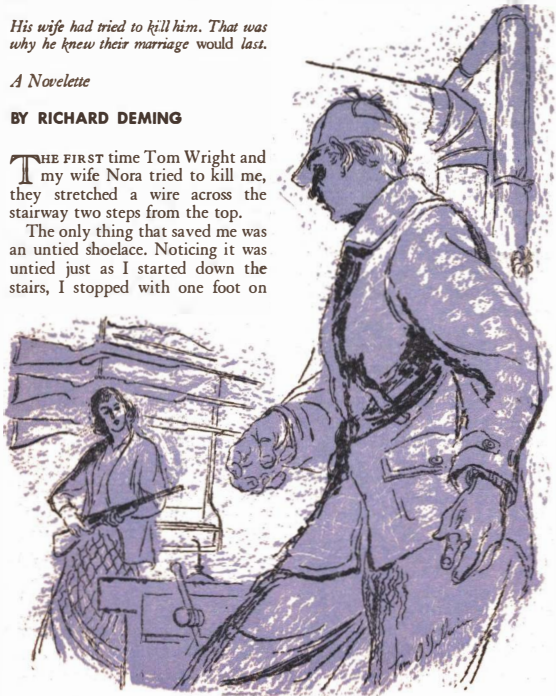
His wife had tried to kill him. That was why he knew their marriage would last.

A Novelette

BY RICHARD DEMING

THE FIRST time Tom Wright and my wife Nora tried to kill me, they stretched a wire across the stairway two steps from the top.

The only thing that saved me was an untied shoelace. Noticing it was untied just as I started down the stairs, I stopped with one foot on



the second step, turned around and raised my other foot to the top landing so that I could bend forward and retie it.

The calf of my left leg touched the wire as I leaned forward.

Forgetting the untied lace, I turned to examine the wire. It was piano wire, almost invisible to the eye, and it was stretched tautly across the stairway about a foot above the steps.

My first reaction was simply astonishment. I was about to yell downstairs to Nora and Tom to come look at my discovery when Nora called from the front room, "George, honey! The Nelsons will be waiting for us!"

It wasn't till then that it occurred to me the wire must have been strung for my benefit, and no one but my wife or Tom Wright could have strung it.

I closed my mouth and looked at the wire again. Then I looked down the steep stretch of stairs and imagined myself hurtling headfirst the entire length to the marble-floored foyer. Our house had eleven-foot ceilings, and there were twenty steps in the flight. I might not have been killed, but I certainly couldn't have escaped serious injury.

Dispassionately I wondered whether it would have been Wright or Nora who would have finished me off if the fall had failed to kill me.

Nora called again, "Did you hear me, George?" and it seemed to me

that a faint note of hysteria underlay the impatience in her voice.

Retreating to the bathroom door, I called in a calm voice, "Just knotting my tie, dear. About two minutes."

Again I knelt to retie the lace which had saved my life. Then I quietly returned to the stairs and loosened one end of the wire where it was wound tightly about a baluster. When I released it, it coiled up like a loose spring against the opposite railing.

Whistling, I descended to the foyer.

Nora was only slightly pale when I entered the front room, and her facial muscles were entirely under control. In a cynical sort of way I couldn't help admiring her recovery, for when she heard me whistling on the stairs, the shock of nothing happening must have flabbergasted her.

Tom Wright was not as good an actor, however. His expression was one of stupefaction.

Smiling pleasantly, I said, "Sorry I took so long, but the Nelsons are never on time anyway."

Tom recovered then and managed a smile in return. "I'm in no rush. Nora's the impatient one."

For a moment I examined the two of them as they stood side-by-side in front of the fireplace. I knew my wife was a beautiful woman, of course, and I knew Tom Wright was an exceptionally handsome man. But until that moment I'd never considered them as a pair. It came

to me with something of a shock that together they made an exceedingly handsome couple.

Under my steady gaze they both began to look slightly uneasy. Casually I said, "I'll get the car out," turned to get my topcoat and hat from the front hall and went out the front door.

I took my time getting the car out, wanting to give them opportunity to recover their poise, to discover that the wire was still on the stairs and decide that one end had somehow come loose by accident.

When I finally honked from the driveway alongside the house, Tom and Nora came out at once. Apparently they had had a swift conference and decided I suspected nothing of their murder attempt, for I could detect an air of relief in both their manners.

En route to pick up the Nelsons I mulled over what action I should take. It never even occurred to me simply to confront my wife and our closest family friend with the charge that they had attempted to kill me. Nora has sometimes accused me of being unemotional, but it wasn't just that which made me delay doing anything at all until I had a chance to think things out thoroughly. Inside I was as disturbed as any man would be who unexpectedly discovers he has been betrayed by his wife and one of his best friends. But I hadn't built my considerable reputation as a corporation

lawyer by moving before I was fully prepared. Years of negotiating business contracts and trying civil suits had conditioned me to studying problems from all angles before making even an initial move.

The only difference between this problem and the ones I was used to encountering was that this one was more important.

2.

As we rode along I arranged the factors of this new problem in my mind as logically as I would have the problem of a corporation merger.

First there was the inescapable fact that Tom and Nora had tried to murder me. I considered the possibility of there being some other explanation for the wire across the stairs, not for the ostrichlike purpose of trying to blind myself to reality, but because I wanted to examine *all* possibilities. I didn't have to consider it long.

When I had arrived home from the office, late as usual, Tom was already there, immaculate in his dinner jacket, and Nora was also dressed for the country club dinner. Our maid Jane doesn't live in and had already left for the evening, so no one else was in the house when I rushed upstairs to shower and dress, leaving Nora and Tom together in the front room. And there had been no wire across the stairs then.

Twenty minutes later the lethal

wire had been in place.

No one but Tom or Nora could have put it there.

The situation being defined to my satisfaction, I next turned my thoughts to what could have brought about Nora and Tom's decision to kill me. The most probable explanation was that they were in love and had decided that as an obstacle to their love I had to be removed. I examined this theory dispassionately and without jealousy.

I was forty-five, I reflected, and Nora only thirty. While I was in fair physical condition, corporate law isn't a field which requires much exercise, and I knew I had allowed myself to grow a little flabby.

Tom Wright, on the other hand, while almost exactly my size and general build, was as leanly muscled as a cat because he got plenty of exercise. He was golf pro and tennis instructor at the country club. He was also ten years younger than I and still possessed the smooth handsomeness of a youth. Physically I was hardly much competition for as beautiful a woman as Nora.

Furthermore I had too little time for Nora. After the first year of our marriage five years before, I had become too preoccupied with building my practice to give her the attention she deserved, I now realized. I had actually welcomed the congenial Tom Wright's gradually increasing presence in our home and his agreeability to substituting for me as an escort for Nora to social

events I wanted to get out of. It had been I who had thrown them together so much, and looking at the matter calmly, I could hardly blame them for falling in love.

I could even understand why they had attempted murder instead of asking me to divorce Nora. I don't mean I could forgive it. I simply mean I could understand the reason. As a member of the country club board of directors, I happened to know Tom Wright's salary was only forty-five hundred a year, which was hardly enough to clothe Nora, let alone support both of them. And Nora was not the sort of woman to sacrifice comfort for love. Naturally she would want both.

Thinking back, it was hard for me to understand why I had not even suspected the growth of Nora's and Tom's love before tonight. In the past year Tom Wright had gone nearly everywhere with us. His presence as a family friend was so commonly accepted, we frequently received invitations which automatically included him. And while he was often attentive to other women at parties and dances, he never escorted any woman but Nora anywhere, nor showed even passing romantic interest in any other woman.

How often, I wondered, had I stood at the country club bar with some of the men my own age indulgently watching Tom and Nora glide across the dance floor? Ruefully I recalled that my sole emotion

on those occasions was relief that I didn't have to exert so much energy myself.

Tom interrupted my thoughts by remarking, "Crisp tonight. Be nice if we had a blanket of snow Saturday to start off the deer season."

Nora glanced sidewise at him. "I don't think I follow that."

"Makes tracking easier," Tom explained. "George, want to go out to Werle's Woods Saturday?"

I thought about being alone in the woods with a man who had tried to kill me, and the prospect didn't much appeal to me.

Noncommittally I said, "Maybe. I'll let you know."

Then we were at the Nelsons, they were coming down the front steps to the car, and during the drive to the country club Velma Nelson kept up such an incessant chatter, I had no chance to return to my inner thoughts.

I didn't have much opportunity for inward contemplation after we arrived at the club either. People were already sitting down to dinner when we arrived, and in the bustle of locating places I found myself trapped next to Velma Nelson. I have learned not to listen when Velma talks, but it's difficult to think very constructively with a monologue going on in your ear.

After dinner, and before the music started, we as usual had an exhibition of local talent. There were the inevitable renditions by the barbershop quartet, in which Tom

Wright sang baritone, and the equally inevitable piano solo by Velma Nelson. Then club president Chet Wayne called on me for my imitation act, and when the crowd set up an insistent clapping, I allowed myself to be drafted.

Mimicry is my sole party talent, and in all modesty I'm good at it. In Chet Wayne's ponderous voice I introduced Velma Nelson, using all the superlatives our country club president is so fond of, then switched to Velma's shrill soprano and announced I couldn't possibly play tonight because of a cold in my little finger.

Immediately switching to the deep bass of Velma's husband Harry, I said, "Good. Then sit down and shut up."

The act got its usual heavy applause, particularly from Velma, who considers it a compliment to be teased.

After that we moved to the ballroom and I spent the rest of the evening standing at the bar with a group of men while Tom and Nora danced. I wasn't able to get back to my problem again until past midnight, after I had kissed Nora good-night and had retired to my own room.

Lying awake in the dark with my hands behind my head, I mentally reviewed the alternate actions I could take. First, I could confront Nora and Tom with their act and demand a divorce without alimony. Second, I could report the murder

attempt to the police and have both arrested. Third, I could ignore the entire problem and get myself murdered when they made their next attempt.

Fourth, I could work out some plan to break up the affair between Tom Wright and Nora and force her to return to me.

After thorough soul-searching, I decided that even though she had tried to kill me, I wanted Nora to remain my wife provided I could set the terms and devise absolutely certain safeguards against her ever attempting to kill me again.

Which meant the fourth alternate action.

3.

The next day, Thursday, was our maid's day off, and Nora invariably lunched downtown on that day. I figured she would have left the house by eleven, and I left my office at the same time. To be on the safe side I stopped at a drugstore two blocks from my house and phoned to make sure she had actually left. When there was no answer, I went home.

The best place for the microphone, I decided, was behind the sofa in the front room, as that was the logical place for a couple in love to sit if they had anything confidential to say to each other. And the best place for the tape recorder was where it already was: in my basement hobby room immediately be-

neath the front room.

In recent years I hadn't spent much time in my hobby room, but it was adequately equipped with every tool I needed. In less than a half hour I had a high-fidelity mike fixed to the back of the sofa just below the top, and a long extension cord leading from it through a hole drilled in the floor.

Setting the recording machine on my work bench, I switched it on, went upstairs again and counted aloud from various points of the front room. When I went back down to the basement to play back the tape, I found that my normal speaking voice had recorded clearly from every test point.

Clearing the tape, I left the house again, had a solitary lunch and spent the rest of the day at my office.

Normally I arrived home between five-thirty and six. The maid being off on Thursday, Nora prepared dinner herself, and if for some reason I was going to be late, I always gave her plenty of notice. But tonight I deliberately waited until five-thirty before phoning that I had an unexpected dinner invitation from a client and wouldn't be home at all.

"But I made pot roast!" Nora wailed. "It's practically ready to serve."

"Sorry," I said. "But this is one of my biggest accounts, and I can't possibly get out of it. Why don't you invite somebody over so you don't have to eat alone?"

"Who?" she demanded.

"Maybe Tom's free. He'd probably welcome the change from restaurant fare."

She was silent for a moment, then said in a mollified voice, "All right, dear. I'll see if I can reach him. Will you be late?"

"Don't expect me before nine-thirty."

"All right, dear. Have a good time." Her voice sounded remarkably cheerful for a woman whose husband had disappointed her for dinner.

I had a leisurely dinner downtown, then drove back to my own neighborhood and cruised slowly past the house. It was not yet seven, but the November days were getting short enough for it to be dark already. Lights were on both in the front room and the dining room.

Tom Wright's car was parked in the driveway.

Continuing on past the house, I rounded the corner and parked on the nearest side street. Quietly I made my way up the alley, through the back gate and let myself in the basement door. Without turning on any lights I felt my way to the hobby room, switched on the recorder and turned the gain control on full.

Then I retraced my way back to the car just as silently. There wasn't any point in waiting in the basement, as the machine was loaded with a two-hour tape and required no supervision.

Promptly at nine-thirty I turned into my drive. Tom Wright's car was now gone, I noted.

Nora greeted me pleasantly but without enthusiasm. Her inquiry as to what kind of time I had had was more polite than interested, and when I asked in turn if she'd been able to get hold of Tom, she merely nodded noncommittally and said he'd left about a half hour before.

With a little more animation she said, "Did you remember Tom's birthday is Saturday?"

I hadn't, as it happened. Wright and I had fallen in the habit of giving each other minor gifts on our birthdays. Nothing elaborate; a box of cigars or a fifth of scotch.

"I'll get something tomorrow," I said.

Nora announced she was tired from the previous night's country club party and was going to bed early. She gave me a tepid good-night kiss and moved toward the stairs.

"I'm going to read awhile," I said. "I won't wake you when I come up."

I did read for about thirty minutes, until I was reasonably sure Nora's door was closed and she was in bed. Then I quietly descended to the basement.

The first fifteen minutes of the tape playback was meaningless, con-

sisting merely of scraps of conversation too far away to make out. Obviously Tom and Nora were still in the dining room.

Then, clearly, Nora's voice said, "Jane can clear the table in the morning. Let's sit in here."

There was a long period of silence, then Nora's voice again, close and breathless. "Please, honey! The front drapes are wide open!"

"Close them," Tom Wright's voice said huskily.

"And chance George coming home early and finding them closed? Stop it, Tom! We have to talk."

"About what?" Tom demanded. "The thing fizzled. Talk won't change it."

"We'll have to try again."

"So we'll try again. When the chance comes. It'll have to be a setup like last night, when we're scheduled to go out together and George gets home late. The chance'll come. What's the point of talking about it?"

I could visualize Nora shaking her head. "Not that way again, Tom. I couldn't stand the suspense. We have to think of another plan."

"Why? The wire's simple and safe. Nobody would suspect anything but an accident."

After a long silence Nora said reluctantly, "I'm not sure George didn't loosen that wire."

"You nuts?" Tom asked. "It just came loose."

"How? You insist you fastened it firmly. You don't know George. It

would be just like him to disconnect one end and pretend he hadn't noticed it so he could have time to figure out what action to take. He wouldn't run out of a burning building until he'd stopped to analyze all possible exits and decided on the most logical one."

Incredulously Tom said, "You don't actually mean you think he suspects we tried to kill him, and didn't say a word about it?"

"Not really," Nora said impatiently. "It's just . . . just that he's such a cold fish, anything's possible. I'm just unnerved, I guess. I don't want to try the wire again."

"Well, what do you want to try?"

"I don't know. I want to think about it. I want to table the whole plan until we come up with a fool-proof idea."

"I think the wire's foolproof."

"It failed, didn't it?" Nora snapped. "I want a plan that will work. And that's going to take thought. Meantime I think it'd be a good idea if we stopped seeing each other except in George's presence."

"Why, for God's sake?"

"Because he's not an idiot. Did you see the measuring expression in his eyes when he came downstairs last night? I turned cold all over. I thought he was going to announce in that calm way of his that it was obvious we're in love and ask our suggestions on what to do about it."

"You're imagining things," Tom scoffed. "George trusts me like a

brother. Didn't he even suggest you invite me for dinner tonight?"

"Well, yes," Nora admitted. "I guess I'm hypersensitive since the wire stunt failed. But I can't help it. I'm scared. Let's do things the way I suggest."

"All right," Tom said resignedly. "I'll stay away unless George himself invites me over. Suit you?"

The tape went on for another full hour, but nothing more definite was resolved. All it boiled down to was that Nora and Wright would independently try to think up a feasible plan, and wouldn't contact each other until one or the other came up with one. Meantime they would keep their relationship carefully circumspect.

It was a mild relief to know I didn't have to be on the lookout for booby traps for at least the immediate future.

Returning upstairs, I disconnected the microphone, went back to the basement and pulled the cord through the hole in the floor. I closed the machine up and stored it back in its locker beneath my workbench.

After I climbed in bed I lay awake for a long time attempting to work out a plan of my own. Tom Wright's invitation to go deer hunting crept into my mind, and at the same time I suddenly remembered that Saturday was not only the opening of deer season; it was Tom's birthday.

The conjunction of the two dates gave me my plan.

Friday evening when I came home from the office, I brought a sealed pasteboard suit box with me. Opening it in the front room as Nora watched, I took out a brand new jacket and a peaked woolen cap. The jacket was a brilliant red. The cap was made up of four wedge-shaped panels, like pieces of pie, the ones on each side the same color as the jacket and the front and rear ones bright green. The peak was divided down the center, red on one side and green on the other.

Removing the sales tags, I slipped both on.

"It's certainly a gay outfit," Nora said dubiously.

"It's supposed to be," I told her. "Even with the woods full of amateurs, nobody ought to mistake me for a deer."

"Oh, you're going deer hunting?" she asked.

"If I can rake up a partner. Got time to make a phone call before dinner?"

When Nora said I had, I dialled Harry Nelson's number. Nora stood watching me speculatively.

Apparently she recalled Tom Wright's invitation to me to go hunting and assumed I was phoning him, because she looked surprised when I said, "Harry?"

"Speaking," Harry said.

"George Wharton. Got your deer license yet?"

When Harry said he had, I said,

"How about taking a crack at Werle's Woods in the morning?"

"Sure," he said. "What time?"

I told him I'd pick him up at five A.M.

When I hung up, Nora said, "You told Tom you'd let him know if you wanted to go hunting."

"I tried to reach him from the office," I told her. "He wasn't home."

Shrugging, Nora left for the kitchen to check up on the progress of dinner. The minute she was out of earshot, I picked up the phone again and dialled Tom Wright's number. He answered at once.

"About tomorrow," I said. "Still want to try for a deer?"

"Sure thing, George. When you didn't call, I was planning to go out alone in the morning."

"Pick you up at five-thirty," I told him.

I slept with Nora that night. Deliberately, so that she'd have no chance to use her bedside phone to contact Wright.

It wasn't until after we were in bed that I remarked in a tone of afterthought, "I tried Tom's place again while you were helping Jane get dinner, and finally got hold of him. He's going along with Harry and me."

She didn't make any comment.

When the alarm buzzed at four-thirty, I let it buzz long enough to arouse Nora before shutting it off.

She watched sleepily as I dressed in breeches and boots and pulled on the brilliant red jacket. When I put on the bright red and green cap, she made a face and closed her eyes. She had drifted off to sleep again before I left the room.

Downstairs I took off the new jacket and cap and neatly repacked them in the box they had come in. From the hall closet I got out my old black and white checked hunting jacket and my solid red cap.

There was no danger of Nora awakening and seeing from her window that I had changed clothes, for her window was on the opposite side of the house from the garage.

Harry Nelson was waiting on his front porch when I got to his house. But Tom Wright wasn't ready when we reached his small apartment, of course, because we arrived twenty minutes earlier than I had told him we would. He came to the door buttoning his flannel shirt.

"I thought you said five-thirty," he complained.

"I did. We're a little early. Happy birthday."

I handed him the suit box.

"Oh, thanks."

Leading us into the front room, he laid the box on the sofa and opened it. His eyes widened in surprise as he drew out the jacket and cap.

"Cripes, George," he said. "You shouldn't have spent this much."

"I got them for a special price and didn't want to pass it up," I

said. "See if they fit. I figured you were almost exactly my size, so I used myself as a model."

Both the jacket and cap fitted perfectly.

Grinning at himself in a mirror, Tom made almost the same remark I had made to Nora the evening before. "I guess nobody will mistake me for a deer in this outfit."

6.

Werle's Woods was only about eight miles from town. The area consisted of a strip about three miles wide by ten long, bordered by a nearly impassible dirt road on one side and a railroad track on the other. It was a rough section, pitted by ravines and with much underbrush, so that it had to be worked slowly, but it was full of deer, and occasionally some hunter even flushed a bear.

At the south end of the woods was a ramshackle frame building containing a restaurant and bar where hunters invariably had coffee before starting out and a drink or two at the end of the hunt. It bore no sign to indicate its name, but was known to its patrons as "Joe's Place."

While we were having coffee at the counter, I excused myself and went to the phone booth in the far corner of the restaurant.

It was only a minute or two after six A.M. and Nora was still in bed. She sounded half asleep when she

answered the phone.

Calling on my talent for mimicry, I said in Tom Wright's voice, "Nora?"

She came fully awake at once. "What is it?" she asked. "Where are you?"

"At Joe's Place, at the edge of Werle's Woods. Listen fast, because I haven't much time. This is it, honey. The opportunity we've been waiting for."

"You mean . . . Tom! Don't do anything dangerous!"

"This is the safest plan we'll ever find, honey. It's a natural. Can you get hold of a rifle?"

"A rifle?" She sounded scared. "I guess. George has three, and I don't suppose he took more than one with him. Why?"

"Can you shoot?"

"I have. I'm not an expert."

"Could you hit a man at a hundred yards?"

"Of course. Anyone could. But what . . ."

"Then listen close," I interrupted. "George, Harry and I will follow the standard procedure of one of us taking a stand while the other two drive game ahead of us. You know where Highway Sixty curves in toward the trestle over Fallon Creek?"

"Yes."

"There's a high knoll covered with evergreen about a hundred yards from the trestle. It's a perfect spot for a stand because it covers a ravine where there's a deer trail. I

estimate we'll reach there about ten, and I'll arrange for George to be on the stand. You can get to within fifty yards of that trestle with your car, slip under the trestle, get off a shot and be back in your car and gone before Harry and I get anywhere near the place."

Nora drew a deep and frightened breath. "But won't Harry . . ."

"Suspect me? How can he? I'll be right with him and he'll know I didn't shoot. It's a cinch to pass as just another hunting accident. A stray shot from some unknown hunter."

"But suppose . . . suppose you can't get him to take the stand?"

"Then don't shoot," I said impatiently. "You can't mistake him very well. With that red jacket and red-and-green cap, he'll show up like a Christmas-tree ornament."

"All right," Nora said in a low voice. "We'll try it."

I hung up and went back to finish my coffee.

7.

On my suggestion Tom Wright took the first stand while Harry Nelson and I drove through the brush. The procedure was simple enough. Tom walked alone along the tracks for a half mile to a pre-designated spot we all knew, as we were all three familiar with the woods. When Harry and I figured enough time had elapsed for Tom to get into position, we started moving toward

him through the woods. Tom's stand was in sight of a deer trail, and our hope was that any game we startled would take that trail.

The going was rough and, for me, a little ticklish, for I had to take into consideration the possibility that Tom might decide to open fire on me when he spotted me in the underbrush and claim it had been an accident. After all, there was no reason to believe he too hadn't been considering the unique opportunity a hunting trip offered for an "accident."

To minimize the risk I stayed within sight of Harry, and as we neared the stand I made a point of keeping the boles of trees between me and it. When we finally came within sight of Tom, and Harry halloed to warn him of our presence, I fell in behind Harry as we worked forward the last hundred yards.

Tom told us we had flushed two does, but no bucks.

Again at my suggestion, Harry took the second stand. In a different way this left the situation just as ticklish, for I was now alone in the woods with Tom. It would be a simple matter for him to stumble over a stick and accidentally discharge his rifle while it was pointed at me.

The only defense against this possibility was alertness. Carefully refraining from getting ahead of my drive partner, I constantly kept him in the corner of my eye, ready to drop flat the moment his rifle

started to swing in my direction.

But if Tom had any homicidal plans, apparently he was not yet ready to put them in operation. He concentrated strictly on the hunt, paying more attention to the ground ahead than he did to me. We reached Nelson's stand without incident.

This one had been a dry run, for Harry hadn't even spotted a doe.

The third stand was mine, and under ordinary circumstances I would have bagged my buck. I had barely been settled ten minutes when a big ten-pointer bounded along the trail not fifty yards from me. But I hadn't been watching the deer trail. I had been scanning the underbrush for Tom Wright, and the buck was past before I even realized I had a target.

When Harry and Tom rejoined me, I didn't mention the chance I had missed.

Now it was Tom's turn again to take a stand, and we were less than a half mile from the knoll I had described to Nora. Tom knew the knoll too, and I didn't even have to suggest it to him.

When Harry asked him where he meant to set up, Tom said, "You know the trestle over Fallon Creek? There's a hill covered with evergreen about a hundred yards straight out into the woods from it. I'll be there."

I looked at my watch as he started off. It was just nine-thirty.

We gave him twenty minutes to get into position, then started our

drive toward him. As we moved through the underbrush I imagined Tom crouched on top of the knoll, sufficiently screened by evergreen to make his identification impossible from a hundred yards off except by means of his brilliant red jacket and red-and-green cap.

We had made about half the distance to the knoll when we heard a single rifle shot.

"Sounds like he got a crack at one anyway," Harry remarked.

"Yeah," I said.

But I knew different. The shot had a hollow reverberation to it, as though it had been fired from beneath a bridge.

8.

It was nearly three in the afternoon when I drove the car into the garage. Nora must have been watching from the window for someone to come and report my death, for she met me at the kitchen door.

Unbelievably she looked me over from head to foot, her eyes widening with the beginnings of shocked understanding as she took in the checkered jacket and red cap I wore.

"That was Tom Wright in the red jacket," I said casually.

Her face was already pale, but now it turned dead white. For an instant she closed her eyes, then opened them again and stared at me.

"It passed as a hunting accident,"

I said. "The coroner's already issued a verdict. There won't even be an inquest. Hunting deaths are pretty cut and dried."

Nora said nothing.

"I want to show you something in the basement," I said, taking her arm again.

Again she offered no resistance, but it was like piloting a drunk. She was so unsteady on her feet, I had to grip her bicep forcibly to prevent her from falling down the stairs.

In my hobby room I left her standing in a corner while I got out the recording machine, plugged it in and started the playback. At first she simply stared at the rotating dials without understanding, but as the meaning of the recorded conversation penetrated, she swayed on her feet and gripped her hands together until the knuckles turned white.

"On the phone," Nora whispered. "That was *you!*"

"Right," I agreed. "But you'd never prove it in a million years, in case you get the urge to sacrifice yourself just so you can take me along as an accessory. On the other hand, the case can be proved against you. Ballistic tests will establish it was one of my rifles which killed Tom, and I have a witness that I couldn't have fired it. The new will I made yesterday leaves the keys to my safe-deposit vault to the district attorney. It'll be to your advantage to make sure I don't drop dead. Because if I do, you'll fry in the

electric chair."

Nora shook her head as though to clear it. "How can you . . . You mean you still *want* me?"

"Of course," I said. "Where else could a man my age find such a beautiful woman?"

In a dead voice she said, "It's horrible. You don't love me. You never have. You're just being vengeful."

Smiling, I shook my head. "I'm merely preserving my happy home."

Approaching her, I tipped up her head with one hand and looked down into her face.

"Kiss me," I commanded softly. "You may as well get in the habit of being a loving wife, because you've got a lot of years to go."

She stood like a lifeless thing when I kissed her, as unresisting as a stick of wood. When I released her, her face grew pinched and she walked stiffly from the workroom.

I took time to light a cigarette before leisurely following. When I came out into the main part of the basement, I discovered she was over in the far corner of the basement, where I kept my gun rack.

I stopped still as she swung around with the same deer rifle in her hand with which she'd killed her lover.

Neither of us said anything as she drew back the bolt to throw a shell into the chamber. I just stood there frozen, my only thought being that I had overlooked one thing.

I had forgotten to make allowance for an unpredictable factor.

THIS is a story of a group of people of strong will — and a will. It involves a fortune of over five million dollars, three sudden deaths, a typhoid epidemic confined to a select group, and a detective who was not a detective but a young doctor.

Kansas City, Missouri, was founded on what had been the farm of Col. Thomas H. Swope. A bold and spectacular operator who believed firmly in the future greatness of the city, Col. Swope invested his farm sale money in vast tracts of land and, when his predictions came true, amassed a fortune.

In the year 1909, when this story opens, Col. Swope was 82 years old, an eccentric millionaire who was constantly changing his will, and known for his many contributions to charity and to Kansas City, including a donation of 1,100 acres of land in the heart of the city for a park.



First the millionaire died, and then his heirs began to get sick. To the bug doctor, things looked suspicious . . .

Bug Doctor

A True Crime Story

BY EDWARD D. RADIN

A bachelor, the elderly millionaire lived in a huge, ugly Victorian mansion in Independence, some ten miles from the city. Also living there were Moss Hunton, his cousin and close friend, whom he had named in all his wills as executor, plus the family of his dead brother. These included the widow, Mrs. Logan O. Swope, her children, sons "Young Tom" and Chrisman, and four unmarried daughters, Margaret, Stella, Sarah and Lucy Lee, who at the moment was in Europe on a trip. Another daughter, Frances, who lived in the city, was the wife of Dr. B. Clark Hyde, a well known and highly respected physician and president-elect of the local medical society. These seven nephews and nieces were the major heirs.

It was late in September of that year when Hunton became ill. Dr. Hyde, who was visiting the house

at the time, diagnosed the illness as apoplexy, and when the regular family physician, Dr. D. T. Twyman, was called in, he agreed with the diagnosis. While the doctors also agreed that it was necessary to bleed the patient, they disagreed sharply on procedure. Dr. Twyman wanted to remove only one pint of blood but Dr. Hyde removed six despite Dr. Twyman's protest that it would be too severe a shock for the elderly patient. Hunton died on October 1.

The death of his closest friend also proved to be a severe shock to Col. Swope who had just recovered from an accidental fall and still had a private nurse to look after him. He suffered a relapse and had to return to bed. Once again Dr. Hyde injected himself into the case. He gave Col. Swope's nurse a digestive pill which the aged millionaire waspishly refused to take when he learned Dr. Hyde had prescribed it. But later the nurse induced him to take it and some fifteen minutes later he was seized with convulsions.

Dr. Hyde was summoned to his bedside and gave him a hypodermic injection. At the same time he warned the family to be prepared for the worst, that Col. Swope was dying. His prediction came true that evening and in less than 72 hours the second unexpected death was reported in the Swope mansion.

This death meant the breakup of the vast fortune since, under his latest will, Col. Swope divided the bulk of his money among the seven

children of Mrs. Logan Swope. The will further provided that if any of the main heirs died without children, their share of the fortune was to be divided among the survivors. Most of the heirs were unmarried, two of the girls were minors, and the death of any heir would make the shares of the others more valuable.

The misfortune that struck the Swope family was only beginning. Early in December Margaret Swope became sick and Dr. Hyde diagnosed her illness as typhoid fever. Returning that evening to check on his patient, Dr. Hyde found he had another. Chrisman, also an heir, was down with typhoid. During the next two days, four other people, two of them visiting relatives who had remained after Col. Swope's funeral, and two servants, also fell ill to the same disease. By now there were half a dozen nurses in the house.

Chrisman Swope died on December 5th, three days after he first became ill. Attending nurses noted in their records that he was seized with convulsions just prior to his death.

Still the outbreak did not halt. Within the next few days Stella and Sarah Swope, major heirs, also became ill with typhoid. So did a family friend who visited the house on a condolence call. Meanwhile, Lucy Lee, who had been informed by cable of her uncle's death, returned from Europe. Upon her arrival in New York she was met

by Dr. Hyde who escorted her back home. Several days later she became the tenth person to be stricken with typhoid, the fifth of the seven major heirs. Frances, Dr. Hyde's wife, and "Young Tom" Swope, so far had escaped the disease.

It was at this point that the hero entered the case. He was Dr. Edward L. Stewart, a young Kansas City physician, specializing in the then new field of bacteriology. The public knew so little about this branch of medicine that Dr. Stewart was referred to as the "bug doctor."

Since typhoid was in his field, Dr. Stewart had read the newspaper accounts of the epidemic in the Swope mansion with great interest. He was puzzled as to why the outbreak was confined to just one home and reasoned that it was either due to a faulty water system or else to the fact that somebody in the household was a carrier, who infected other people without exhibiting any symptoms himself.

Dr. Stewart knew Dr. Hyde personally but realized that it would be unethical for him to make any suggestions to his fellow physician. It was while musing over the strange epidemic that he suddenly recalled that Dr. Hyde had expressed an interest in doing some research work on germs and had asked him to provide some live specimens. Dr. Stewart had agreed.

It was several days after this conversation which had taken place at

lunch, that Dr. Hyde brought several test tubes containing culture media and Dr. Stewart gave him live samples of various germs including diphtheria, streptococci, and typhoid.

The young physician hurriedly tried to brush the thought from his mind. It was unthinkable that a man of Dr. Hyde's standing in the profession could have caused the epidemic in the Swope household, but the thought refused to die and so Dr. Stewart decided to play detective and end all doubts.

He waited until he knew that Dr. Hyde would not be in his office, went there and informed the other's nurse that he needed to take back some of the culture because his germs had died. The girl shrugged, said she never touched Dr. Hyde's test tubes and suggested that he look in a closet in the physician's private office.

Dr. Stewart found the tube containing the typhoid culture and stared with disbelief. Almost half of the culture was missing. Enough live typhoid germs had been removed from the test tube to cause a major epidemic in a large city.

The young bacteriologist now found himself on a spot. He realized that it was possible for Dr. Hyde to have used the culture to make his own serum to treat his patients, but at the same time he knew that such serums were readily available and inexpensive, so there was no logical reason for Dr. Hyde to make his own. Casual questioning at drug

stores confirmed that Dr. Hyde had bought ready-made serum.

The young bacteriologist had another test in mind before taking any steps. He knew that typhoid germs take at least ten days to incubate in the body before any signs of the disease appear. Yet Lucy Lee had contracted the disease only a few days after her arrival. The possibility that she had accidentally caught typhoid while in New York was too much of a coincidence to the physician, and yet she had to catch it in New York to become ill when she did. He knew that Dr. Hyde had presented her with a box of chocolates when he met her after her boat docked in New York.

Dr. Stewart did not know whether typhoid germs would live in candy and he decided to find out. He purchased a box of chocolates and then experimented with injecting live typhoid germs into several of the pieces. He waited for several days and then tested the chocolates. The typhoid germs were still alive. Lucy Lee could have been infected by eating a piece of doctored candy. The time element also checked.

Doctor Stewart consulted the outgoing President of the Medical Society and reported his findings. Dr. Twyman was hastily summoned to a conference.

The family doctor was startled at the suggestion that Dr. Hyde was deliberately infecting the Swope heirs, but at the same time he re-

vealed he had been uneasy because of the way Dr. Hyde unnecessarily bled Moss Hunton and also because of the medical treatment he had prescribed for Col. Swope. Dr. Hyde had told the nurse to administer about one-sixtieth of a grain of strychnine in a hypodermic every two hours to relieve Col. Swope's high blood pressure. But the treatment could only increase the blood pressure.

Dr. Twyman now found himself on the spot. Dr. Hyde had supplanted him as the family physician by the simple device of taking over and issuing orders to the nurses. Any accusation by him might be construed as sour grapes. At the same time, he was an old friend of the family, and felt it was his duty to speak to Mrs. Logan Swope.

Mrs. Swope was staggered at the implication that Col. Swope, Hunton and her son, Chrisman, had all been murdered, and that four of her other ill children were still in danger.

Dr. Twyman hastily pointed out that there was no proof as yet and Dr. Hyde might be completely innocent.

Mrs. Swope, though, refused to clutch at straws. "There's only one way to find out," she declared. Dr. Hyde would have to be relieved as attending physician. Without accusing her son-in-law, she informed him she was recalling Dr. Twyman to handle all the cases.

Dr. Hyde reacted angrily to his dismissal as a reflection upon his

medical reputation and demanded to be retained. When Mrs. Swope refused, her daughter Frances, Dr. Hyde's wife, who had moved to the mansion to assist her mother, declared that if her husband left she would never return or speak again to her mother.

Torn between her love for Frances and her fear that something might happen to her other children, Mrs. Swope accepted her daughter's ultimatum and saw her leave the house with Dr. Hyde.

From questioning the nurses, Dr. Twyman learned that they had come to the conclusion that something was amiss. They pointed out that both Col. Swope and Chrisman had died of convulsions shortly after taking pills brought by Dr. Hyde, and that Margaret had also been stricken with convulsions but had not died. The nurses had secretly agreed among themselves not to give their patients any more pills brought by Dr. Hyde.

The nurse who had attended Col. Swope during his final illness revealed that immediately after Moss Hunton's death, Dr. Hyde had asked her to suggest to Col. Swope that he name Dr. Hyde as executor to replace Hunton. The nurse had refused to involve herself in family affairs.

Dr. Stewart was now brought into the house to weld another chain in the link against Dr. Hyde. He checked the water system and all members of the household not

stricken with the disease. His tests were negative.

As the investigation proceeded quietly, two further bits were added. The day Dr. Hyde had been removed as family doctor, he was seen by a nurse and Tom Chrisman to drop something in the snow and grind it under his heel. After he left, the spot was searched and a smashed capsule, similar to those Dr. Hyde had given to the nurses, was found. The contents were analyzed and contained a large dose of cyanide.

The servants also reported that shortly before the epidemic broke out, Dr. Hyde had brought his own bottled water to the house.

Convinced now that her son-in-law had tried to wipe out the other heirs in a fantastic plot to seize the fortune, Mrs. Swope employed James A. Reed to take charge of the investigation and become special prosecutor if necessary.

A secret court order was obtained to exhume the bodies of Col. Swope and Chrisman Swope, both of whom had died in convulsions. Experts were called in for the autopsy. Dr. Hyde learned of this activity through the newspapers when a reporter heard of the exhumation order and printed the fact.

The following day, Dr. Stewart received a call from Dr. Hyde stating that he feared he had typhoid and asked him to make a bacteria test. Dr. Stewart realized that Dr. Hyde was preparing his defense,

that if he also came down with typhoid he could use it to point to his innocence.

Dr. Stewart drew some blood and his findings were that Dr. Hyde did have typhoid germs in his body, indicating that he was coming down with the disease. Dr. Hyde smiled when he received the report.

But the physician had not reckoned with the determined bacteriologist. Dr. Stewart suspected that Dr. Hyde had given himself some serum and was simulating the disease. Medical literature was obscure on this point and so Dr. Stewart deliberately injected himself. He discovered that his blood also gave a positive reaction although he did not have the disease. He waited for several days, returned to visit Dr. Hyde and managed to

jab him with a hypodermic needle and draw some blood before the unsuspecting doctor could protest. Dr. Stewart ran a test on this blood and found Dr. Hyde did not have the disease.

The autopsy disclosed that both Col. Swope and Chrisman Swope had died of a lethal dose of cyanide and Dr. Hyde was indicted for their murder by poisoning and for killing Moss Hunton by literally bleeding him to death. His motive was five million dollars.

Dr. Stewart quietly resumed his career after becoming one of the pioneers in scientific crime detection.

And in Kansas City, the 1,100 acres Col. Swope had donated to the city, is officially Swope Park, a memorial to a murder victim.

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Make It Neat



First Carter was killed, and then his wife. Johnny Liddell was the next candidate, and even the cops wouldn't help him out.

A MAN sat in the leather-upholstered chair, his legs stretched out full length, his head resting back on the cushion. His normally ruddy face was a dirty grey, his wide eyes were fixed on the back of the man who was hurriedly ransacking the contents of the desk drawers.

A thin trickle of red ran from the corner of the mouth of the man in the chair,

course down the side of his chin. It matched in color the large dark stain on the front of his white evening shirt.

The man at the desk didn't waste a look at the dead man. He took the drawers one by one, riffled through the papers. Finally, he seemed to find what he was looking for. He wet the tip of his index finger, checked through a

A Johnny Liddell Story

BY FRANK KANE

thin packet of papers and nodded his satisfaction. He folded them and stuck them in the inside pocket of his jacket.

Then he looked around, satisfied himself that he had left no trace. He pulled his handkerchief from his hip pocket and carefully wiped the knobs of each of the desk drawers. He pulled the chain of the desk lamp, spilling darkness into the room, and headed across the thick-pile carpeting toward the study door.

He had his hand out to the knob when the door swung open. A tall, heavily boned blonde in her late thirties stood framed in the doorway. As she saw the man, her eyes widened, her lower jaw dropped.

The man moved fast. He cut off a half-formed scream with an overhand right that sent the woman reeling backwards. A small hall table caught her knees, sent her tumbling to the floor a bundle of arms and legs. The man pulled a switch knife from his jacket pocket, snapped open a four-inch blade. He started toward the fallen woman, stopped at the sound of awakened servants from the back of the hall. Cursing under his breath, he replaced the knife in his pocket, darted back into the study and closed the door after him. He ran across the room, pushed open the french doors and stepped out onto the terrace.

A hundred feet beyond, a row of hemlock had been planted to assure privacy. He sprinted across the

lawn, made the hemlocks just as the lights flashed on in the room he had just left. He melted into the shadows, satisfied himself that there was no immediate pursuit.

From the study came a piercing scream that seemed to reach for a high note, then hang on the air. His car was parked without lights on a back road that paralleled the house. He stamped on the starter, eased it into gear. By the time the startled servants at the house he had just left had contacted the police, the killer was miles away.

Sergeant Marcy Lewis of the Waterville Police Department watched with no change of expression while the two men from the medical examiner's office transferred the body of the man in the chair onto a stretcher. They strapped it into place, then one of them walked over to the sergeant, held out a printed form.

"This is sure going to raise some stink, Sarge." The coroner's man turned, stared at the suggestively shaped bulge on the stretcher. "The papers've been hinting the Judge was getting ready to lower the boom."

Lewis initialled the form, pushed it back at the man. "It didn't say on whom. Maybe it meant him." He shoved his battered fedora on the back of his head, scratched at his thinning hair with the nail of his index finger. "Snoopers have a habit

of not living long. Guy like this takes himself serious when they put him in charge of an investigation, it stands to reason he's asking for trouble."

"Sure ought to discourage a lot of the rest of the do-gooders." The m.e.'s man bared the discolored stumps of his teeth in a broad grin. "They sure been yelling for blood. Looks like they got it. Their own."

Lewis nodded. He took a last look at the body on the stretcher, crossed to the door and left the study. A cop, wearing a uniform with two buttons missing from his tunic, lounged against another door halfway down the hall. He made no attempt to straighten up as the sergeant walked up.

"They all in there?" the sergeant wanted to know.

The patrolman didn't remove the toothpick from the corner of his mouth as he nodded. "All of them."

The sergeant pushed open the door and walked in. The blonde woman sat in a straight backed chair. The color had drained from her face, leaving her make-up garish against her pallor. An elderly man stood nearby, dry-washing heavily veined hands. Hovering over the woman in the chair was another woman, evidently the elderly man's wife.

The sergeant's eyes hop-scotched around the room, came to rest on the man. "Who are you?"

"Blake, sir. I work for the Judge and Mrs. Carter." He looked over to where the older woman stood behind

the blonde's chair. "My wife, Annie, is the cook and maid."

The sergeant nodded. He looked at the woman in the chair. "I'm sorry about the Judge, Mrs. Carter."

The blonde looked up from a scrutiny of her tightly locked hands in her lap. "It didn't come as too great a surprise, Sergeant." Her voice was low, tight. She seemed unaware of the older woman's hand on her shoulder. "Anybody who undertakes to clean up the filth and corruption of this town can expect what happened to the Judge."

The sergeant tugged a dog-eared notebook from his hip pocket, flipped through to an empty page. He found the stub of a pencil, wet the tip on his tongue. "Who found him?"

The woman in the chair hesitated. "I did. I had been out for dinner. When I came back, I headed for the study." She dropped her eyes. "I almost ran into the killer. He was about to leave as I opened the door."

The sergeant's pencil paused in the middle of a word. He looked up. "You saw him?"

The woman in the chair nodded. "I saw him. The lights were out in the study, but as I opened the door, the hall light shone on him." She looked up again. "I'll know him again if I see him, if that's what you want to know, sergeant."

Lewis wet the lead of his pencil thoughtfully, scribbled a few notes. Then he snapped the notebook shut. "Feel up to looking at a few pictures for us tonight?"

"The missus needs rest, sergeant," the older woman started to protest. "She's been through a lot. She can't —"

"I'm all right, Annie." The woman in the chair worked on a smile, almost made it. She nodded to the sergeant. "I'll look at pictures. I'll do anything to get the man who murdered my husband."

The sergeant nodded. "Good. I'll meet you in my office at headquarters in, say, a half-hour? That give you enough time to pull yourself together?"

The blonde nodded. "I'll be there."

Sergeant Lewis had a cubby-hole office on the third floor of the county court building that housed police headquarters. He was standing at a window, staring down into the darkness of the memorial park outside the county court, when the door opened. Emily Carter and her maid Annie walked in.

Lewis waved to a chair on the far side of the desk for Mrs. Carter, motioned to a chair against the wall for the maid.

"I'd like to stay with Mrs. Carter," the older woman protested.

"Did you see the killer?" Lewis growled at her.

"No, but —"

"Okay, then sit over there. I have no objection to your staying, but I don't want you under my feet. This is a murder investigation."

"And who'd be more likely to

know it than Mrs. Carter?" the maid sniffed.

"Do as the sergeant says, Annie," the blonde told her. "I don't think this will take long." She pulled the chair close to the desk. "Do you have any idea of who the killer was, sergeant?" she asked.

"I might," he conceded. He pushed a pile of photographs across the desk to her. "Your husband gave a lot of people a good reason to want him dead. Here are some of them." He leaned back in his chair, picked a cigarette from a battered pack on the edge of the desk, stuck it in the corner of his mouth. "Take your time, but be awful sure when you pick the guy out." He lit his cigarette, seemed to lose interest in the woman in the chair.

He was almost through with the butt when the blonde stopped at a picture. She stared at it for a moment, then tossed the rest of the pictures on the desk. "That's the man," she said in a low voice. "I couldn't be mistaken. That's the man."

Lewis crushed out the cigarette, reached across the desk, took the picture from her hand. He stared at it for a moment, then looked up. "You're sure?"

She nodded her head vigorously. "I'm sure."

Lewis shrugged, placed the picture face down on the desk. "Mind signing your name and the date on the back?"

The blonde got up, took the pen

he held out, signed her name and the date. He looked to where the maid sat, hands folded in lap. "You, too."

Annie looked to the blonde, drew a nod. She got up, shuffled over to the desk, picked up the pen. Awkwardly, she scribbled her name.

"The date, too," Lewis snapped.

The older woman shook her head in annoyance, clenched the tip of her tongue between her teeth and added the date.

The blonde watched the man behind the desk curiously. "What are you going to do now, sergeant?"

Lewis picked up the picture, stared at it for a moment. "I'm going out and arrest him, of course."

The blonde stared at him for a moment, then smiled wryly. "I wish I could believe that, sergeant."

The car was parked without lights just off the square from the courthouse. When the blonde and her maid appeared at the head of the courthouse steps, the car purred into motion, inched forward.

Mrs. Carter was halfway down the steps when she first saw the car. For a moment it seemed as though she were going to run. The window at the driver's side belched flame. There was the sharp snap of four shots.

The woman clutched at her breast, seemed to reach for her toes. Then she pitched forward, tumbled down the rest of the stairs. She was dead when her body hit the sidewalk.

Johnny Liddell stood at the far side of the desk, failed to be im-

pressed by the man in the desk chair. "I understood you were in charge of the investigation into the deaths of Judge Carter and his wife."

Sergeant Lewis nodded, returned Liddell's scrutiny with no sign of enthusiasm. "The do-gooders think a private eye can do a better job than the town force, that it?"

Liddell shrugged. "Take it up with them, sergeant. All I know is they're not satisfied with the progress being made. They made a deal with the agency to look into it."

The sergeant picked up Liddell's credentials from his desk, riffled through them, shoved them back across the desk. "We don't like private eyes up here, Liddell," his voice was flat, unfriendly. "Especially when they start stepping on our toes." He stuck a cigarette in his mouth, scraped a paper match across the strip on the box, held it to the butt. "We've got a line on the killer. Mrs. Carter fingered him for us."

Liddell picked up his papers, rearranged them, stuck them in his pocket. "You've had a line on him since they were killed two weeks ago," he pointed out mildly. "Now the Citizens' Committee wants you to pull in the line. They're beginning to get a little impatient."

Lewis stared at him through a thin haze of smoke. "You've done some investigation work. You know it sometimes takes a while to smoke out a killer when he's gone underground."

Liddell considered it, nodded. "Sometimes it does. In the meantime, though, the clean-up Judge Carter was trying to effect has been brought to a stop. Until you pin this killer, no one else is willing to take it on."

"It figures. Bucking the organization isn't the best way to grow old gracefully." He took the cigarette from between his lips, tapped a thin film of ash from its end. "For them or anybody else."

"Me, for instance?"

The sergeant's eyes rolled up to Liddell. "Anybody."

Liddell pulled the straight-backed chair on his side closer to the desk, dropped into it, leaned his elbows on the desk. "You get a flyer out on this suspect that Mrs. Carter fingered?"

Lewis stared at him coldly. "We handle our business our way, mister. That bunch of do-gooders that hired you, if they think they're running this department, they've got another think coming. We got out our own APB. There were no prints, so there's no FBI kickback."

"How'd you identify him?"

"A mug shot. We got a small package on this guy because he was mixed up in some strong arm stuff at one of the joints outside of town. I've been keeping it under wraps that we've got a make on him. He'll show sooner or later and when he does, I'll wrap it up." He jabbed an index finger in the direction of Liddell. "And I don't need help."

"Mind if I see the mug shot?"

The sergeant's eyes narrowed, then he shrugged. "Why not?" He pulled open his drawer, riffled through the papers, came up with a photo, tossed it across the desk. The face that stared off the picture was flat with thick, dark hair pasted back above the temples, fluffy on top. The mouth was a thin, cruel line, the nostrils wide and flared.

Liddell studied the face, looked up. "He looks like a user. Got an I sheet on him?" He turned the photo over, noticed the signature and date signed by the two women the night of the killing.

"We don't turn our files over to unofficial agencies, mister," the sergeant growled. He reached across, picked the picture from between Liddell's fingers, dropped it back into the drawer. "The only reason I even let you see this is because I want you to know there's nothing for you here."

Liddell shrugged. "You make it sound very encouraging," he conceded. "Just the same, I think I'll stick around."

"Look, Liddell," Lewis' voice was loaded with menace. "I tried to tell you the nice way we don't want you around here. But you're a stubborn guy. So, okay, I'll put it on the line." He got out of his chair, walked around the desk and stood facing the private eye. "This is my town. I don't stand for any tin-badge peepers fouling it up. Don't start anything you can't finish."

Liddell nodded, stood up. "That's pretty good advice. I think I'll take it."

The sergeant worked at a smile. "You'll be leaving?"

"No. Anything I start I'll finish." Liddell walked to the door, let himself out.

Lewis Berton, secretary of the Citizen's Committee was waiting for him at the foot of the courthouse stairs.

"How'd you do?" he asked Liddell as the private detective joined him.

Liddell shook his head. "Your sergeant doesn't like interference." He brought up a pack of cigarettes, held it out to the small man at his side, drew a shake of the head. "This picture he has of the suspected killer. Has anyone checked on it?"

Berton nodded. "It's authentic. Annie Blake, the Carters' maid, identified the signatures on the back, even though she'd never seen the picture when they signed it. That ties it up tightly enough."

Liddell lit his cigarette, drew a deep drag on it, let the smoke cascade in twin streams from his nostrils. "And Mrs. Carter identified the picture as the man who killed her husband?"

"Without any hesitation. She was positive of it, according to Annie Blake." He raised a hand, fended off an objection. "Annie was very devoted to the Carters. Nothing could make her do anything that would hurt them or help their killer escape."

Liddell smoked for a moment as

they walked toward the equestrian statue of Grant that dominated the town park.

"Is something bothering you, Mr. Liddell?" Berton broke the silence finally.

"Yeah. You see, I recognized the man in the picture that Mrs. Carter signed." He pinched at his nostrils with thumb and forefinger. "I also checked the back of that picture to make sure the signatures hadn't been transferred from another picture. They weren't."

"But if you recognized the killer —"

"That's the trouble, Mr. Berton. That's a picture of Bernie Kalman, a New York gun. To the best of my knowledge, he's never been outside of New York."

The little man stopped and stared. "But Mrs. Carter was positive."

Liddell nodded irritably. "Yeah. But if she saw Bernie Kalman that night, it was by ouija board. Bernie Kalman was burned down in a gunfight in New York over a year ago!"

He repeated that statement to a meeting of the Citizen's Committee at the Great Waterville Hotel that night. Lewis Berton, the secretary, looked around with satisfaction at the way Mike Hughes' jaw dropped. Mike was editor of the Waterville Sentinel and liked to pretend that nothing surprised or impressed him.

Ed Michaels, president of the Waterville Bank, stopped with his cigar halfway to his lips and stared. The fourth member of the com-

mittee, Sid Jaffe, operator of the Bon Ton Ladies' Shop, tsk-tsked under his breath.

There was a pause after Liddell dropped the bombshell. Mike Hughes, the editor, was the first to regain his wits. "You could be mistaken, Liddell. Mrs. Carter was a very level-headed woman. She wouldn't identify the wrong man. I'm sure of it."

The others in the room nodded their heads in unison.

Liddell walked over to the small portable bar in the room, helped himself to a scotch with a touch of soda. "You gentlemen were working with Judge Carter on this clean-up. Who was he shooting for?"

"The head of the organization that runs this town." Mike Hughes looked around, accepted the unspoken invitation to be their spokesman. "In a resort town like this, when a mob moves in and takes over, anything goes. Judge Carter got us together one night and told us he thought he had enough on one of the top men in the organization to break its hold."

"He didn't say what?"

Hughes looked around, shook his head. "Not to me. Any of you fellows in on it?" He drew a head shake from each, returned his attention to Liddell. "When they found his body, his office had been ransacked. Whatever the evidence was, it was gone."

Liddell swirled the liquor around his glass. "All the more proof that

Carter was killed by the big man himself instead of by a hired gun."

"How so?" Jaffe wanted to know.

"In the first place, he wouldn't have let a hired killer in without a struggle. In the second place, the big man in the organization wouldn't let a hired killer get his hands on whatever the Judge had on him. He'd be jumping from the frying pan into the fire."

The newspaper editor considered it, liked it. "Then you think Carter agreed to talk it over with the head man?"

Liddell shrugged. "Why not? Maybe the Judge figured he could put the pressure on the head man and crack the organization without resorting to open warfare."

Berton, the Committee secretary, shook his head. "But you still haven't explained how Mrs. Carter could have been so wrong in her identification."

Liddell grinned humorlessly. "I didn't say she was."

"But her signature on that picture. You said yourself it hadn't been transferred. She did sign that picture."

"An old trick, gentlemen. Art fakers use it all the time. When they permit you to take out for approval a picture they've deliberately underpriced, they have you sign your name on the back so you're sure of getting the same one you had appraised. The only difference is that they've pasted another, worthless one to the underside. That's the one

you sign."

Hughes stared at him for a moment, swore fluently. "That would have to mean Sergeant Lewis was in on it. He must have known the real killer, showed her that picture with another one pasted to its back."

Liddell nodded. "It would also explain how the killer knew that Mrs. Carter was at headquarters and was waiting for her as she walked out." He tossed off his drink, made a face. "A signal from the sergeant's window as she left and it was like shooting bottles off a fence."

Berton was on his feet. "What are we sitting here for? Why don't we have Lewis picked up?" He looked around. "Maybe by now he's already taken off."

Liddell shook his head, set his glass down. "I doubt it. But just the same, I've had a man on him all afternoon and evening. The minute he makes contact with anybody or goes anyplace we'll know about it. So let's start making plans for wrapping this whole thing up."

The trays were filled with cigarette butts, a slow-moving fog circulated near the ceiling, the bottles in the bar showed sharp cuts in their levels by the time the phone rang.

Berton answered it, held it out to Liddell.

The private detective held it to his ear, talked for a moment. A deep v of annoyance creased between his eyebrows and he slammed the receiver back on its hook. "The sergeant gave him the slip." He

pounded his clenched fist on the telephone table. "He must have tumbled to the fact we'd put a tail on him."

"Where did your man lose him?"

Liddell shrugged. "He headed north out of town. At the cut just above Route 11, my boy lost him." He picked a cigarette from his pocket, broke it irritably between thumb and forefinger. "This just might have been the break we've been waiting for. And we blew it."

Mike Hughes sat chewing on his thumb nail. "I have an idea of where you might pick up Lewis' trail," he consulted his wristwatch, "in about an hour."

"Where?"

"Lewis has a girl in the show out at Barney Maurer's place. A stripper named Cora Harper." He stared at Liddell for a moment. "From all I hear, he's pretty jealous of her. No matter how much heat was on, he'd show up to take her home."

Liddell nodded. "This Barney Maurer's place. Where is it?"

"It's out on Route 7. About twenty miles north of town." The editor pulled himself out of his chair, freshened his drink. "It's in county territory. The sergeant has no standing there."

Liddell grinned. "Good. I'd like to have a talk with the good sergeant on neutral ground. I have a feeling he might get pretty confidential."

Johnny Liddell elbowed himself

a spot at the bar at Maurer's. It was a smoky room with clouds of smoke making visibility somewhere near zero. He ordered a shot of scotch, waited until the bartender had slid it across the bar to him, passed over a five. When the bartender started to make change, Liddell shook his head. "Never mind the change, bud."

The bartender examined the bill. "You got us mixed up with the big town, sport. We don't draw a fin a shot here."

Liddell dumped the scotch into some water, tasted it. "I thought maybe you'd like to do me a favor."

"Depends."

Liddell's eyes flicked to the left, then to the right. "There's a babe in the show I'd like to meet."

"That's a favor?" His eyes rolled past Liddell to a small floor in the inner room where a small group of girls were making a heroic, though unsuccessful effort to keep time with the music. "Which one?"

"Her name's Cora Harper."

The bartender shook his head. "I ain't shilling for no undertaker, sport. Cora's got her a guy. A real jealous guy."

"He's not in yet, is he?"

The bartender twisted his lips in a grin. "That's what you think." He squinted against the floor lights, stared around the floor. "I don't see him at any of the tables, but he's here. I saw him come in."

"Maybe he left?"

"Without the babe? Not him."

He leaned forward, dropped his voice. "He's real poison, mister. He wears tin in Waterville. Throws a lot of weight and muscle. Real poison." The floor lights started to go down. "This is Cora's spot. If you like, do some window shopping, but be a smart guy and don't touch."

The spot shot to the side of the floor, picked up a tall, full breasted brunette as she came out onto the floor. She wore a dark red, strapless evening gown that looked as though she had been poured into it. As she crossed the floor, her hips started to swing in an exaggerated strut. When she reached the edge of the dance floor, the drummer pounded off four beats, and she kept time with bumps. As she strutted back across the floor, she pulled open the snaps that ran along the side of the gown. White flesh gleamed through. At the rhinestone curtain, she turned, grinned saucily at the audience and pulled open the gown. She stood there for a moment in a jewelled G-string and a filmy bra and the lights went down.

The place rocked with applause and wolf calls. When the lights came up, she stood in the middle of the floor. The band increased its tempo, the strut became a wild swaying, her body undulated from shoulders to hips to ankles. The beat of the drum, the wail of the trumpet swelled in volume, her motions became more and more abandoned. She danced wildly, her hair flying, her body twisting and squirming suggestively.

She emitted a little scream, reached back and unhooked the bra. It fell away from her body, leaving her breasts as living things throbbing in time with the music. There was a roar of frustrated resentment from the packed tables as the lights went down, the music stopped. This time the girl refused their coaxing to take a bow. As the spotlight found the curtain, a hand came through holding a rhinestone G-string. Then a shapely leg protruded and was withdrawn. The applause continued for minutes.

"That's quite a woman," the bartender swabbed the bar in front of Liddell. "You blame a guy for wanting to keep something like that private?"

Liddell grinned, shook his head. "She pack them in like this every night?" He stared around the crowded bar, the crowded room beyond. "A joint like this must coin money."

The bartender shrugged. "Me, I just pour the stuff, I don't get to count the folding money." He seemed to lose interest in Liddell, shuffled to the other end of the bar.

Liddell was still leaning against the bar when Sergeant Lewis and the brunette elbowed their way through the crowds to the front door. He waited until they had had time to reach the parking lot, dropped a bill on the bar and followed.

Lewis was driving a black Buick. As Liddell stepped out of Maurer's

the big car swept in a U turn, started south on the highway. Liddell flipped a half at the doorman, walked over to the rented car he was using, kicked it into life.

The sergeant was a fast driver, paid little heed to traffic regulations. But traffic was light enough so that Liddell had no difficulty in keeping the other car's tail-light in view. About six miles south of Maurer's, the big Buick turned into a brightly lighted area that consisted of a motel, coffee shop, and a huge gas station. He swung through the entrance into the motel, swung his car into the space alongside Cabin 16.

A moment later, Liddell wheeled the rented car into place in front of the coffee shop that adjoined the motel. He ambled into the shop, had a cup of coffee and waited. After two cigarettes, he slid out of the booth, walked past his car into the motel area. The big Buick was easily recognizable, and he marked the location of the unit Lewis had taken.

Liddell walked to the end cabin, circled around behind it. He loosened the .45 in its holster, started back to Cabin 16. The weeds grew knee-high, effectively covering an accumulation of beer bottles and cans. He swore under his breath, almost fell to his knees. At the rear of what he figured to be Number 16, he put his ear to the paper-thin walls and listened. He heard a mumble of voices; it sounded as though an argument was in progress.

He melted into the shadows at

the side of the cabin, worked his way carefully to the front. The cabins on either side were dark, there was no other sign of life in the court. Liddell tried the knob, found it turned easily in his hand.

He pushed it open, stepped in, .45 in his hand.

The girl was standing in front of a small rickety bureau, brushing her hair. She had substituted a clinging red silk gown for the dress she had worn out of Maurer's.

Lewis was sprawled in an armchair, watching every motion of the girl. At the sound of the opened door, he started. When he saw Liddell, his hand streaked for the shoulder holster that hung over the back of his chair. It froze with his fingertips touching the butt of his .38 at the sight of the .45 in Liddell's hand.

The girl stopped brushing her hair, the brush suspended in air. Her lips were parted, gleaming and wet, her eyes half veiled by artistically tinted lids. The red gown gaped in front revealing the whiteness of breasts and thigh. After the initial shock had passed, she resumed brushing her thick black hair, gave no sign she was aware of the gaping of the gown.

"What is this?" Lewis growled at Liddell. His little eyes were butressed behind discolored sacs, heavily veined lids helping to conceal the menace in them. "You're asking for trouble busting in on people like this, mister. I won't forget it."

Liddell kicked the door shut behind him with his heel. "I'll bet you won't." He circled the sergeant, tugged the .38 from its holster, tossed it onto the bed. He looked over at the girl, grinned. "I saw your act tonight, Cora. Pretty hot stuff for a small town."

"I get by." The girl's eyes took in the broad shoulders, the heavy jaw, the grey flecks in his hair. "I haven't seen you around before."

"If you came for her autograph, you're wasting your time, peeper. She can't write."

Cora glared at him. "Very funny. What are you sitting there so scared for? I thought you were so tough. Why don't you get up and throw the guy out if you don't like him?" she taunted.

"Who's scared?" Lewis blustered.

"You could fool me," the girl grinned. "I didn't know your knees were keeping time to the music. I thought they were knocking."

"Keep cracking wise, baby. I don't forget stuff like this."

"That's twice you bragged about your memory, sergeant," Liddell told him. "That's good, because I've got some questions I need answers to."

"I don't answer questions for a private peeper," the sergeant spat. "As soon as I get out of here, I'm going to make this town too hot for guys like you. I'm going to —"

"You're going to tell me what I want to know, or I'm going to leave you as toothless as the day you were

born," Liddell told him. He stuck the snout of the .45 under the sergeant's nose. "Who killed Carter?"

A thin film of perspiration formed on the sergeant's forehead. "You saw the guy's picture. Mrs. Carter identified him."

"No. I didn't see the picture Mrs. Carter identified. That's the one I want to see. Who was it?"

Lewis clenched his teeth sullenly, glared at Liddell.

"Look, I'm neutral," the girl put in. "But you're off base, pal. The Carter dame signed the picture she identified. I saw it."

Liddell caught a hand full of the sergeant's hair, made his eyes meet his. "The sergeant's a pretty tricky fellow. He stuck two photos together and she signed the back of one thinking it was the other."

"You can't prove that," Lewis growled.

Liddell grinned grimly. "Sure I can. That mug shot you picked at random happens to belong to a guy who was gunned out a year ago. Mrs. Carter couldn't have picked that one."

Lewis stared at him for a moment, wiped the perspiration off his upper lip with the side of his hand. "I don't believe it."

Liddell grinned. "You better start believing it, pal. The killer is going to be awful unhappy with you for snafuing this deal. He might even have it figured out that you're the only one that knows who he is."

The sergeant's eyes hop scotched

from the window to the door and back to Liddell. "Look, you can't do this to me. I'm a sitting duck for him, if . . ."

There was a crash of glass at the side of the cabin. Sergeant Lewis screamed, twisted off the chair, rolled toward the bed.

Liddell's .45 sounded like a cannon in the confined space. His slugs bit chunks out of the window frame and sill. There was no answering fire from the window.

Outside there was the roar of a motor being kicked into life. Liddell raced for the door to the cabin, got to the road just as the big Buick lumbered from its parking space.

He yelled to the driver to halt, realized almost too late that instead of turning the car toward the highway, the driver had turned it so it could bear down on him. He heard the roar of the motor, saw the big car, like a thing alive, reaching for him.

The driver's face was a white blur in the dimness of the car. Liddell's yell was drowned out by the roaring of the motor.

He raised the .45, squeezed the trigger. The windshield fell to pieces around the driver as the big car sprang at him. He felt rooted to the ground, kept squeezing the trigger. Suddenly, the big car seemed to waver, veered off to the right. It plowed through the side of a cabin on the far side of the road, came to a shuddering rending stop against the trunk of a huge tree.

"All right, peeper." He turned to see Sergeant Lewis framed in the doorway of Cabin 16, his .38 in his hand. "I saw the whole thing and it was murder. And since you're trying to shoot it out with me —" His finger whitened on the trigger.

Liddell had a flash of the girl coming up behind the sergeant. She raised a small wooden stool, brought it down on his head. Lewis staggered forward, the bullet dug a trench at Liddell's feet. The sergeant went to his knees, sprawled out face down in the dirt outside the cabin.

"You all right, mister?" she called over to Liddell.

He tried for a grin, almost made it. "I've been better," he conceded.

Heads were beginning to cautiously peek out doors and some of the hardier souls were already in the doorways of their cabins. From a distance came the wail of a siren.

"Better get back in, folks," Liddell shouted. "There may be more shooting."

The doors slammed.

Liddell walked over to the wrecked car and pulled the unconscious form of Ed Michaels, president of the Waterville Bank, from behind the wheel. He dragged him across the road to where Lewis lay, laid him down at the sergeant's side.

"Who's he?" the stripper linked her arm in Liddell's.

"He's the brains behind most of the gambling and vice in Waterville.

He financed most of the joints and took his cut as well as interest. Since he was a member of the Citizen's Committee, he was able to tip the operators off when there'd be a raid. It was a swell set-up."

"How about Lewis? He work for this guy?"

Liddell shrugged. "Indirectly, I guess. He was on the take for protection from all the operators. Michaels knew that and made Lewis produce when Michaels got into a jam. Judge Carter found out who he was and he killed the judge. He had to find out if Mrs. Carter had recognized him so he had to take Lewis into his confidence. When he found out Mrs. Carter did recognize him, he killed her, too."

"And Lewis knew it?" the girl asked wistfully. "Gee, that's like having a due bill on Fort Knox. This guy knowing you could put him in the hot seat — that's really having a free pass."

"A free pass to the morgue, sometimes. If a guy like Michaels will kill twice to cover up, he'll kill once more to protect that cover up."

The girl suddenly seemed to realize the flimsiness of her gown. She shivered and pulled it closer around her.

"Suppose he thought Lewis had told me about it?"

"I was just thinking that, baby. What a waste of good material that would be."



Pass the Word

*The recording of Statement by
Sean McCauley, Bartender*

"It's very simple," the man told the bartender. "I know a way to get twenty-five pounds of heroin over the border."

A Casebook Story
BY JACK SWORD

HE WAS a punk. Even after he got in with the big boys I never changed my mind, only I didn't dare say anything then. Now, when everything's blown up in my face and I've lost the fireplace and every cent I had sunk in it, I know I was right. He was a cheap, gutless

MANHUNT

punk. I'd go looking for him, but there's other guys with better reasons who are doing that. They'll get him, but I just wish I was there when it happened.

My name's Sean McCauley, but the boys know better than to call me that. Everybody who comes into the Fireplace — that's my joint, a combo bar and restaurant, only the eats aren't much — calls me Bigfist. I got the name when I was a pretty fair lighthheavy a long time ago. After I got beat up one time too much, I took my dough and set up the Fireplace. I let the word drift around to the right boys, and pretty soon if anybody wanted to leave a message it got delivered. There wasn't any rough stuff or deals worked out in the Fireplace. That way I kept clean. I never had no trouble with the law or any of the syndicates.

Like I was saying, though, one night this character rolls in. He perches himself on a stool and orders a creme de menthe and soda. I never heard nobody order no drink like that before, and I look him over. He was kind of thin, with slick black hair combed straight back. He looked just like some ordinary guy, except his mouth was screwed up in one of those cocky shapes that jerks use when they try to make out like they're tough. I give him his drink and he has another, and then he leaves. I'm glad to see him go. Like I said, I get all kinds of characters, but there's something about this one I don't like.

He comes back the next night, and the next. Always the same. Two creme de menthe and sodas and out he goes. This goes on for about almost a month. Then one night we're alone in the place. Smart boy opens up.

"My name's Luke Caron," he says.

"Yeah," I grunts and starts to polish some glasses.

"I hear I can get hold of the right man in this place," he goes on.

I just look at him. If he thinks I'm going to give him the time of day, he's got another think coming.

He finishes his second drink for the night. "When you get around to it," he says, slipping off the bar stool, "you can pass the word along that I got a way to bring in twenty-five pounds of heroin a month."

I guess my mouth must of dropped ten feet when he walked out the door. Like I said before, I don't get mixed up in anything, I just pass the word along. But I pick up a little piece of info here and a little piece there, and I know that twenty-five pounds every month would sure make the syndicate happy. The Feds have been raising hell with the syndicate's connections, and they're kind of desperate for a way to get the stuff into the country.

Well, I think the deal over long and hard. And every night this Caron comes in, has his drinks and takes off. Finally I figure, so what. I'll let one of the boys know and he can take it from there. If Caron's

just shooting his mouth off, or if he's a stool pigeon, it won't be my fault. So I tip off Charlie Rocca. About a week later Charlie follows him out of the bar and Caron don't come around any more.

Statement of George Dama, Importer

Charlie Rocca came into my office one afternoon. "Hi, Mr. Dama," he said. "I've got a hot tip from Bigfist."

"Yes?" I said. "What is it?"

Charlie leaned across my desk. "According to Bigfist, there's a guy hanging around the Fireplace who claims he knows a way to bring twenty-five pounds of heroin into the country every month.

"What!" I sat up straight.

"That's right, Mr. Dama. That's what he says."

"It could be a plant, or it could be legitimate," I said thoughtfully. "Take a reading on this man. Put the Golden Eagle Detective Agency on it. We've used them before. As soon as they get enough, do some checking through our connections."

After Charlie left I sat back in my chair and thought what that amount of stuff would mean to us. The government had been smashing our operations as fast as we set them up. If we got one load in five through we were lucky. We were having a hard time supplying our usual outlets. There was absolutely no possibility of any expansion. The

syndicate didn't like it, and when the syndicate didn't like it, somebody was going to get hurt. That somebody might be me, because I was in charge of operations on the West Coast, and it was my responsibility to see that the stuff got in.

About a week later Charlie gave me the information on this Luke Caron. I told Charlie to go down to the Fireplace and pick Caron up and bring him to me.

When Caron came in, I looked at his eyes. Government undercover men are tops in their business, but no Federal Agent could ever imitate the shiftiness of Caron's brown eyes as they flickered around the room, sliding off one object and on to another, never staying in one place.

"I'm George Dama," I said. "I understand you have a proposition for me."

"Hi, George," he said, extending his hand.

"Mr. Dama," I growled. I always have the boys call me mister. It makes them more respectful.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, then, Mr. Dama. Yes, I've got a proposition for you. I'll show you a guaranteed way to bring in twenty-five pounds of heroin every month. That will cost you twenty-five thousand dollars. I want five of it now, and the other twenty after the first load has come in."

"You're asking a lot," I said. "How do I know you aren't trying to pull a fast one?"

"You can trust me," he said.

"Can I?" I laughed. "Let's just review your record and see if it looks like I can trust you. You were drafted into the army in 1943. You were in and out of the stockade for petty larceny and AWOL. Finally, in 1946 when you were with the 411th Airborne Division in Japan during the occupation, you got mixed up in a grand larceny charge — theft of government property and large-scale black market operations. You got five years and a dishonorable discharge. Since you got out you've been working around the West Coast, picking up odd jobs here and there. You've been in San Francisco four months."

He tried to laugh it off, but I could see it didn't sit so good with him, hearing his record ticked off like that.

"My plan is still good," he said sullenly.

"Okay, let's hear it."

He sat down, without an invitation, and explained. "I know you've got contacts in Mexico," he began. "In fact, you try to get a lot of your stuff through there. Right. Here's what you do. Have a man down there with a light plane. It should be somewhere close to the border. When you're ready to send the stuff through, the plane will fly a man across the border. The man bails out with the pack of heroin, meets a car at a prearranged place, and brings it in."

"You can't have a plane flying

back and forth from Mexico to the States," I objected.

"He doesn't have to fly very far into the States," Caron said. "Take a look at a map of the El Paso area. The road runs within a few miles of the border there. The plane will only be in the States for a few minutes. If the pilot knows his navigation, the man who jumps won't land more than a mile from the car."

I lit up a cigar and thought it over. It sounded good. "I'll let you know," I told him.

A few days later, after I had checked his plan thoroughly, I called him in. "It's a deal," I said. "There's one thing more. We don't have any jumpers in this outfit. You're going to have to do that part of it."

"Suits me," he said casually, "but it will cost you another five thousand a jump."

That was agreeable to me. I gave him the original five he had asked for, and explained where and how to meet our contact in Mexico.

From the Diary of Paul Kowalski, Pilot

I was waiting in the Hyacinth Bar in Juarez, just across the line from El Paso. I didn't know what he looked like, or when he would arrive. I was just told that a man would be in the Hyacinth about nine o'clock that evening. He would wear a thick blue nylon jacket, grey-green pants, and heavy boots. He would be drinking creme de menthe and soda.

When I spotted him I had to make the pitch. After we got together I was to take his orders.

It didn't sound good, but what could I do? After the war I found out real quick that just being a fighter pilot wasn't enough. Nobody had any use for a dumb Polack who didn't have a college education. The airlines laughed at me when I asked for a job, and the Air Force was cutting down on pilots, so they wouldn't take me back. I was ready to go home to the West Virginia coal mines when I was contacted by one of the syndicate boys. At the time I was so desperate I didn't care what kind of a job it was. Now, when I want to get out, I don't dare. I know too much, and anyway the syndicate would never let me get away with it.

He came in about nine-thirty. I waited until he had ordered a drink — it was creme de menthe and soda. After he had finished it and ordered another I made my pitch. It didn't take long to get organized, and pretty soon we took off. I had a car waiting for us and we drove into the country. When we got to the airfield — it was just a rough cleared piece of ground — the joe told me where we were going.

This I didn't like at all. It was bad enough working for the syndicate in Mexico, but when it came to working dope into my own country, I drew the line. I knew I had to carry out orders or else, but that didn't mean I couldn't do something about it.

We took off about one in the morning. It wasn't long before we crossed the border west of El Paso. I'm a good navigator and I headed directly for the rendezvous point. Just before we got there this fellow tapped me on the shoulder and yelled:

"If I make this one okay, I'll be back in three or four weeks."

When we got to the place — it was about a mile south of the Southern Pacific tracks — he bailed out. I saw his chute open, and then I headed back to the field.

The next day I wandered over to El Paso, real casually. After I had made sure nobody was following me, I ducked into the Post Office and bought a stamped envelope. I wrote a quick note, sealed it, and addressed it to the U. S. Treasury Department, Narcotics Bureau, Washington, D.C. I mailed the letter and went back to Mexico.

*Statement of Private First Class
Carl Swanson, Soldier*

I had the night shift on the radar at Fort Bliss, Texas, on the 28th. Ordinarily we track guided missiles when they are tested out at the proving grounds, but lately we had been running our radar day and night. The Captain said we needed more practice. Maybe he was right, but I thought he was making an awful fuss just because we lost that last missile at sixty thousand feet.

There hadn't been anything on the screen for over an hour. About one-thirty in the morning I picked up a blip. I called the sergeant over, but he said it was just some plane flying in Mexico, although it was close to the border. I kept an eye on it and sure enough, it came over our side of the line. I called the sergeant again, and we watched it, but pretty soon it headed back to Mexico.

"Must have been a local Mexican pilot who got lost temporarily," the sergeant said. He wrote it up in the radar log and showed it to the Lieutenant in the morning.

About a month later — it was the 26th to be exact — I picked up a blip at the same place and almost the same time. Everything happened like it had before. The ship came over the line a ways, and then turned around and went back to Mexico.

It certainly was curious, but when I mentioned it to the Lieutenant he laughed and said I'd been reading too many spy stories.

*Statement of Andrew Schuster,
Special Agent*

The tip saved me a lot of work. Our undercover men had told me that a big shipment of heroin was due in on the West Coast. That was all they knew, and all they could find out. I had no idea where to begin to look. As a matter of routine I had all ship arrivals covered, and even had some spot checks made at the

U. S.-Mexican border near Tia Juana, but of course it failed to produce any results.

A few days later I got the news that twenty-five pounds of pure heroin had arrived in San Francisco. Twenty-five pounds! Shortly after that I got a letter which had been sent to our department from El Paso. According to the postmark it had been mailed almost three weeks ago. The red tape in our bureau is fantastic sometimes. The note was short and to the point:

*Heroin is being smuggled into the
U. S. A. by plane, near El Paso.*

It wasn't signed, of course.

It didn't take me long to fly down there. I had all incoming planes from Mexico checked, but that didn't seem to be the answer. I talked with the radar section at Fort Bliss about possible private flights. The lieutenant in charge showed me their log book. I noticed that a plane had flown from Mexico into the States a short way and then had returned without landing. This had already happened twice; the last time had been four days ago.

I was still trying to figure it out when I got a message from Washington. Another twenty-five pounds had been delivered to San Francisco two days ago. Suddenly I had a hunch. Either the plane was flying over and dropping the stuff, or else a man was jumping with it. I inclined to the latter theory, because according to the radar boys the plane

had been flying at about a thousand feet. To drop a package, the plane would have been almost on the ground.

The army was glad to co-operate. We set up a radio network and kept contact with the radar unit every night. General Metz loaned me enough troops to blanket the area. We went out on the desert every night after dark, and came in just before daylight.

This went on for close to a month. The General started to get unhappy about it, but I convinced him we should keep on.

Finally the break came. Radar phoned that a plane was coming our way. We waited, and then one of the units reported a car had pulled up on the shoulder of the highway, turned out its lights, and seemed to be waiting for something. I sent a message back that the unit was to close in on the car, but to remain hidden and not to try anything unless I gave the signal or the car tried to leave. I warned the sergeant in charge that the men in the car might be armed and dangerous, and that the soldiers should take no chances.

"If they try anything, shoot," I told him.

Radar kept tracking the plane. It wasn't long until I heard the sound of the engine. When it was almost directly overhead it went into a 180-degree turn and started to retrace its flight path. There was no moon, but my eyes were accustomed to the dark and I caught a glimpse of some-

thing black blotting out the stars.

When the dark spot came closer to the ground, I saw it was a man in a parachute. He hit the earth not far from me and I was up to him almost before he got to his feet. He was taken completely by surprise and surrendered without a fight. He was carrying a pack. Laboratory analysis of the contents showed it to be twenty-five pounds of heroin.

I radioed the unit that had the car under surveillance to close in. They did. The men in the car tried to shoot it out. They wounded a couple of soldiers, and then the sergeant brought up a light machine gun. When he got through there wasn't much left of the car or its occupants.

The man who had parachuted gave his name as Luke Caron. I took him with me to the Bureau office for interrogation.

*Statement of
Arthur Lebelowitz, Attorney*

The trial was both a success and a failure.

Caron gave Agent Schuster a full and complete confession. In addition he agreed to become a witness for the government against Dama, Rocca, and McCauley. Dama received a sentence of fifteen years, Rocca five. McCauley was found not guilty, but enough evidence was brought out during the trial to cause the California State Liquor Control Board

to revoke his license. I presume this will put him out of business.

In my opinion Caron was let off very lightly, considering that it was his idea which enabled this gang to bring fifty pounds of heroin into the country. He got only three years.

Unfortunately we could not bring Kovalski to trial. While we were trying to extradite him, he disappeared.

The trial was a failure in the sense that we were unable to find out who was behind Dama. He, Rocca, and McCauley refused to talk, and Caron, because of his short period of association with them, did not know the identity of any of the higher ups in this horrible business. However, sooner or later they will slip up. I only hope that I will be the prosecutor when they are brought to trial.

Transcript, Death-bed Statement of Paul Kovalski, Pilot

I had a hunch when I tipped off the narcotics agents about the syndicate that I wouldn't get away with it.

A few days after Caron made his third jump, a couple of the boys came down to Juarez. I don't know their full names. They called each other Steve and Ed. They said the syndicate had another job for me and I was to come on with them. I wanted to go back to the airfield for my clothes, but they told me it was too important. Ed said that a man would be sent to get my stuff.

We drove straight through with Ed and Steve spelling each other at the wheel. When we got here to Chicago, we pulled up outside this apartment and came in. We went into that room, the one that's fixed up like an office. A man was waiting for us. He told me he was Frank Bucklan. I recognized the name right away. He's the top man in the syndicate.

Bucklan got right down to business. "I sent for you because Dama's in jail," he said. "The Federal Agents picked him up several days ago. They also got Caron. There was a tip-off somewhere, and I'm going to find out who did it. You can make it easy or you can make it hard, but you're going to tell me what you know about it."

He caught me flat-footed. "Why me?" I asked, more to stall for time than anything else.

"Because you're the only man who could have done it, Kovalski," Bucklan said. "A lot of things you've done showed you're too stupid to hold down a job with this outfit. I didn't want to use you from the beginning, but Dama talked me into it. Now he's paying for his mistake. But we're wasting time. Are you going to tell me, or do I pull it out of you?"

I knew I wasn't going to get out of this one. I thought, since I had to go, I might as well do it like a man. "Yes," I said, "I tipped the government off."

Bucklan slumped back in his chair

and looked at me for a minute. "Well," he said finally, "that's that." He motioned to Ed and Steve. "Take Kovalski out and get rid of him," he ordered.

The boys closed in on me. There wasn't any chance for me if I went along with them; I knew that. The smallest opportunity was worth taking. When Bucklan turned away for a second I moved.

Instead of stepping back to meet Ed and Steve I went forward, toward the desk and over it, scrambling to meet Bucklan. He was trying to get at his gun when I hit him and I grabbed the gun and fired, close range. I didn't even expect to hit him; I just grabbed the gun and let go. But he slumped over.

Then Ed and Steve opened up. Ed hit me first, but I got off a couple more shots. I think I got Steve; maybe I got both before the gun was too heavy to hold. I tried to crawl out of the office, and that's when the police broke in.

Look, tell the doc to leave me alone, will you, Lieutenant? There's one thing more. I kept a diary. If you go to Juarez, and then drive

about twenty miles southwest, you'll find the airfield we used. I lived in a little house on the edge of the field. My diary's in a tin box on one of the shelves. You'll find the names of a lot of syndicate contacts in it.

Give me a cigarette, will you? Thanks.

*Extract from the report of
Police-Lieutenant William Schroeder*

. . . Enclosed is a transcript of a statement by a man identified as Paul Kovalski. He died from gun shot wounds before he could be moved from an apartment at 2763 West Maplewood Boulevard . . .

. . . Others involved in the shooting incident are:

Frank Bucklan, dead of gun shot wounds in the head.

Steve Mitchell, gun shot wound in the chest.

Ed Scardon, broken right knee . . .

. . . The Federal Authorities have been advised concerning the existence of the diary mentioned by the man Paul Kovalski . . .

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Capital Loss

A recent ad in the Reporter-Telegram of Midland, Texas, read: "Will party or parties that have constantly robbed my mail for the last year please give me your name so I can claim dependents on my income tax?"

Love's Full Flower

In Omaha, Neb., Thomas Judd Bennett, 50, repeatedly proposed to Policewoman Faye Page to avoid going to jail. She declined the honor.

But in Indianapolis, Attorney Perry H. Smith, 60, got his client's sentence cut in half by proposing to her. He told the judge that he first met May Belle Thomas, 23, after she had been sentenced to six months in jail for stabbing another woman. "Are you sure you want to marry her?" Judge Chamberlain inquired. "She might want to stab you." The lawyer thought otherwise, so the judge cut the sentence in half, leaving a fine of \$50 and costs.

Water Cure

When Lueck's Dairy in Syracuse, N. Y., was broken into, the intruder fled, drenched with water instead of milk. He evidently stepped in a

sink and broke the water pipe.

Quick with the Quip

An Indianapolis citizen, found in a barbershop in the middle of the night near a broken rear window, told police he merely wished to be first in line for a haircut.

Joseph McShane, 70, of Hamilton, Ontario, up for sentence for stealing a pair of \$1.50 glasses from a store counter, explained: "I took the specs so I could see my way out of the store."

Grand Larceny

In Emeryville, Calif., the Judson-Pacific Construction Corp. reported a theft. Somebody had made off with what they described as "a blue and gray flatbed truck, conspicuous by virtue of its 10 wheels and the \$1000 load of red-leaded steel plates and 25-foot I-beams extending 7 feet behind the bed."

Honey Ring

James Parker reported to Syracuse, N. Y., police the theft of a beehive from his yard, complete with its combs full of busy bees.

While in Shelby, N. C., five people were arrested by Sheriff Haywood Allen for merely taking the honey and leaving the bees. The honey was not recovered but the

evidence was conclusive. All five had that guilty look. Their faces and hands were three times normal size from stings.

Moonshine Modes

In Tampa, Fla., Robert B. Lane, district supervisor of the state beverage department, reported discovery of a bootleg whiskey still. He found it on his own property, 20 miles from Tampa.

In Woodsun, Ark., revenue agents found a still carefully hidden in plain sight. Tomer Lee, 42, had built it on a 10-foot platform in the middle of a lake, so that it appeared to be a pile of junk rising above the water. No one ever investigated until a drought dried up the lake.

Great Expectations

A motion picture studio in Key West, Fla., reported the theft of \$500. But the thieves will have to join the movie industry to use it.

The bills were stage money.

Griffith Park in Los Angeles reported the theft of a golden eagle from one of their cages. The bird, famous for its ferocity, had talons two inches long and a seven-foot wing spread.

Qualified, But —

A Joliet, Ill., office machine firm reported the return of a stolen electric typewriter worth \$450. With it was \$2 for use of the machine and a note: "No one was in the office when I was there last week. Maybe I could get a job sitting in the front office watching your machines."

While in Madison, Wis., a man who had robbed a bank of \$300 explained that he had done it solely to prove to his probation officer that he could easily make a good living. But for the next 1825 days he won't need to prove it. An unsympathetic judge gave him 5 years.

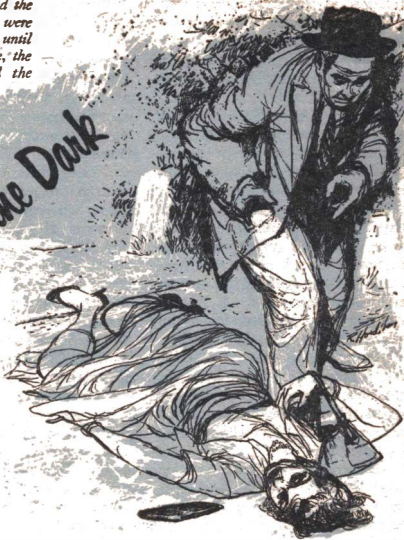
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Please send me the next twelve issues of *Manhunt* for which I enclose \$4.00 check money order.

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John J. Malone and the beautiful blonde were alone that night — until they met the corpse, the nervous man, and the memory professor.

Shot in the Dark



A John J. Malone Novelette

BY CRAIG RICE

JOHNN J. MALONE looked affectionately at his newest currently favorite blonde and said, "Let's stop here for a minute. There's a view I want to see."

Dolly Dove, recently voted Chicago's favorite model, obediently

braked her car to a stop. A date with Chicago's most infamous criminal lawyer was something to put in her memory book. Besides, she thought, she really liked the little guy.

Malone sighed happily. He had plans. Some of them had been car-

ried out. A perfect dinner in a special little roadhouse. The drive back to town. For later, reservations were waiting at the Chez Paree, and after that — heaven only knew, and probably wouldn't tell.

But the view itself was worth the stop. There were trees and flowering bushes against a nicely moonlit springtime sky. He could almost have sworn he heard a cricket.

Suddenly he heard more than that. He heard shouting, and a man came plunging up through the bushes on the side of the road.

Dolly Dove grabbed his arm and said, "Malone!"

"Stay here," the little lawyer told her, reaching for the door handle.

Just then the man reached the car, running, as if he'd been shot out of a cannon. He half-collapsed against Dolly's lime-green convertible, and gasped, "Violet! She's dead! He killed her!"

Malone grabbed his arm with one hand. With the other he reached for the brandy bottle in the glove compartment. "Hold still," he said sternly.

For a moment it was a question whether the frightened man would calm down, completely collapse, or drop dead. To Malone's intense relief, the man calmed down.

"Thanks," the frightened stranger said, catching his breath. He seemed to be mentally counting to ten before he said, "She's down there. What can we do?" Apparently he counted another ten before he said,

"What can we *do*?"

"Take it easy," Malone said. Instinctively he added, "Don't worry."

He took a quick look at the stranger. A medium-sized man, probably average height, average weight, brown hair turning grey, eyes that were just plain eye-color, a few scratches on his face.

"You stay here," Malone said. He managed to get the still shaking man into the convertible, and said, "Now sit there, and keep quiet."

Dolly Dove handed him a flashlight from the glove compartment. Malone thanked her with his eyes. This was the time to catch his own breath. He leaned against the side of the car for a few seconds.

"Dolly," he said, "I've got to go down there. Will you be safe here, with him?"

By way of an answer she held up a tire iron in one hand and the brandy bottle in the other.

The little lawyer smiled for the first time in the past five minutes, and whispered, "But will he be safe with you?"

She said a very rude word, made a mock pass at him with the tire iron and said, "But hurry, Malone!"

Malone hurried, through sweet-scented bushes whose soft leaves caressed his face. He wished he could bottle their perfume and send it as a gift to Dolly Dove. He wished too that the carefully planned evening would turn out all right, but in his heart he knew it would not.

He finally reached the side road

and searched around with his flashlight.

Violet X was dead, there was no doubt about that. In spite of her still-bleeding bullet wounds he could see that earlier in life she had been beautiful. Her well-dyed hair was dark and soft as the shadows cast by the moon behind the trees. Even with only the flashlight and the half-hidden moonlight, he could see that her face was not young, but had been carefully and expensively made up.

She was sprawled on the pavement as though she'd been thrown from a car. A black moleskin handbag hung from her wrist by its strap. Malone was tempted to open it for identification, and resisted it as he had never resisted temptation before. An alligator hide jewel case lay beside her. The little lawyer resisted that temptation too.

He'd seen enough for now. He plunged back up the sweet-scented hill, following the trail the frightened stranger had blazed for him.

Dolly was still behind the wheel, one hand on the tire iron, the other on the brandy bottle, and a wary eye on the unwelcome stranger.

"We've got to stay here," Malone said hoarsely. "We're witnesses. But somebody's got to call the police."

As though Providence had been listening in, headlights appeared over the hill ahead of them. Hastily the little lawyer turned on the flashlight and signalled it to stop. An ancient and noisy sedan slowed and stopped with a jolt that was prob-

ably recorded on seismographs halfway around the world.

A scared middle-aged face looked out and a worried voice said, "We were only going twenty-five. I'm Mr. Edgar Osterhout and this is Mrs. Osterhout. I'll show you my license —"

"Never mind your license," Malone said. "See if you can make forty-five. Or even fifty-five. There's been a murder here."

The plump, blondined Mrs. Osterhout gave a frightened yelp.

Malone said quickly, "Find the nearest phone. Call the police and ask for Homicide, Inspector von Flanagan."

"Young man," the white-haired Edgar Osterhout said, thereby giving Malone the happiest moment he'd had in years, "I am a private teacher of mnemonics. I remember everything. Take one of my pamphlets." He shoved a paper into Malone's hand, reached for the gear shift and said, "It will be a matter of minutes."

The white-haired memory course teacher stepped on the gas and the old sedan moaned, groaned, and finally took off with a roar that would have raised envy in a jet plane.

Again Malone leaned against the lime-green convertible. Dolly's warm hand reached out and held his. With her free hand she reached for the brandy bottle. Both of them made him feel a little better, but not much.

"Malone," she whispered, "Everything is going to be all right, isn't it?"

"Of course," he reassured her, and hoped he was telling the truth. He nodded toward the stranger. "Has he said anything?"

"He said 'Boo!' once, but I don't think he meant it."

The little lawyer sighed, handed her the pamphlet and said, "While we wait for the cops, read it. Out loud."

This time Dolly sighed. "I'm your gal, Malone. The title is 'You Too Can Remember.'"

"There are times," Malone said, "when I'd rather forget. But go on." He reached for a cigar and said, "but I do remember a few things —"

Dolly said, "Shut up," but in a very soft voice. "This is the first lesson in a memory course. You memorize these words first and you can remember anything."

"Shoot," the little lawyer said. He was beginning to wish he had died in his cradle.

"Bat," Dolly read out loud.

"Bat," Malone repeated dutifully.

"Hen."

"Hen."

"Bug."

"Bug," Malone repeated and added, "Where's the brandy?"

Dolly handed it to him, and said, "Hill."

Malone came back with "Hell," and Dolly said that was no language to use in the presence of the witness

to a murder.

It took a few minutes, and a sip from the brandy bottle, but Malone made it.

"Bat, Hen, Bug, Hill, Shoe, Hat, Cow, Ape, Woods, Dog," he recited triumphantly. He tried it again. "Dolly, this should be set to music. I know an orchestra leader in Los Angeles named Spade Cooley." He tried on a tune for size, and was advised by Dolly that he'd better stay with the legal profession.

"Not that I don't have faith in this memory course," she said encouragingly.

The stranger suddenly sat up and said, "Violet!"

"See?" Dolly said. "It's even making *him* remember."

"Olive!" the stranger said. "*Olive!*" He lapsed back into his white-faced silence.

"He probably wants a martini," Malone growled.

2.

It wasn't long before the sirens sounded. Dolly clutched his hand.

"Don't worry," Malone said. "It's only a murder."

It was von Flanagan who got out of the police car. He stormed over to the convertible and gave Malone one of the dirtiest looks in history.

"I might have known it," he said unhappily. "But how did you get here so fast?"

"Believe me," the little lawyer said, in his most conciliating voice,

"we were here first. Miss Dove and I had stopped to admire the view."

The big police officer caught himself on the verge of a very rude remark about the view. Dolly Dove was a view anybody would stop to admire.

"We heard the shots," Malone went on smoothly. "This man came running up through the bushes. He said there had been a murder. Frankly, I think he's in a state of shock."

"Stick to the story," von Flanagan said, "and skip the comments."

"Naturally," the little lawyer went on, "I went down to investigate."

Von Flanagan said in a nasty voice, "Naturally, you would."

"You have three witnesses," Malone said. "And you have a corpse. What more do you want?"

At that moment the Osterhout's well-used sedan came around the bend with a noise like an old garbage pail, filled with nuts and bolts, being shaken to and fro in a Nevada earthquake.

Edgar Osterhout's pink face peered through the window. He said, "Can I be of any more help?"

Malone muttered under his breath, "You've been too much help already." He went on hastily to von Flanagan, "After we heard the shots, and I went down and discovered the body, I came back up here and flagged the first car that came along. It happened to be this one. This gentleman was kind enough to tele-

phone the police."

"It was no trouble," the professor said. "Do you wish us to stay here?"

Von Flanagan groaned. "As it is, we'll probably have traffic tied up from Gary, Indiana to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. You'd better get on home and let me know where to reach you."

"Gladly," Edgar Osterhout said. "My card. It has my home address, my business address, and a day-or-night telephone number." He added proudly, "I am a professor of mnemonics." The sedan moved away with a visible shudder.

Von Flanagan looked at the card, glared at Malone and growled. "Fine. A name I can't pronounce, and a job I can't even spell."

"Mnemonics," Malone said. "Memory. He teaches you how to remember everything."

At that the white-faced eye-witness half opened his eyes and began reciting, "Dog, Woods, Ape, Cow —"

"Gosh," Dolly said. "He's got it, but he's doing it backwards!"

The big policeman said slowly, and very patiently, "For years I have been planning to retire from the force. I am going to do so tomorrow. One eye-witness, who is either drunk, crazy or both. And you, Malone —" He paused, and said wearily, "Well, let's go look at this corpse."

He raised his voice and called, "Danaher!"

A young blond policeman who

could have posed for Mr. America, Apollo, or both, popped out of the car.

"Danaher," von Flanagan said, "stay by this car. Don't take your eyes off either of these people."

Danaher took one quick look at Dolly Dove and said, "Yes, sir!"

Von Flanagan growled something under his breath and yelled, "Klutchesky! You and Patapoff stay with the car." He turned to Malone. "All right, where is it?"

Malone pointed and said, "Down there." He added, "It's the old road and, before this masterpiece was opened, it was the boulevard. Turns off about a block below here. We can walk back and come in that way, or we can go through the bushes."

Von Flanagan headed for the bushes and said, "If they keep working on the boulevard system, you'll need a compass to drive through Lincoln Park."

At the end of the bushes, Malone said, "There's probably tire marks."

"Twenty-four years on the force," von Flanagan growled, "and you tell me about tire marks?" He pushed on through the bushes and snapped on his flashlight. Then he walked carefully along the edge of the road.

He surveyed the scene, the dead woman, the purse, the alligator-hide case. Gingerly, he moved in a little closer.

"Malone, looks to me like five bullet wounds, and any one could of done it. Guy wants to kill her, why not stop with one shot?" He

sighed and said, "All that's got to wait until the experts get here." He said "*experts*" as if it was a word that shouldn't be said within five blocks of a public school, church, or polling place.

Suddenly he yelled, "Klutchesky!"

There was an answering hail.

"Come down here." He added, "Come through the bushes and don't step on the road. Could be tire marks."

Malone maintained the most discreet silence in a fairly long lifetime of discreet silences.

Two hundred and ten pounds of Klutchesky plunged down the little hillside, walked carefully alongside of the road, surveyed the scene and said, "Looks dead."

Malone knew the procedure. The expensive black moleskin handbag had to be opened. The alligator-hide jewel case had to be opened. Some-one, this time Klutchesky, had to be present.

The handbag revealed the usual female paraphernalia: compact, two lipsticks, pancake makeup, a tube of stick cologne, a few old ticket stubs, a half-used package of cigarettes, two sticks of chewing gum, a handful of Kleenex, and a wallet.

Before touching the wallet, von Flanagan turned to Malone and Klutchesky. "You're witnesses. I just want you to make sure I didn't swipe a dime."

The bill compartment of the wallet contained \$417 in assorted bills. The change compartment contained three

quarters and a nickel. Klutchesky made a note of the total amount, which Klutchesky and von Flanagan signed, and Malone initialed.

The other compartment of the wallet contained a membership card in an exclusive women's club, a business card giving a home address in an expensive building on the Drive, and a driver's license.

What it all added up to was that the dead woman's name was Violet Castleberry, that she was in the real estate business, and that she lived well.

"No keys," Klutchesky grunted.

"Naturally," von Flanagan said. "They'd be in the car over there." He looked at the alligator hide jewel case. It had a lock on it, but experimentally, he pushed the catch.

Surprisingly the lid flew open.

A dazzling array of diamonds blazed at them from necklaces, bracelets, rings, earrings and clips.

Von Flanagan said one word, but he said it reverently.

He slammed the lid shut. "This has to be sealed and taken to Headquarters."

3.

A rapid inspection of the car, a late model Cadillac, revealed no bloodstains, and no trace of the murder weapon.

Malone looked at his watch. Yes, it was nine-fifteen. Still time, with good luck, to make that reservation at the Chez. There was always a

chance the Chez would hold it for him.

Von Flanagan glanced back at the jewel case. "If I owned a tenth of what that's probably worth," he said a little wistfully, "I'd retire to California and raise chinchillas. I understand that —" He got his mind back on his work and said, "Well, it wasn't robbery."

Malone decided it was safer not to say anything.

"I'm going to retire anyway," the big policeman said, his voice beginning to rise ominously. "A nice simple little murder, I can understand. But this —" He glared at Malone as though the whole thing was his fault.

Malone said smoothly, "I didn't invite myself to this murder."

Von Flanagan turned to Klutchesky. "The experts will be along any minute." Again his tone of voice indicated what he thought of experts. "You take over. Get that stuff —" he glanced again at the jewel case, "downtown as soon as you can. Come along, Malone."

"I will," the little lawyer said, "and quietly."

As they neared the lime-green convertible, they could hear what seemed to be a chant. The handsome Danaher was leaning against the door, gazing adoringly at Dolly Dove, and reciting "Bat. Hen. Bug. Hill. Shoe."

"Danaher!" von Flanagan roared. He groaned. "Now one of my best cops goes crazy."

Danaher blushed. "It's a memory course, sir," he explained apologetically. "It teaches you how to remember everything."

"There are times," von Flanagan growled, "when I'd be satisfied if you remembered *anything*."

"It's really wonderful, Inspector," Dolly Dove said softly. She handed him the pamphlet.

Von Flanagan glanced at it, turned to Malone, and asked, "Do you suppose there is anything to this stuff?"

"If there is," Malone said acidly, "you ought to have it made required reading for the whole police force."

Von Flanagan opened it, looked at it. He began to read aloud, "Bat. Hen. Bug." Suddenly he hurled the pamphlet into the convertible, and, forgetting Dolly Dove's presence, said a very rude word.

"Danaher," he said. "You and Patapoff stay up here with the car. When the experts get here, direct them to go down through the bushes and walk on the grass. Tire marks."

Again Malone was tactfully silent.

Danaher said, "Yes *sir!*" took a wistful look at Dolly Dove and went away. Sirens were beginning to sound in the distance.

"And now," von Flanagan said grimly, "we'll see what *he* remembers." He walked around the car and said in what was, for him, a gentle voice. "I'm von Flanagan of the police department. I just want to ask a few questions."

"I'm Alvin Orvell," the frightened

stranger said. He seemed a little more calm, a little less pale. "Violet was murdered, wasn't she? He did kill her, didn't he? I didn't imagine it?" He looked at Malone for reassurance.

"Yes," Malone said soothingly. "but who was *he*?"

"I don't know. You see, we'd never seen him before." He paused for breath. "I mean we didn't know him. He answered Violet's advertisement. Violet is my fiancée. We're going to be married." He paused again, began to sob, and said, "I mean, we *were*."

Dolly Dove automatically handed him the brandy bottle and said, "Hold everything, chum."

Alvin Orvell gulped, said, "Thanks," and blew his nose. Von Flanagan muttered something about getting his one eye-witness drunk.

"Olive can tell you more about it. Please, who's going to tell Olive? She is — I mean, she was — Violet's step-daughter. They are — were — more like sisters. She knows a lot about Violet's affairs. It was all about the jewelry. Olive can explain. She lived with Violet. If it hadn't been for the jewelry and the investment and the advertisement, this wouldn't have happened." He closed his eyes and was silent.

"It's none of my business," Malone said softly, "but I have a hunch we'll get more sense out of this if we have Olive present."

Von Flanagan gave him a look.

Cars were beginning to arrive.

Von Flanagan bellowed "Danaher!"

The handsome young cop raced over as though he were trying to break Bannister's track record.

"I've decided we'd better go to Mrs. Castleberry's apartment," von Flanagan said. "Klutchesky has the address and phone number. He's in charge, and the experts know what to do. You stay here with the car and remember, tell those guys to go down through the bushes." He paused, scowled, and said, "Hell, you've got to keep the car here, and —"

"Deputize me," Dolly Dove said sweetly, "and I'll drive you."

The big policeman managed a grateful smile, and went on giving orders to Danaher. "Send Gadenski over here, he's going with us." He turned to Alvin Orvell. "Whose car is it?"

"It was her car," Orvell said. He blinked his eyes as though trying to remember. "She was driving."

"Okay, let's get moving," von Flanagan said.

Danaher moved, and, in a matter of seconds, so did everybody else. The tall, lanky figure of Gadenski started moving fast toward the lime-green convertible. Members of the Homicide Squad, carrying their equipment, started moving fast through the bushes.

"If this keeps up," Malone commented, "they'll beat a path that will be discovered by the Park Department, which will promptly start to build a new boulevard."

Von Flanagan ignored that, said hoarsely, "Get in back with this guy, Gadenski, and let's get out of here before the reporters come around the bend." He smiled at Dolly Dove and said, "How fast can you drive, young lady?"

"Don't tell him," Malone said. "He'd use it against you the next time you're arrested for speeding."

"I'm a deputy now," Dolly Dove said, and stepped on the gas.

4.

Approximately twelve minutes later the convertible came to a screeching stop in front of the impressive address on Lake Shore Drive.

"Young lady," von Flanagan said breathlessly, "I'd back you in the Memorial Day Race any time."

She smiled her thanks and said, "I'll wait for you here."

"You will not," Malone said in a stern voice. "You're coming with us. There's a killer loose, and after all, you're more-or-less of a witness."

It was a small, modest, and probably, Malone reflected, incredibly expensive apartment building. One apartment to a floor, as he discovered when the self-service elevator let them out at the second floor into a small but perfectly decorated foyer.

The woman who answered their ring almost made Malone wish he didn't prefer blondes, but not quite. Beautiful, he decided quickly, was not quite the word for her. Breath-

taking might be better. Her hair was very dark, smooth and shining, and swept into a coil on the back of her neck, and her skin was the exact color of the cream he liked on strawberries. Her eyes were a shade somewhere between grey, green and brown, and right now they were wide with startled surprise.

"Olive!" Alvin Orvell gasped. He stumbled past her into the room.

Malone and the others followed. Von Flanagan kicked the door shut behind them.

"Alvin!" The lovely girl said, and Malone couldn't decide whether it was anger or amazement in her voice, "Alvin, you're drunk! And who are all these people?"

Alvin shook his head, said nothing, sank down into a chair that was an interior decorator's dream of glory, and buried his face in his hands.

Von Flanagan cleared his throat and said, "Miss —"

"Castleberry," she told him coldly as though he should have known it all the time.

The big policeman introduced himself and Gadenski as "— both from Homicide," Malone as "— criminal lawyer," and Dolly Dove without comment.

Olive Castleberry stared at him and then, as though she might have been ordering the band to keep on playing on a sinking ship, said, "Won't you sit down?" Then she said, in an anxious voice, "Is Alvin in any trouble?"

Von Flanagan was never one to

break news gently, with such phrases as, "There's been a little accident," or, "Just a little trouble." He told her, simply and bluntly, "Your step-mother has been murdered."

And then Olive Castleberry sat down. "That man!" she said.

"All right," von Flanagan said, "Tell me about that man. Gadenski, take this down." He looked admiringly at her. He liked women who didn't fly into hysterics and have to be calmed before they could get out a coherent word.

Gadenski obediently got out his notebook and looked expectant. Malone just opened his ears and wished he'd met Professor Osterhout a few years before. Dolly Dove yawned and lit a cigarette.

"And start from scratch," von Flanagan said.

5.

"My father," she said quietly, "married Violet a little over five years ago. He'd been a widower. Violet was just a few years older than I — and I liked her right from the beginning. They wanted me to stay here with them, and I wanted to. Then my father died a few years ago."

She paused for a minute, and no one broke the silence.

"Alvin — was almost one of the family. When my father died, he was wonderful to us. I don't know what we'd have done without him. Then he fell in love with Violet. I

wasn't surprised. Everybody who knew Violet loved her. I was so happy for them both —"

For the first time her calm, low-pitched voice almost broke. Alvin Orvell moaned softly and kept his face in his hands.

"My father was in real estate. That's how he and Violet met. He never made a great deal of money. But he used to say of her that she had the greatest gift of turning money into more money that he'd ever seen."

She looked at the big policeman as though asking what more he needed to know.

"About tonight —" von Flanagan began.

Alvin Orvell sat up suddenly and said, "The jewelry. The advertisement. The investment." Then he sank back and put his face in his hands again.

Olive Castleberry frowned. "I don't know how much money Violet had, but I do know it was all tied up in properties she couldn't touch without a terrific loss. This opportunity came up — to invest in a new project. She couldn't turn it down, not Violet. So she decided to sell some of her jewels. She never wore them anyway, not since my father died. She put an advertisement in the *Tribune* offering them for sale. This man telephoned and made an appointment for this evening."

Now, Malone thought, we're getting somewhere, but with the speed of a lamed turtle. He'd already

crossed off all hopes of the Chez, and he suspected Dolly Dove had fallen asleep.

"I let him in, and called Violet," Olive Castleberry went on. "Alvin was here. Violet brought out the jewel case and they went through it. He said he wanted to buy it as a gift for his wife. They agreed on the price. Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Malone thought about all the things he could buy with twenty-five thousand dollars, besides jewelry. He glanced at Dolly Dove and saw that she'd suddenly sprung awake just at the sound of those words.

"But," Olive Castleberry said, "he wanted his wife to see and approve the jewelry first. His wife couldn't come here because she's a semi-invalid. He asked Violet if she'd bring the jewelry to his home, for her to see. Violet agreed. After all, she was terribly anxious to make the sale. He was going to call a taxi — he said he'd come in one — and she suggested that they use her car. That's all I know. Except that Alvin went along to protect Violet."

Malone took another look at Alvin and decided that he couldn't protect an agile mouse from a lazy and overfed cat.

Von Flanagan looked at Alvin and said expectantly, "Well?"

Alvin looked up. "It was like this. All my fault, I guess. Leaving Violet alone with that man. And with all that jewelry in the car."

He paused to blow his nose. Loudly.

"Violet was driving, naturally. He was sitting between us, giving directions. He said it wasn't far from here. But going through the park he seemed to get lost. Then we ran out of gas. Violet told me to walk back to the highway and try to flag down a car, maybe borrow some gas or get a lift to the nearest filling station. I shouldn't have left her alone with that man."

He paused again and put his face back in his hands.

Olive Castleberry leaped up, made a quick run to the sideboard, came back with a glass that she handed to the white-faced man, and said sternly, "Here. And don't try to tell it so fast. Nobody's in any hurry."

Except me, Malone thought, looking at Dolly Dove.

6.

A little more color came into Alvin Orvell's face.

"I don't know how many cars passed by. Nobody would stop for me. Then I heard her scream. When I ran back to the car she was lying on the ground. Dead. There was no sign of the — the murderer. Then I ran back up to the highway. The bushes scratched my face but I kept on running. I think I fell once or twice. I was frightened. Then I found these people, or they found me." The color began to recede from his face again. "That's all I remember. That's all . . . that's all . . ."

He slid from the chair like a puppet with the strings suddenly cut, to land supine on the floor.

Everybody jumped up except Malone, who said, "Only a faint. Leave him alone. Miss Castleberry, could you get a blanket and throw it over him?"

Dolly Dove said weakly, "He might have a bad heart."

"If he had," Malone said, "he'd have fallen down long before this." And, "Miss Castleberry, that's fine, but don't put the pillow under his head. Put it under his back."

Von Flanagan said coldly, "And since when have you been a combination of the Red Cross, the Emergency Service, and the Visiting Nurses Association?"

"Since," Malone said, just as coldly, "I had to wash the sand out of your eye back in third grade, after a kindergartener knocked you down in the play-yard." He took Olive Castleberry by the arm and said, "There's nothing to worry about. He's had a terrific shock tonight and it's small wonder he fainted after telling about what happened. Meantime, suppose you go on with more details, and don't *you* faint."

She gave him a wan smile and sat down.

Von Flanagan gave Malone a look that, under other circumstances, would have passed for gratitude, and said, "Miss Castleberry. I know this is all very painful for you." It was the voice and manner, Malone rec-

ognized, that the big policeman used on emergency occasions among the upper-income brackets.

"I understand," she said in her cool smooth voice. "I'll tell you anything you need to know, if I can."

Gadenski immediately reached for a fresh pencil and looked as hopeful and expectant as if he were one of a pack of hound dogs waiting at the foot of a tree in Tennessee, watching a treed coon.

"A little more information about this man," von Flanagan said. "His name. He must have given you his name."

"His name was Otto Bergholtz. I mean, he said that was his name. He said he was a poultry dealer."

"Address?"

"He didn't say. He just said it wasn't very far from here. Maybe he told it to Alvin, I don't know."

Malone murmured, "There can't be many poultry dealers named Otto Bergholtz in the telephone book."

"You mind your business," von Flanagan said, "and I'll mind mine." He turned back to Olive Castleberry and said, "Now, if you'll just describe him."

"Well—" For a moment puzzled lines appeared between her lovely eyebrows. "He seemed sort of middle-aged. Maybe thirty, forty, fifty, sixty. Medium high. Not fat, and not really thin, either. Sort of brown hair. Just hair-color hair. I didn't notice the color of his eyes. He had on a suit. I think it was grey . . ."

She added, "I really didn't pay too much attention to him."

The little lawyer said nothing, closed his eyes, and reflected that this was the kind of description that drove policemen into resigning and going to California to raise chinchillas. "He had on a suit." What would she have expected him to wear, an embroidered Zambezi robe, or a pair of Hollywood shorts? It was a description that would have fitted half the males in the Western hemisphere, and probably a good-sized number in the Eastern. He knew from von Flanagan's breathing and wordlessness that he was thinking the same thing.

She added one helpful note. "And he wore horn-rimmed glasses."

So, Malone told himself, did a fair percentage of American men who would never even hurt a mouse.

He heard von Flanagan say, in a weary voice, "Thank you, Miss Castleberry. You've been very helpful." From the sound of his voice, Malone knew that before the night was over he would hear a lamentation from von Flanagan dealing with the fact he had never wanted to be a cop, the reasons why he had become a cop, and what he was going to do when he retired. From the way he heard the notebook slam shut, he knew Gadenski was thinking the same thing.

Alvin Orvell moaned and sat up.

"Get him to a hospital," Malone said quickly.

Olive Castleberry frowned. "He

can't be that sick. And he doesn't have a bad heart. You said yourself it was the shock."

"True," the little lawyer told her, "but he will have a bad heart if somebody puts a shot through it. And it will be a lot easier to guard him in a hospital."

Her eyes widened.

"He saw the killer," Malone went on quickly before von Flanagan could steal the scene. "He can identify him. And the same goes for you, Miss Castleberry. As far as you know, did anyone else get a look at him?"

She shook her head. "There's no elevator man. And the maid had gone to bed."

Von Flanagan muttered crossly, "Why do I need the Chicago police force, when I have a lawyer for a friend!" He snapped at Gadenski, "Get the phone. Twenty-four-hour protection for Miss Castleberry. Put him in Wesley Memorial, it's the closest hospital to here. Round the clock for him too. Stay here until her guard arrives. And move fast, because this place will be lousy with reporters any minute now." He rose and put on his hat.

Dolly Dove smiled and said, "I'll be more than glad to drive you anywhere you're going."

Malone glanced at his watch, and sighed. The last show would be going on any minute now at the Chez. Why couldn't this particular murder have picked any other night in history to happen?

He sighed again when the lime-green convertible stopped in front of Headquarters, and Dolly Dove said sweetly, "Unless you boys need me for anything more, good night."

The little lawyer laid a hand on the wheel. "Not so fast," he said. "Remember, you're a material witness. Von Flanagan, tell her she can't go yet." He added, "If she goes then I have to go too. Can't let a girl go home alone — with a killer prowling the streets."

"That's right, miss," von Flanagan said. "With Mr. Malone here to help us it shouldn't take long to wind up this case." He gave Malone a dirty look.

Reporters were waiting in the anteroom of von Flanagan's office. The big policeman shouldered his way through them, Malone in his wake.

At the door von Flanagan paused long enough to recite, "We have a definite suspect and an arrest is expected shortly." He slammed the door shut fast.

He plopped down behind his desk without saying a word, reached for the classified directory and began pawing through it. Suddenly he looked up at Malone, wonder in his eyes.

"There *is* a poultry dealer named Otto Bergholtz."

"Naturally," Malone said, lighting a cigar. "Nobody would make up a name like that on purpose."

He added, "Maybe an arrest is expected shortly. Maybe for once you told the reporters the truth."

Von Flanagan pushed the switch on the intercom and barked out orders. "Look up his home address. Have him picked up and brought down. And *now!*" He looked at Malone and said, "And I hope he doesn't live in Maywood or South Chicago. Because I'm holding you as a witness."

"Nonsense," Malone told him. "You just want company."

The buzzer sounded. Von Flanagan flipped the switch and listened.

The first report had come in. A .38 revolver had been found near the scene of the crime.

Von Flanagan growled "It took you guys long enough to find it."

"I think," Malone said, crushing out his cigar and reaching for a new one, "you can safely tell the gentlemen of the press that five .38 caliber slugs will be found in the late Mrs. Castleberry."

"By now," von Flanagan said, "those bums will have taken enough pictures of the car to fill a Sunday supplement."

The second report arrived in person, from Gadenski. Alvin Orvell was safely tucked away in the hospital. Guard had been posted there and at the Castleberry apartment. Half the reporters and photographers in the city of Chicago had tried to get in and failed. And he was very tired and would like to go home.

The third report arrived, from

Klutchesky. The jewelry, purse, and cheap wrist watch had been properly put away. The body had been removed. The experts had come and gone. Curious spectators had tied up traffic in four directions. The other half of the reporters and photographers in the city of Chicago had littered the area with used flashbulbs and cigarette butts. Danaher had been left at the scene and was not too happy about it. Finucane would relieve him. And he, Klutchesky, was very tired and would like to go home.

After they had gone, Malone said lazily, "Let's all go home and go to bed."

Von Flanagan gave him a long, sorrowful look. "Malone, I never wanted to be a cop. I wanted to be an undertaker."

Here it comes, Malone told himself. He half closed his eyes, and dozed. A few phrases came to him through beautiful dreams of Dolly Dove.

"— if the alderman hadn't owed my old man money —

"— never asked for a promotion. Especially not to Homicide —"

Malone visioned Dolly Dove floating on a rosy pink cloud, in a spring wind.

"— murderers seem to go out of their way to make life hard for me —

"— and they say there's a fortune in chinchilla. You just buy two of them —

"— now a maniac killer —"

Malone looked at Dolly Dove. She was yawning. He reached for a cigar, and said sleepily, "I think you hit yourself on the head with a nail that time." He paused, blinked and said, "I mean you hit the hammer with a nail."

"Never mind," von Flanagan said, "I know what you mean. Sure, this poultry dealer is nuts. He answers an ad to sell jewelry. He arrives, agrees on a price, wants to show the jewelry to his wife. It's a lot of money." He scowled. "I guess there is a lot of money in hens and chickens at that. Maybe when I retire —"

"As you were saying," Malone said quickly.

"So he shoots her five times, when one would of done it," the big policeman growled. "The little guy, this Alvin what's-his-name, he's gone after a can of gas. This poultry dealer takes it on the lam. But why doesn't he pick up the jewelry? Or her purse?"

"Ask him when he gets here," Malone said. He was very tired now.

8.

Another report came in. No fingerprints on anything, not on the car, the jewel case, the gun, except the legitimate ones of Violet Castleberry, Olive Castleberry, Alvin Orvell, and a few cops that von Flanagan stated he would deal with personally in the morning.

"In these days," von Flanagan said furiously as he switched off the

intercom, "nobody wears gloves. And two people saw him. If he'd of had gloves on, it would of been noticed."

"Maybe," Malone suggested coyly, "no hands." He went on very fast. "You don't need to worry. You've got the guy's name and address, and he's probably on his way down here right now. He'll probably talk your ears off."

"And you'll probably get him for a client," von Flanagan said bitterly.

Malone said, "You've skipped something. Fingerprints in the Castleberry apartment. He was there quite a while, and he must have touched something. And Olive Castleberry would have noticed if he'd worn gloves."

Von Flanagan swore softly under his breath, and gave more orders over the intercom.

A moment later the intercom spoke back to him. "They brought Bergholtz in."

"Send him here," von Flanagan said, and immediately regretted it. From the sound effects in the corridor, a minor riot was going on. Then came the popping flashbulbs and the sound of voices from the anteroom. Finally the door was kicked open, two perspiring squad car officers shoved their loudly protesting prisoner into the office, slammed the door shut behind them, and said, "Here you are."

Otto Bergholtz, poultry dealer, was, roughly, somewhere between five foot two and five foot three, and

very much on the chubby side. He had a round, pink face, bright blue eyes, a white moustache that matched a fringe of white hair surrounding a round, pink bald head. At the moment, he was probably the angriest man in the state of Illinois.

"What kind of outrage is this?" he wanted to know. "I want to buy a nice present for my little woman, my Bertha. It's our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. I see this advertisement in the paper. I go there and it looks all right, nice jewelry. Fine. Only mamma she should see it first. I never buy anything without mamma sees it first. So we go in the car, and the car runs out of gas. This young man, he says, you go get some gas, please, and we wait here. I get out of the car and I start walking. A block away I hear the motor starting and the car driving away — back. When I come home I tell mamma, she thinks I'm crazy. Then policemen come —"

Von Flanagan looked at Malone, then he looked at Mr. Bergholtz. "You say *you* got out of the car? *You* went for the gas?"

"Sure. Why do you ask me questions? Am I arrested? What happened? All I wanted to do —"

Malone spoke up. "Did anybody see you get out of the car, Mr. Bergholtz? Anybody, that is, except Mrs. Violet Castleberry and Alvin Orvell?"

"Sure," said Mr. Bergholtz. "They saw me get out of the car. You ask them, they will tell you."

"Did anybody *else* see you there?" Malone asked patiently. "Any passing car —"

"No," said Bergholtz.

"How did you get home?" asked von Flanagan.

"I walked to the filling station at Milwaukee crossing, I called up for a cab and I went home. What is the matter? Did — did anything happen?"

"Oh, nothing at all," von Flanagan replied. "Nothing at all." He turned to the little lawyer. "Malone, what do you make of it?"

Malone said, "Looks like we've hit a detour. You know the procedure. Hold the suspect while you check his story. It shouldn't be hard to find the gas station attendant, and the cab driver. If his story holds up you've still got Alvin Orvell — or would you rather hang it on me? Or Miss Dolly Dove? After all, it's only a slight case of murder."

"Murder!" It was Mr. Bergholtz, and it sounded more like a shriek than a question.

"Yes, murder," von Flanagan said. "I'm holding you — only on suspicion, mind you — until we check your story — for the murder of Mrs. Violet Castleberry."

9.

If he had been made of inflated rubber and someone had pricked him with a pin Otto Bergholtz couldn't have gone limper than he did that instant. After a glass of

water he revived enough to gasp, "Murder? How could it be? They weren't supposed to —" He caught himself, took another sip of water, and looked around him miserably.

"Who wasn't supposed to what?" Malone asked. "Was there somebody else?"

Otto Bergholtz looked down at the floor. "I'm not saying any more," he said. "I want a lawyer."

Malone stepped forward. "At your service," he said, handing Mr. Bergholtz his card. "John J. Malone, attorney at law." He turned to von Flanagan. "Would you mind leaving me alone with my client for a few minutes?"

Von Flanagan's reply to this request was an elaborate and profane no, with apologies to Miss Dolly Dove. "Not till I'm through with him," the chief of homicide continued more moderately. He turned back to the poultry dealer. "You were saying, Mr. Bergholtz — they weren't supposed to — what? Murder the victim? What *were* they supposed to do? And who were *they*? Your accomplices?"

Otto Bergholtz looked at Malone questioningly.

"It's all right," Malone said. "If you're innocent you have nothing to fear, Mr. Bergholtz. Tell us what happened."

The poultry man looked at Malone, nodded, and turned to von Flanagan.

"I don't know what happened," he said. "All I know — these men,

they come to me in my store. Two men. We want to buy some jewelry, they say. They show me the advertisement in the paper. They are diamond merchants, they tell me, but they don't want to buy direct. They want I should be their agent. Something about income tax. I don't know. Anyway, you can buy cheaper, they tell me. You're a private party. Tell the lady you want the jewels for your wife, for a wedding anniversary present. Tell her you have to show them to your wife first. We will be in your house when you come home and you can say we are friends. You want us to look at the jewels for you, give you advice. If everything is okay we give you the money to pay, and we give you also ten percent for being agent."

"And when you got home tonight," Malone prompted him, "they were waiting for you to look at the jewels?"

Otto Bergholtz shook his head. "No, nobody was waiting for me. I don't understand."

Von Flanagan gave out with an incredulous grunt and a scowl that he divided equally between the suspect and his lawyer. "So you come here and tell a cock and bull story," he said, "about getting out of the car to go for gas and the car driving away —"

"My client hasn't finished his story," Malone said icily. "And now, Mr. Bergholtz. Since you are only an innocent victim in this case, you won't mind telling us, will you

— who were these two men? What were their names?"

"Names?" the poultry dealer turned a perplexed look on Malone, then on von Flanagan. "They didn't tell me their names," he said. "It was all very — uh — confidential, you understand."

"Yes, I understand," von Flanagan said. He turned to Malone. "Your client is innocent," he said with a smile that looked like the calm before a storm. "Your client is the injured party, Malone. Take him home to mama and let me know where to send my apologies." His voice took on the sound of low thunder. "Two men drop down from Mars, in a flying saucer. They set up this guy for a heist, murder the victim, leave the loot at the scene of the crime, and skedaddle back to their flying saucer. Is that the story you want me to tell the reporters?"

Malone said, "You forget the gas station attendant. And the cab driver. How do you know his story isn't going to stand up?" He turned to the poultry dealer again. "These men you mentioned — since you don't know their names, could you describe them for us?"

Mr. Bergholtz nodded. "One was tall, and he had a grey suit on —"

"And the other one was short and he had a brown suit on," von Flanagan said.

Mr. Bergholtz beamed. "That is right," he said. "You know them, maybe?"

"Yes, I know them maybe," von Flanagan shot back. "They're old friends of mine. We used to shoot pool together." He barked into the intercom and Gadenski came in. "Put this joker in the lock-up until we can check his story," he told the officer. "And as for you, Malone, I'd lock you up *with* him if the law allowed. Why does everything have to get complicated for me the minute you turn up on a case?"

"Why should you worry?" were Malone's parting words. "You've got the case on ice."

Out on the street again Malone looked at his watch. "We can just make the finale of the last show," he said to Dolly Dove. "A couple of drinks is what we need, and then, well, the night is still young."

"I've got an early morning modeling date," Dolly Dove said, "but maybe just one, and then I've got to get my beauty rest."

"Then let's not lose any more time," Malone said as they got into the green convertible.

"Am I still deputized?" Dolly Dove asked as they sped away.

"As far as I'm concerned you're chief of police," Malone replied, "so don't spare the horses."

10.

The head waiter at the Chez greeted them as they walked in. "Mr. Malone," he said, "you're wanted on the telephone. The party said he'd hold the phone till you

got here.”

“Sit down and order a double rye for me,” Malone told Dolly Dove. “I’ll be right with you.”

He went to the booth and picked up the receiver. It was von Flanagan.

“Malone,” said the chief of homicide in a sepulchral voice, “I’ve got news for you. That jewelry the Castleberry woman was going to sell for twenty-five grand. The lab has just reported on it. It’s fake, nothing but glass. The settings are genuine but the stones are phoney. And another thing, the gun. We’ve traced it. It belongs to Violet Castleberry.”

Malone tried to conceal his surprise. “So what do you want me to do about it?”

“Look here, Malone,” the voice on the phone exploded. “You got me into this. You and your half-witted poultry dealer. How do you suppose I’ll look to the reporters if I tell them —”

“Tell them nothing,” Malone said. “Do nothing till you hear from me. I’ve got a hunch, and I think I can wind this thing up for you before morning.” He hung up.

Back at the table he drank his double rye and ordered another. The last show was over and the waiters were beginning to look their way impatiently. “Let’s go,” Malone said to Dolly Dove. “It’s been a lovely evening.”

When they were seated in the green convertible again he broke the news to Dolly. “We’re not going home,” he said. “Not just yet.”

She started to protest but Malone ignored her. “If you were a jewelry faker and you wanted to hide the *real* jewels, where would you hide them?” Malone asked her.

“Who’s a jewelry faker?” Dolly said, showing sudden interest. “Mr. Bergholtz? Violet? Olive? Or Alvin Orvell?”

“I don’t know yet,” Malone said, “but I’m going to find out. If you turn off here and head up the drive we should be able to get to the Castleberry apartment in about five minutes flat.”

He identified himself to the policeman on guard at the door, and rang the bell. Olive Castleberry answered the door. She was in negligee but it was plain that she hadn’t slept. In a few words he told her the latest developments in the case. “I know you’ll want to help,” he said. “Did Violet ever say anything to you about having the gems copied, and reset?”

Olive said, “No, but she didn’t tell me everything she did. Not about business matters.”

“Then you won’t mind if we have a look around,” Malone said hopefully.

“Not at all,” Olive said. “I’ll help you. You think the real jewels might be somewhere in the house?”

“I don’t know where else they’d be,” Malone said. He paused. “Do you suppose she might have asked Alvin to have the gems copied for her?”

Olive gave a start. “I — don’t

know why she should. He would have said something about it if he knew. He — he's like one of the family — like a brother to me. It's been such a shock to him."

"I know," Malone said soothingly. "I know. Well let's have a look around. Miss Dove here will give us a hand."

In no time at all they had the place turned inside out — drawers, closets, desks, and no sign of the missing jewels.

"While you girls keep looking I'll go to the kitchen and fix us some drinks," Malone said. "I'm sure we could all do with a bit of liquid refreshment."

He found the makings and as he filled the glasses and dropped in the ice cubes he turned the case over in his mind. Presently he returned to the living room and set the loaded tray down on the cocktail table. A discerning glance would have revealed that his hand shook a little as he did so, but if he had come to any startling conclusions about the case his face did not betray them.

Dolly Dove glanced at the array on the tray. "You don't expect *us* to drink all that," she said. "You must be expecting company."

"I am," Malone said. He went to the telephone and got von Flanagan on the wire. "Get over here right away," he told the chief of homicide, "and bring Bergholtz with you. And Alvin Orvell. The men from Mars have landed."

And he hung up.

When everybody was assembled in the living room the little lawyer lighted a fresh cigar and turned his attention first to Olive Castleberry. "You knew, did you not, Miss Castleberry, that you are in a direct line to inherit your step-mother's fortune?" Olive nodded. "And you knew that if Violet married Alvin Orvell —"

"You leave Olive out of this," Alvin Orvell spoke up. His brief hospitalization seemed to have revived him remarkably and, despite the late hour, he was alert and easily the most wide-awake person in the room. "Olive had nothing to do with it," he said flatly. "You're not accusing her of —" He paused.

"Of what?" Malone asked. "Of the murder? Certainly not. We all know Miss Castleberry was not present at the scene of the crime. But the science of criminology knows of such things as intermediaries, accomplices, agents, innocent and criminal —"

"Never mind the lecture," von Flanagan broke in. "You didn't get us all up here at this god-awful hour to hear a lecture on criminology. Are you hinting that Olive Castleberry hired those men from Mars to come down in a flying saucer and murder her step-mother?"

Alvin Orvell put his hand to his forehead and for a minute it looked as if he was going to do a collapsing act again. "Flying saucers? Men

from Mars?" he muttered. "Is everybody going crazy?"

"I'm not hinting anything," Malone said smoothly. "I'm only trying to establish the facts. If Olive stood to inherit, she had a motive. If she had no taste for becoming the stepdaughter, or the ward, of Alvin Orvell, she had a double motive."

Olive Castleberry spoke up angrily. "I don't know what you're driving at, Mr. Malone, but I have nothing to hide." Her eyes flashed. They were more green now than grey or brown. "If it's me and Alvin you're hinting at, Mr. Malone, I'll confess that I'm fond of Alvin. After all, he's like a member of the family."

"Olive!" It was Alvin Orvell, and his face was flushed. "Don't say another word, Olive. It's nobody's business how we feel about each other. It hasn't got anything to do with this case, anyway." He turned to Malone. "What is it you're driving at, Malone? We've told you everything."

"Not quite," Malone said. "For instance, about the jewels. Did Mrs. Castleberry have them copied and reset, or did you take it upon yourself to do it?"

The flush vanished from Alvin's face and gave place to an ashen white. It was a full minute before he was able to answer, in a low voice. "She asked me to have it done for her. Said she was afraid to show them to prospective buyers for fear of theft. She'd heard that jewel

thieves answer newspaper ads and then come back and burglarize the house. She didn't mean to offer fake jewels. The buyer would get the real ones when the sale was made. Is there anything wrong in that?"

"That figures," von Flanagan spoke up. "If Bergholtz's accomplices got a look at those phony jewels —" He looked hard at Alvin Orvell. "You said you got out of the car and went to find some gas, is that right?"

Bergholtz shot up out of his chair. "It's a lie!" he shouted. "Me — he sent *me* for the gas. First they try to sell me fake jewelry, and now they say *he* went for the gas." It was all the officers could do to keep him from pouncing on the pale and frightened Alvin Orvell.

"I don't know who's trying to frame who or who's protecting who," von Flanagan said, "but if Bergholtz's story isn't a flying saucers yarn, it looks like a plain case of the old jewel-hijacking racket. They get this poultry dealer to lure the victim out of the house with the jewels, they follow them in the car and then pull a stick-up. The way I see it, if Mr. Orvell here wasn't in on the stick-up why did he have to lie about getting out of the car to go for the gas? As far as I'm concerned, I'm holding them *both* for the crime. When we find their accomplices we'll have an air-tight case against the whole mob."

"Not so fast, Chief," Malone said. "You forget there was a murder

committed."

"Before we go any further," Malone said. "Let's all have a drink before all the ice melts in those glasses. Here, let me play host, since I mixed the drinks."

He picked up the tray and passed it around. When he came to Alvin Orvell he handed him a glass himself, saying, "I mixed this one especially for you. Those scratches on your face, Mr. Orvell. You say you got them coming up through the bushes. Von Flanagan, you went through those bushes. Did you get any scratches on your face?"

"Not I," von Flanagan said.

"Neither did I," Malone said. "Are you sure, Mr. Orvell, that you didn't get those scratches from a lady's fingernails? Mrs. Castleberry's for instance?"

Alvin Orvell was silent, staring down into his glass, his eyes fixed and glassy, like a marmoset hypnotized by a snake. Suddenly he flung the glass from him. The all but melted ice cubes scattered on the floor. As he made wildly for the door von Flanagan's cops grabbed him.

Malone picked up the scattered ice cubes and laid them on the cocktail table. There in plain view, bedded in the remaining pieces of ice, lay the missing diamonds.

"There is your missing evidence," Malone said to von Flanagan. "Hot ice."

"Then you didn't gang up with

those jewel thieves?" von Flanagan asked Orvell.

"I don't know anything about any jewel thieves," Orvell said. "I fixed the tank so we'd run out of gas. I sent Bergholtz for the gas, figuring I could frame him for the murder. It was only his word against mine. I was going to strangle Violet. I didn't know she had a gun in the glove compartment. She jumped out of the car. I struggled with her. Then — I lost my head, I guess. I forgot about the jewels — the fake jewels. I didn't want to take a chance with the real ones in the car with Bergholtz, that's why I had copies made. I guess I bungled everything. All my life . . . everything I ever tried to do. . . ."

He let out a low moan and folded up in the arms of the policeman.

"Well, there's your case, chief," Malone said.

"Here I am," Dolly Dove said. She looked groggy, but whether sleepy or drunk Malone couldn't tell.

"Let's go," he said. "If we drive fast we can just make it in time to see sunrise on Starved Rock. I've always wanted to see sunrise on Starved Rock. We'll just pull up by the side of the road and admire the view . . . moonlight . . . spring-time . . ."

"And a scream from the bushes," Dolly Dove said. "And a dead body beside a car in the road. Okay, here we go again."

What's Your Verdict?

No. 14 — The Buried Fortune

BY SAM ROSS

RITA MASON had a lot of dates, but she wasn't the kind of girl men wanted to talk about. She went out with married men, when their wives were away or when their wives just weren't looking. The men enjoyed their dates with Rita, but their enjoyment lasted only a short time. Soon each man began getting demands for money, and if they were reluctant about giving Rita a little cash she mentioned that their wives would be receiving a little phone call unless Rita was paid off.

Rita didn't like blackmail, since she knew that a blackmailer is almost certain to be caught sooner or later. But she went on with her career anyhow, thinking that she'd stop as soon as she could.

She stopped on the day she met William Dockwrath.

Dockwrath was an old man, a rich man and, perhaps, a foolish man. He fell for Rita at first sight and she, recognizing the size of the fish she had on her hook, played him for all he was worth. It wasn't long before Dockwrath was leading Rita to the altar. "Living alone isn't much fun, anyway," he told his cronies, and

they all agreed he ought to know. He'd been living alone for nearly seventy years.

Rita was just thirty-two when she became Mrs. Dockwrath. She saw to it that her new husband changed his will in her favor immediately — and then she had nothing to do but sit back and wait. She was confident that Dockwrath would die before long, and when he did Rita would inherit a fortune. She was perfectly willing to wait for her fortune.

It wasn't long in coming. The couple had been married barely two months when old Dockwrath's heart gave out, quite naturally, one morning. Rita acted the part of a bereaved wife to perfection. She cried at the deathbed, she cried at the funeral, and she even cried as she went to a lawyer's office to hear her late husband's will read.

She was crying when she went in — but she wasn't tearful at all when she came out of the lawyer's office. She was blazing mad. Old Dockwrath had lived with her two months, and that had been ample time for him to find out what kind of woman Rita was. He hadn't liked

the idea of leaving her all his money, and, without her knowledge, he'd changed his will. Rita got the smallest possible pittance. The rest went to various town charities.

At first, Rita didn't know what she was going to do. For a while she thought she'd have to go back to blackmail to earn a stylish living. The thought frightened her a little — blackmailers are almost bound to get caught, after a while, and Rita knew that. But it was the idea of blackmail that gave her her inspiration.

She contested the will. She went into court and stated that her late husband hadn't meant what he'd written at all. She stated that, right up until the day of his death, Dockwrath had meant to leave all his money to his loving wife. But she didn't stop at mere statement, unsupported by evidence.

No less than four of the most respectable gentlemen in town went to the stand and swore that they'd heard old Dockwrath say he meant to leave his money to his wife, and had in fact done so. They swore they'd heard him say it within a week of his death — long after the second will had been drawn up.

With that testimony, Rita's at-

torneys rested their case.

The contesting lawyers, though, had an objection.

"You can't deny what the will says," they insisted. "The will states that the money's to go to charity, and that's all that counts. The words of the will are perfectly clear. That's all we can go by."

"But my husband meant me to have the money," Rita pleaded. "You can't just ignore the testimony of all these men — the most respected men in town. They say my husband wanted me to have the money, and you have to respect his wishes."

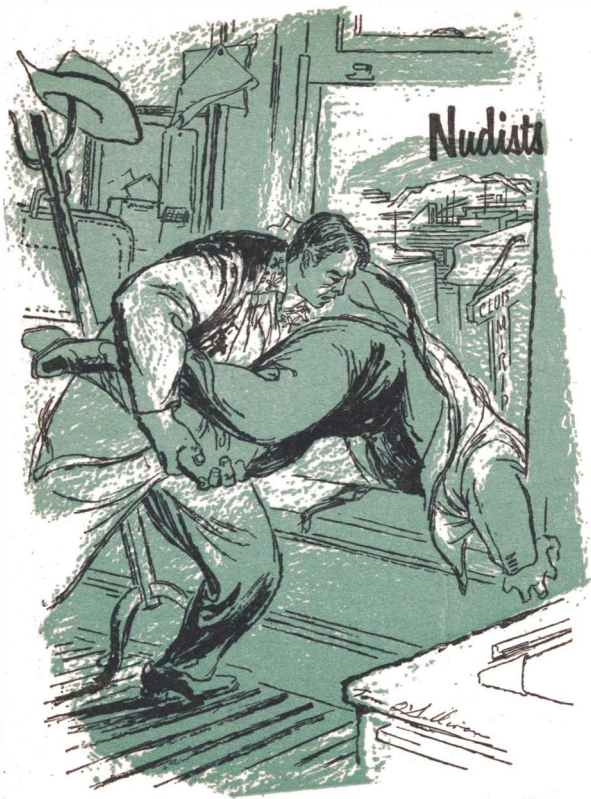
"But the will is what we have to go by," the contesting attorneys argued. "It's all we can go by."

Who was right?

What's *your* verdict?

ANSWER:

The contesting lawyers were right. If the wording of a will is clear, no other evidence that would change the intent of the words can be admitted. Rita lost the case, and, because of her trick with the witnesses, her blackmail was easily exposed. She was tried and convicted on several counts of blackmail, and served a long term in the State prison.



Die Naked

Shell Scott didn't mind the killers or con-men so much. What bothered him was that fantastic nudist camp . . .

A Shell Scott Novel

BY RICHARD S. PRATHER

THIS WAS a party which Cholly Knickerbocker, in tomorrow's Los Angeles *Examiner*, would describe as "a gathering of the Smart Set," and if this was the Smart Set I was glad I belonged to the Stupid Set.

None of the fifty or so guests here, I hoped, knew I was a private detective named Shell Scott, but few could have avoided the impression that I might have sneaked in by mistake. Among all the tuxes and tails I felt out of place wearing brown slacks and a tweed jacket over a sports shirt called, according to the salesman, "Hot Hula," but at least there were no wild Balinese babes doing things on the shirt; it was just colorful. Anyway this was a warm summer evening, the last day in June.

Earlier, a Mrs. Redstone, who was tossing this ball, had phoned me and said she needed a private investigator. She would recognize me, she'd said, and I was merely to "mingle unobtrusively" with the guests. That was going to be loads of fun. Since I'm six-two and weigh 205 pounds, have short white hair which sticks into the air like a small bleached porcupine curled up on my scalp, whitish eyebrows, plus a very slightly bent nose and Hot Hula, it was also going to be impossible.

Two old biddies near me were yakking about a gal who was "coming out," and I looked around eagerly, thinking maybe she'd bust out of a paper-covered cake and the party would get livelier, but no such luck. They were talking about some tomato who was having a party so she could be stared at over champagne glasses.

I'll tell you one thing: Neither that party nor this one would be *my* kind of party. I drink bourbon and water, and I like to stare at women over women. A bunch of us solid citizens were scattered about an enormous drafty room in the big Redstone house and I leaned against a wall staring at the one woman there worth staring at. She was sitting on a gold divan a few feet from me, animated, laughing, talking to a guy sprawled next to her. The guy glanced at me momentarily and frowned slightly, then his gaze passed on. But he kept frowning.

The girl fluffed short blonde hair and said, "Poopy, pay some attention to me."

Obviously the guy was a real blue-blood, because a man with a dozen red corpuscles would have been paying so much attention to her that she'd have been screaming. Her lips were bright red in a milky white face, light brows arched over blue eyes. She had a nice body, too, though a trifle slim, but her dark green dress was strapless and almost off, and what she had was all hers. She finally got the blue-blood's attention and I looked over the gathering some more.

A male juvenile from one of the studios was here, looking carefree tonight, since he was so drunk his toupee was on backwards. Next to him was an ex-Miss America who had a thirty-six-inch bust of which thirty-five inches was back, the sweet sad expression of a moulting angel, and little else — but she was six feet tall and could tap-dance like a fiend. In the same group with them I recognized a tough dimwitted thug named Garlic. He was talking to a heavy, thick-bodied man I'd never seen before. They both glanced at me, then went on talking.

Garlic's friend was stolid, unsmiling, his face a bit marked up, the coat of his dinner jacket a little too tight over his shoulders. Most coats would be a little too tight on him. He was a vital-type egg, with power seeming to ooze out around him, and I got the impression of a man full

of iron and wires and cold-rolled steel bars. He and Garlic glanced at me again.

"Hey." It was a soft, husky voice alongside me.

While I'd been looking elsewhere, the blonde's friend from the gold divan had walked up to me. "Hello," I said.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

Only he said it like "Fetch me my spats, boy." He was a little younger than I, under thirty, dark and good looking but weak-sisterish despite rugged features. If the big egg I'd been looking at moments before were made from hunks of iron, this one might have been built out of solid, stale cream puffs. He stood about five-ten and glared up at me insolently, oily lids lowered over black eyes. Black hair lay close to his head in tight waves.

"Just . . . mingling," I said agreeably. "Nice party."

"How the hell did you get in here?"

"I shot the butler. What makes it your business?"

His heavy lips twitched. "I'm Andon Poupelle."

"That's nice. Glad to meet you, Poopy."

I'll usually give a man more rope, but once in a while I meet one that rubs me wrong from the beginning. Like this slob.

A slow flush was creeping up under his tan. "You make a lot of noise with your mouth. And you smell

like cop to me."

I straightened up, wound my right hand into a fist and then loosened the fingers again. "Listen, friend. I can make just as much noise with *your* mouth if you want it that way. If you've got something on your mind, tell me nice."

Poupelle's belligerence left him. He ran his tongue over beautiful teeth, regular as a row of small sugar cubes, expertly porcelain-capped, then spun on his heel and walked away.

The blonde was alone on the divan now, so I walked over to her. If she was Andon's date, he'd made me mad enough to try moving in. Hell, I'd been planning that even before he'd made me mad. She looked like the only woman here who wouldn't go to the Blue Cross when there was a blood drive on.

"Hi. Can I get you a drink, or a mink coat or something?"

She smiled. Nice. Teeth almost as pretty as Poupelle's. "No, thanks," she said. "You can sit down, though. You didn't look very comfortable on the wall."

"Ah, then you noticed me."

"I thought somebody had hung a modern painting over there. Didn't anybody tell you to come dressed for dinner?"

"I'm not going to eat with my clothes. As a matter of fact, I may not eat at all." It was true enough, but also I had in my wanderings around scouted the enormously long dinner table, set with place cards

and everything, including printed menus. The menus were in French. Talk about class!

I went on, "I'm afraid to eat. Can't read the food."

She laughed. "I'll read it to you."

"Show-off. You know, one of these days I'll throw a ball for the Smart Set and the menus will be printed in Abyssinian. We'll see how smart they are."

She gurgled and we made extremely small talk for another minute, then she said, "You know Poopy, do you?"

"Not well," I told her. "Well enough." She kept smiling.

"He's so much fun," she said. "So interesting to talk to."

I went along with the gag. "Yeah. Of course, I've had better conversations with parakeets."

She frowned. "You mean you don't think he's . . . clever?"

Oh, she was marvelous, completely dead-pan, almost as if she were serious. I grinned at her. "That boy could be drowning and he might know he was wet. Otherwise, though . . ."

Suddenly I discovered the blonde had been *serious*. Her tone was frigid when she said, "Go back to your wall."

"Wait a minute, I —"

"Wait, nothing."

"O.K., Miss." I got up, but before I left I said, "Miss what? I should know who I've insulted. Whom. Have I insult —"

"I'm Vera Redstone — oh, damn!

That's *twice* tonight. I'm not Miss Redstone. I'm Mrs. Poupelle. We've only been married two weeks and I keep getting my name —"

"You're Mrs. Redstone's daughter? And . . . *his* wife?"

"Yes."

"Well," I said. "Him. You must have been talking about Andon. Why, he's . . . he's a prince!"

It wasn't any good. "Go back to your wall," she said.

Nope, Vera Redstone-Poupelle and I weren't going to fall panting into each other's arms. But what the hell, I don't mess around with guys' wives, anyway. At least not when they've only been married a couple weeks. At least I don't usually.

Somebody tapped me on the shoulder. I looked around at Garlic's face. "Well, hello there," he said gently.

I exhaled garlic-laden air, put my index finger against his chest and pushed easily. He stepped back and said, "There's a fellow would like to talk with you outside."

"Who?"

"Me."

I walked to my wall again, leaned on it. Garlic tagged along.

"Get lost, Garlic."

He grinned and squirted garlic odor at me. "Let's go." He latched onto my left arm.

"Let go of me, Garlic," I said.

He didn't. As he put on pressure to ease me toward the door, I pointed four fingers straight out and jabbed them into his neck. My fin-

gers hit his Adam's apple and a funny squeak came out of his throat. His face got red and he balled both hands into fists.

He was about to swing when I said softly, "I'll carve up your chops like a salisbury steak, Garlic. Let's not."

His face got redder, but he didn't swing. He squeezed air out of his throat. "You damn punk. I'll kill you, you son —"

Then he broke it off and walked a few yards away, stopped and stood by himself, big paws opening and closing spasmodically. I looked around. In an arched doorway across the room on my left, a woman stood, smiling at me. Still smiling she nodded, waved a hand. It seemed likely that Mrs. Redstone had made an appearance. She was quite a surprise.

2.

So far the only woman I'd seen who looked female was Vera, but this gal was tall, white-haired, erect, and damned fine looking. I knew she was getting on toward sixty but, from this distance anyway, she didn't look forty.

When I went through the archway, she pulled drapes to close off the room and said, "I'm sorry it took me so long to find you, Mr. Scott. Cook's drunk — appropriated a magnum of champagne — and I had to help straighten things out." She grinned. "Including cook. I'm

afraid everything's going to taste like champagne tonight. I'm Mrs. Redstone." I said how-do-you-do, and she asked me, "Did you hurt the gentleman?"

"Yes, Ma'am, only he's no gentleman."

She frowned. "I don't know who he is. Odd. There's usually a stranger or two at these dreadful affairs, but he's such a *strange* stranger. What was the difficulty?"

I told her that Garlic had invited me outside for a chat and I preferred not to go anywhere at all with Garlic.

She led the way to two leather chairs and when we were seated, she said, "Do you suppose any of the guests know you're a detective, Mr. Scott?"

"Garlic must. A couple people asked me who I was but I told them I was an entertainer named Pakua. I dance with knives."

"I hoped your identity could be kept secret. You see, you're the second detective I've hired — if you accept my offer. The first one was murdered."

She handed me a short newspaper clipping. A local detective, Paul Yates, had been found early Sunday morning face down on a dirt road named Traverse Road north of Los Angeles. He'd been shot in the chest and been dead about six hours when found.

Mrs. Redstone went on to tell me that she had two children who would eventually inherit her estate,

twenty-two-year-old Sydney, whom I meant to ask her more about to make sure Syd wasn't a counterpart of Poopy, and twenty-six-year-old Vera, whom I'd met. Vera had known Andon Poupelle for less than two months; they'd become engaged three weeks ago, married a week later. Mrs. Redstone was afraid Poupelle wanted next to Vera only to get next to whatever part of Mrs. Redstone's fifteen and a half million dollars might trickle down to Vera. So Mrs. Redstone had hired investigator Paul Yates, told him to conduct a thorough investigation of Poupelle's background. Yates had made a report one day before the marriage, and according to Yates, Andon Poupelle was Little Lord Fauntleroy after adolescence.

Mrs. Redstone wanted me to determine if Yates might conceivably have been killed because of his work for her, and also do the job she'd originally hired Yates for: go over Poupelle like a vacuum cleaner. She was willing to pay much more than the job was worth. I took the case — and a thousand-dollar retainer.

She walked across the room and got some papers, brought them to me. "You may as well have Mr. Yates' report now. I can't make myself believe that Andon is quite the jewel described here." In a minute we got up and headed for the other room.

Mrs. Redstone smiled. "Possibly some of the guests already know you're a detective, Mr. Scott, but

I'll not escort you to the door, even so." She laughed softly. "Not a knife dancer. My social standing would be ruined." We grinned at each other and I went out.

In the big room, I looked around to see if I could spot Garlic, but he wasn't in sight. The big man who'd been talking to Garlic earlier was still in the same place. Poupelle stood with him and the movie juvenile; all three of them were watching the ex-Miss America, who was tap-dancing.

I went outside. My Cad was parked behind a long row of other Cadillacs, Buicks, sports cars. I reached it, climbed inside, and was putting the key in the ignition when I smelled him. I froze for a moment, then started the engine.

A dark Packard was parked straight ahead of me. I put the Cad in gear, stepped down on the gas and suddenly let out the clutch, used my foot on the accelerator as leverage to shove myself to the right side of the seat as the car jumped forward. My Cad slammed into the Packard with a hell of a crash, but my foot against the floorboards held me braced and I was twisting around in the seat as Garlic's right arm, and hand full of .45 automatic, plunged forward followed by Garlic's surprised face.

I bounced my fist off his chin. His head snapped back and his gun fell to the seat beside me. I grabbed it, swung it up like a discus. It caught him squarely on the fore-

head as he slumped.

I hauled Garlic onto the lawn and dumped him — as light flashed from the front of the house. Men and women stepped outside and peered this way. That hellish crash had probably caused near apoplexy among some Cad and Jag owners, and if half a dozen guests came piling out here they'd soon learn I wasn't Pakua.

I hesitated as a couple middle-aged guys started toward me, then I swore, jumped to the Cad and backed it up. One of the guys yelled, "Yo! I say there." I slid the Cad around on gravel and took off, leaving much yelling — and Garlic — behind me.

3.

In the morning after coffee I called Homicide in L.A. and spent a few minutes talking to my friend, Captain Samson, about the Yates kill. He filled me in fast, saying a detective named Carlos Renata might give me more. "We got a big nothing," Sam growled, undoubtedly around a black cigar. "Shot once in the chest; thirty-thirty slug put a leak in his ticker about two A.M."

"Rifle, huh? What does that mean?"

"He wasn't shot with a revolver. We got the slug, a Silvertip, good enough to match the rifle. If we had the rifle."

Sam put Carlos on. He supplied

me with one interesting item. "Yates hung around the Afrodite, Afro-Cuban place on Sixth. Man, the music — gourds and things that go clank. And the babe! This gal's named Juanita, see? Sings a little and shakes the maracas. Wait'll you see them maracas."

"Carlos, I thought you were on a murder case."

"Hell, I was there on business — this Yates was there Saturday night, the night he got hit. Last place we've got him pinned down; next spot was the dirt road."

That was all of it. I was strapping on my gun harness when the phone rang. I grabbed it and said hello.

"Mr. Scott?"

"Yeah."

"This is Miss Redstone. I need some help, right away. Can you come to see me?"

"Well, hi. What's the trouble?"

"I'll have to explain when you get here. But somebody's tried twice to kill me. You are a detective, aren't you?"

"Yeah, but how did you know? And I thought you were mad —"

"I only have a minute. Do you know any calisthenics?"

"Any what? What are you talking about?"

"Calisthenics. Exercises, jump up and down. Mother said you were full of muscles, and that you were an ex-Marine. And I thought surely you'd know some exercises."

"Baby, I know lots of exercises. It depends —"

"I've got to run. Will you come?"

I was not nearly awake yet, and I said, "Uh . . ."

"I'm at Fairview. You know where that is, don't you?"

"Uh . . ."

"You go out Figueroa and swing off at Maple, then left on Traverse Road. There's a fence along the road and a wooden sign over the gate. Can you get here in half an hour?"

"What do you mean, somebody tried to kill you?"

"They tried to roll a rock on me, then tried to gas me. I'll have to explain when you get here. You will come, won't you?"

Something was buzzing around in my head, but I couldn't figure out what it was. Things buzz in my head lots of times. "I suppose so," I told her. "I don't get this calisthenics business, though. What's that got to do with helping you?"

"I'll have to introduce you as the Health Director. So nobody will suspect you're a detective. What's your first name? Shell?"

"Yeah. From Sheldon, if that —"

"Good. We'll call you Don. Don Scott. See you here, then. I've got to hurry."

"Yeah. Health Director, huh? Don Scott, huh? You know, you don't make a damn bit of sense . . ." She'd hung up.

And then I got what had been buzzing in my skull. She'd said to turn left off Maple at Traverse Road. Traverse Road was where detective Paul Yates had got it.

The intersection of Maple and Traverse Road was only about five miles from the Civic Center, but it could have been fifty. A slit-rail fence bordered the rutted dirt road, and beyond it grass sloped gently uphill to massed trees. It was green and cool, and there wasn't even any smog. I'd gone six-tenths of a mile beyond the intersection when I saw the sagging gate. A weathered sign arching over it said *Fairview*. I parked next to it and got out. I couldn't get rid of a sensation of tightness, a crawling of hairs on the back of my neck.

Beyond the gate a path was worn, faintly yellow in green grass, curving left to be hidden in thick shrubbery and trees. Nobody was in sight. I looked around for a doorbell — a real city boy, that's me. A tarnished cowbell hung from a frayed rope on the gate, so I grabbed it and gave it a couple yanks. Sound clanked over the hills. Nothing happened.

A minute passed — and then I heard a whisper of noise. Sounded like somebody running. The sound got louder. Somebody was coming this way, all right.

Then, with startling, almost overwhelming suddenness a naked tomato swished out from the trees and around that curve in the path and trotted toward me.

That's right, naked, stark staring nude.

Well, you should have heard me. I let out one hell of a noise.

She was a little dark-haired doll and nobody I knew, but you can bet it was somebody I wanted to know. She trotted up to the gate and stopped. At least she stopped trotting, but it was quite a spell before she stopped moving.

"Hi," she said.

"Hello there!"

She smiled. "You're Mr. Scott?"

"Yes. Sh — er, Don Scott. You call me Don."

"Fine. We were expecting you."

Wow, I thought. Maybe my reputation had preceded me. If this was what happened when I was expected, I was never going anyplace again without letting people know well in advance.

"Miss Redstone told me to meet you and let you inside." She unlocked the gate and swung it open. "Come on in."

I sprang inside like a gazelle. This gal was about five feet tall, in her early twenties, and would have looked delectable in BVD's. But in sunlight, she was sensational. Maybe she was small, but she had more curves than the Long Beach Fun Zone, and she looked like more fun, too.

She smiled at me again, looked me up and down and said impishly, "My, you're bigger than the last one. You'll do."

"Do?" I said hoarsely. "Do . . . what?"

"You're the new Health Director,

aren't you? The last one got hurt. He's in the hospital."

"What . . . how was he hurt? Where was he hurt?"

She blinked. "A rock fell on him. Didn't you know?"

I pulled myself together a little, remembering the recent phone conversation. "Oh, yes. That rock. Well . . ."

Man, I was really at a loss. The little gal said, "There isn't much time, Mr. Scott. Just follow the path, till you see the buildings. On the left, the long green room, is where you change. You can take off your clothes in there, then go to the main building."

"O.K., thanks. I don't think I caught your name."

She smiled again. She smiled a lot. But, then, I had been smiling quite a lot myself. "I'm Peggy."

"Swell. Hope I . . . see you again soon, Peggy."

"Of course. We'll get together later."

I let out another sound, much softer than the first one but of the same species, then whirled and started running up the path. She'd said to go to a green room up yonder and . . . *No!*

I spun around and raced back to the gate. "What do you *mean* by telling me to take off my clothes?"

She laughed. "You didn't expect to keep them on, did you?"

"Lady. Miss. Peggy. Are there people up there?"

"Certainly. About a hundred. All

the permanent members."

"Come on, tell me the truth. Don't they have clothes on?"

"Of course not. How silly."

Yeah, boy. Talk about silly. "Where am I?" I cried. "What is this place? What have I gotten into? Are you . . . nudists?"

She winced. "Nobody calls us nudists. We're Naturists. Health Culturists. Sunbathers. Stop pulling my leg —"

"Level with me now. You're *nudists*."

She shook her head, then laughed. "I suppose in a sense you could call us nudists, if you must have it that way."

I'll tell you, in all eighteen senses she was a nudist, and I didn't much care how I had it. I was beginning to believe maybe I didn't even want it. I said, "Well, I have to go. Really I do. It's been fun, but I really do —"

"Mr. Scott, are you serious? I thought you were joking."

I let go of the gate and said, "I'm not irreplaceable, you know. But neither am I expendable. So —"

She acted like a babe about to break into tears. "You *are* serious! Oh, how terrible. You know we can't get anybody else. The Convention's just day after tomorrow and everybody's worked so awfully hard. You've *got* to help out. Oh-h . . ." She glared at me. "You stand right there, Mr. Scott, while I go get Miss Redstone. She'll straighten you out."

She whirled and ran off up the path, arms flying, legs pumping. I tried to calm down and think logically, but it didn't work. Perhaps it was just as well. What happened next would have sent me straight back to wild and goofy. Peggy came flying into sight again and cried, "Oh, good, he's still there!" I could hear more feet pattering behind her. And then it happened.

Another naked woman happened.

But simply to say "another naked woman" is like saying Mount Everest is higher than some hills, that the sun is hotter than two ounces of lighter fluid. She was maybe five-six, with hair like copper and brass melted together by the sun, with eyes a bright, clear and vivid blue, long dark lashes sweeping up from smooth lids. She was brown, deeply bronzed by the sun, and from her tiny waist and flat stomach clean lines swept up to big firm breasts and curved down around sleek, generous hips.

Breathing easily, she stopped in front of me, then turned her head, the fine lustrous hair flashing in the sunlight, and said, "Go back, Peggy. We'll follow you."

Peggy nodded, trotted out of sight. The girl said, "You almost ruined everything, Mr. Scott. Peggy's all mixed up."

I found my voice. "She can't be as mixed up as I am. You're not Miss Redstone. I mean, Vera. When she — you phoned, I just assumed it

was Mrs. Poupelle. That was the only Miss Redstone I ever heard of. Boy, that makes a lot of sense."

"Vera's my sister. I'm Laurel Redstone."

"Then who the hell is Sydney?"

She laughed. "I'm Sydney Laurel Redstone. Ever since High School I've been called Laurel — except by mother."

Her laugh had been bubbling, merry, full-throated. And her voice was just right here in the trees and fresh air, soft and warm like a breath of fresh air itself. She was looking up at me, a half-smile still on her full red lips, and I could see now her resemblance to Mrs. Redstone. The strong, high cheekbones and big eyes, the eyes that same soft, but startling, liquid blue.

"Come on, Mr. Scott, the Council is expecting us."

"You may as well call me Shell," I said.

We walked into the coolness of the trees, branches arching overhead and filtering the bright sun. As we went up the path Laurel said soberly, "The important thing is that nobody is to know you're a detective. It must be somebody in camp who's trying to kill me, and if they were to know you're not really what you say, well . . . it could be awful."

"I — uh — haven't really said I'm anything yet."

"Just bluff it through when you meet the Council. I'm sure you can do it. If they pass you, then you'll

be accepted immediately and nobody will guess you're an investigator."

"What's this Council? What do you mean, if they *pass* me?"

She didn't answer, because at that moment we reached a large clearing containing three big frame buildings, a small swimming pool, a volleyball court. Trees ringed the clearing, but in the near distance I could see bodies. Cavorting bodies. The sight shook me. By God, I *was* in a nudist camp.

Laurel took my hand and pulled me after her to the long green building on our left. Inside, there was a small central room, doors opening into wings on either end. She pointed. "The men's section is there, Shell. Go in and change."

"Uh-huh. Change into what?"

She chuckled. "Oh, stop it. Go in and undress."

"I . . . can't."

"Now, hurry. You'll ruin everything."

"But, well, it's just that I'm not a nudist. Never have been. I don't mind nudity. Not in reasonable amounts. But this — why, this is preposterous!"

She pulled me to the door, pushed me through. "There's nothing to it," she said. "Anyway, it isn't for long. You'll get used to it." She slammed the door behind me.

I stood stock still for a minute, then said to myself, "Scott, you're being silly. Nothing to it. Everybody does it. Everybody should

spend at least one day in a nudist camp. Hell, you might *like* it." Besides, Laurel was Mrs. Redstone's daughter — one of two heirs to millions of bucks. Maybe what seemed to be happening here had some connection with the case I was already on. It was my duty to investigate.

In another minute I cracked the door and looked out at Laurel. She was sitting on a small couch, as lovely a sight as I ever did see. She glanced up as the door opened a bit.

"Yoo-hoo," I said. "Well, I did it."

"Fine. Come on out."

"Well, there's something I wanted to ask you. This is something of a strain for me. I'm a detective, you know. I . . . feel naked just without my gun. And this —"

"You can't go wandering around with nothing on but your gun."

"Can't I just wear my holster?"

"You can't wear *anything*. It's like going in to swim in cold water. Plunge right in and the shock is over in a second."

"O.K.," I said, and plunged right in. I swung the door wide and stepped into the room.

"Oh," Laurel said. "Oh. Come over here and sit down by me. We'll talk a little. I'll tell you about the Council."

I sat down beside her, and she started talking while I examined the woodwork for termites. Laurel said, "So it shouldn't take long. I hope you can convince them you're really

a physical instructor." She smirked. "You're certainly physical enough."

We got up and left the green building, walked to the biggest building and inside, down a hall and stopped before a plain wooden door.

"In we go," Laurel said.

"What's in there?"

"I just told you. Didn't you hear a thing I said?"

"Not much."

She sighed. "The Council is in there. They're waiting for us. I told you, they have to look you over, size you up."

"*They what?*"

"Quiet. They have to determine if you can handle the job, if you can conduct the calisthenics and games and so on."

I realized that the sight of Laurel Redstone back there at the gate had swept sanity away. And the sight of her again in the green room had kept sanity from returning. But I pushed the door open, trying to be casual about it all. I started to put my other hand into my pocket — and the horror of this hit me.

Laurel whispered suddenly, "Oh dear. I hope none of the Council members recognizes you."

I whispered back weakly, "Nobody could possibly recognize me. I'm disguised." Then, half fainting, I walked inside.

5.

Ten people were seated at a long table on our left. As Laurel and I

entered, all ten of those nudists sprang to their feet as if somebody had wired their chairs and just squirted them with juice. They were, I thought, carrying manners too far.

Laurel guided me to a chair at the near end of the table, introduced me as "Mr. Don Scott," then everybody sat down again. I sat down as fast as anybody. While Laurel went on talking, I looked over the gathering, and this was a gathering a man could really look over. Laurel and I sat at the narrow end of the long table, four men on our right, four women on our left, and at the far end were another man and woman, who were the oldest cats here. I don't know how old the woman was, but she had sure reached a *ripe* old age.

She alone was standing now, saying something to me, and she looked like one of Fairview's founding fathers. She was tall, lank, bony, even muscular, and straight up and down. Here at last was a tomato who looked like a banana. A peeled banana.

". . . and so," she was saying, "we welcome you to Fairview, Mr. Scott." There was a murmur of assent around the table.

"Thank you, thank you all," I said.

She sat down, then the old guy next to her, one Frank Blore, popped up, said, "With our Health Director in the hospital and the convention two days away, this is a

difficult situation," and concluded by saying other Council members would brief me.

Then he sat down—and up popped one of the gals on my left, a beautiful, brown-eyed cutey. She talked a minute, then a guy on my right sprang healthily to his feet and briefed me in a muscular voice. It was becoming evident that whenever these characters addressed the Council, they leaped to their feet and plopped down again when finished.

The Health Director was supposed to direct "health-building" activities in Fairview, morning calisthenics, games, contests. Their pressing need was for a man to take over all the functions of the ex-Director, primarily his supervision of day-after-tomorrow's convention. The talk ricocheted around the table, then the banana—Mrs. Blore—popped to her feet and said, "What have you to say, Mr. Scott?" and popped down into her chair again.

Everybody looked at me. Eleven pairs of eyes focused on me. Then twelve pairs: I was looking at me, too.

"Nothin'," I said.

The silence grew uncomfortable. As Mrs. Blore got to her feet, more slowly this time, Laurel turned her head slightly toward me, put one hand over her mouth and whispered, "Please . . ."

Mrs. Blore was saying, "It's too late for us to find another person

who could help us. We'll give you every . . ." She sat down. I looked around the table. At eleven very long faces, sober faces. Laurel's face looked a little pale under her deep tan.

I didn't get up, but I said, "Well, ah, I assumed that you'd all been informed of my background in . . . this work. I don't see any great difficulties. None that we can't work out." It was amazing the way expressions brightened all around the table. Laurel's face went back to its normal bronzed beauty.

Mr. Blore said, "We've really only the sketchiest information about you, Mr. Scott. If you'd be so good as to tell us more . . ."

"Of course. I spent several years with the Marine Corps. I've a rather extensive background in unarmed defense, judo, some of the oriental arts of body building. Oh, yes, everything from yoga to yogurt." I beamed at them.

Mrs. Blore's face was radiant. "Judo!" she cried. "That would be perfect for us!"

A gal on my left said, "How divine."

I'd gone too far. "Well," I said, "ah . . ."

Laurel leaned toward me. "I'd forgotten this talent of yours, Mr. Scott. This *would* do it."

And how it would do it, I thought. But I knew she meant that a little exhibition would put me in solid. I didn't exactly want in solid, but Laurel went on, "Can't we have a

demonstration?”

I forgot myself for a moment and said, “Not with you, Babe.” Next to her the brown-eyed beauty leaned forward too close and said, “Oh, show me, show me.”

I began to get panicky — and then inspiration blossomed. I turned to look across the length of the table squarely at the banana. “Why certainly,” I said. “Mrs. Blore, would you —”

She didn’t even let me finish. “I will. Yes, I will.”

She sprang up and away from the table like a starving ballet dancer. “What do I do?” she cooed.

I fixed my gaze on Mrs. Blore’s chops, took a deep breath and got up, walked over next to her. “I’ll just run through a few of the elementary items quickly here. First, a couple come-alongs. Holds. To keep your assailant, I mean attacker, I mean the other party helpless while you walk him out of the room or something.” I paused. “Should have a pile of blankets — or, you know, something soft to fall on. That is to say . . .”

Laurel got up, saying she’d go get some bedding. I demonstrated a simple two-finger come-along, and Mrs. Blore went “eek” softly and up on her toes as Laurel returned. I let go of Mrs. Blore’s hand and she shook it a while, but looked pleased. I demonstrated a couple of the sensitive points on the body, on the upper body, then said, “Just one more and we’ll be through. I’ll show

you how to throw people across the room.” She got a pained look but I added, “I’ll do it gently.”

“Can . . . can you throw me across the room gently?”

“Oh, I won’t throw you far. I’ll just throw you down on the blankets.” I had to chuckle at the sheer insanity of my throwing *her* down on any blankets. Mrs. Blore would actually have been to throw up. But I was in a veritable frenzy of exhibitionism now, and I said, “Just relax. Here we go.”

I gripped her upper arm in my left hand and stepped closer, pivoting so that my back was to her, wrapping my other arm around hers and pulling as I bent forward, rolling her over my back onto the blankets, graceful as a swan. As she went kerplow I held on in the hope of letting her down easy, but it must have jarred her nonetheless. She waggled her head about a bit, stuck out her tongue and said, “Gah,” then she tottered to her feet.

By George, though, she was a game old nag. “Show me again,” she said. This time she got her feet partly under her and cushioned the impact. There was very little except feet with which to cushion the impact. Then she sprang up and said to me, “You do that so easily. Could a woman do it?”

“Of course. Naturally. It’s not so much strength as balance, timing. You use the other person’s strength.”

“Well, you’re so strong I should be able to do it easily.”

One of us was dizzy. But she persisted, so I showed her just where and how and we made a couple playful passes at it, then she said, "I'll try it now." She sounded sort of grim.

I said, "Fine. Ah, easy, remember."

She went into action like a tiger, spun about, slapped her hips into place, and bent forward tearing at my arm. Just to please her, I gave a little kick with my feet — and off into space I went. Well, I should never have given that little kick with my feet; Mrs. Blore let out a great grunt, but it was nothing to what I let out, since if I'd given a big kick with my feet I'd have gone clear through the window.

As it was I spun around in the air like a windmill, making sounds similar to those Mrs. Blore had made, and when I landed it was not on those blankets. I landed on a hard floor and I could hear everything rattling around inside me, and my head rolled back and went kerplunk. I just lay there, and I must have been quite a sight, but I soon clambered to my feet and said:

"That was a *dandy* one, Mrs. Blore!"

She clapped her hands and noise bubbled around the table. However, she had clapped her hands from a spot far to the left of me and I realized I was staring at a lamp. My eyes focused and I wheeled around. Everybody was beaming happily — except Laurel, who was damn near hysterical.

I went back and sat down. "Yeah, funny," I hissed at her. Finally Mr. Blore said, "Would you wait in the hall, Mr. Scott?"

I gave Laurel a hard look, got up and strode out, trying not to limp. I leaned against the wall for about a minute. Four women strolled by, then two couples, then six or seven more women. I didn't count them, but never in my life had I seen so many naked women all at once. I didn't mind, though; I'm broad-minded. Slowly the suspicion was growing: There was a new day dawning in this here nudist camp.

6.

The door behind me opened and Laurel came out. She said in that soft, warm voice, bright blue eyes on mine, "Mr. Scott, you are officially the new Health Director of Fairview."

"I am appalled."

Laurel took me to what she called the "pool." We walked into the trees, followed a worn path for a couple hundred yards, then came out into a clearing. A trickle of water ran down toward us from a narrow cleft between two steeply sloping hills. We walked between the hills and a hundred feet into a blind canyon. Then Laurel pointed. "There's the pool. Nice, isn't it?"

It was. Fifty yards ahead was the steep face of a cliff, the waters of a small lake forming an oval pool at its base. Two big white boulders rested

on deep green grass. A knoll of grass-covered earth near the pool rose a few feet above the surrounding ground and Laurel sprawled at its top.

"Sit down, Shell," she said. "We can drop the 'Don' here."

She was leaning back on her elbows, the leg nearest me drawn up with her foot almost buried in the grass, and I thought about walking past her and down into the water. But I sat near her.

Laurel told me she'd been in Fairview off and on as the saying goes, for a year, and almost steadily for three months. Yesterday afternoon she'd been with the old Health Director, Mr. Elder, when he'd shouted at Laurel, then jumped and pushed her out of the way of a huge boulder plunging down at her from the hillside above. He'd been clobbered by the thing himself. Last night she'd gone to bed in one of the small cabins everybody used here, been awakened by a noise, got up and found the gas jet wide open on the small heater and both windows closed.

I said, "I'm going to be plenty busy outside of Fairview, Laurel. I can prowl around here a little, but that's all. Incidentally, do you know anything about a guy named Paul Yates?"

"Never heard the name."

"You've surely heard of Andon Poupelle."

"Of course. He's my sister's husband. I met him at mother's about

two months ago. He made a big play for me, but I couldn't stand the man. Right after that he turned his charms on Vera. He's from back east, New York I think. Quite a gambler, I've heard."

By this time I was sitting up, sort of sprawling all over my knees, and Laurel was still leaning back on her elbows. I looked out between the V in the hills on either side of us. Something flashed, glinted down near trees a couple hundred yards away. I looked back at Laurel. "Just what comes off at this convention?" I grinned. "I mean —"

She laughed. "There'll be about four hundred Sunbathers from all over the United States here. There'll be games, contests, and of course the beauty contest to choose this year's queen."

"Beauty contest? That sounds jolly. Queen of Fairview?"

"Queen of all the United States' Sunbathers. You're supposed to be one of the judges, of course."

"Of course. You win."

She smiled. "I can't compete. I'm last year's queen. Wait until you see the others."

"I don't need to wait. I have seen . . . enough." If the truth be told, I had seen far too much. Laurel had leaned back flat on the grass, fingers laced behind her neck. "Laurel," I said, "don't you think . . . what I mean is . . ."

She turned toward me, lips parted. I scooted closer and said, "Maybe we should go back . . . it's late."

Softly she said, "It isn't late."
"It is later than you think."

The parted lips curved into a soft smile. I leaned toward those ripe red lips — and something whipped past my head. It snapped by viciously, but I kept on leaning. I almost made it, and Laurel didn't move, didn't look away, then I heard the *crack* of sound from far behind me. It was unmistakably a gunshot.

I jerked my head up as clots of dirt fell from a spot high on the cliff, splashed into the water, then I grabbed Laurel and rolled. She let out a yelp, but I half dragged her toward one of the big boulders.

We made it and Laurel said breathlessly, "What happened?"

"Somebody took a shot at us, that's what happened."

7.

Fifteen minutes later I'd made it to the trees from which the shot had come, without getting plugged, and looked around carefully. But there was no sign that anybody had been down here. I could see uphill into the V, see the raised spot where Laurel and I had been sitting, the boulder she was behind. I trotted back toward the little lake.

Laurel got up from behind the boulder and walked toward me as I got close. Her face was drawn, sober. "Did you see anyone?"

"No."

She bit deeply into her lower lip. "Whoever it was just tried to kill

me again. You've *got* to help me, Shell."

I started wondering a little about Laurel Redstone. And everything that had happened from last night until now took on a different complexion. That slug had been meant for me. And if I hadn't leaned toward Laurel just before the shot was fired, it would sure as hell have killed me.

"What are you looking at?" Laurel asked me.

I'd been peering up the cliff's side. "I'd like to get my hands on that slug," I said. "I saw where it hit. The problem is how to get up to it." There wasn't any place to put a ladder, and even a rope let down from the cliff's top, a hundred feet or more higher, wouldn't have worked because the top jutted out so much farther than the place where the bullet had dug in.

I said, "The only way I could get there would be to float up. How come you chose that knoll for our conversation?"

She looked puzzled. "It's pretty, and we'd know there wasn't anybody listening . . . why do you ask?"

I dropped it. "We'd better get back to camp. I've got to get out of here, anyway."

"You mean you're leaving? After this?"

"That's right." We started walking.

When I finished dressing Laurel gave me a key to the front gate —

"In case you come back," she said somewhat coolly — and pointed out her cabin and one beyond it which I could use. At the gate, after a few seconds of silence, she said, "'Bye, Shell."

"So long, Laurel."

She turned and walked up the path, disappeared among the trees. I watched her go. There wasn't really reason to doubt anything Laurel had told me, I supposed. She'd sounded sincere and honest, had even seemed hurt at a couple of my remarks. One thing was certain: I sure as hell wanted to believe her.

8.

I checked with Mrs. Redstone and made sure that her Sydney and the lovely Laurel were the same girl. She also gave me the Poupelles' address, but they weren't in. At my office in downtown L.A. I made a dozen phone calls to informants, bootblacks, hoodlums, bartenders, went over Yates' report on Poupelle, phoned Western Union and sent a couple telegrams. Then I left the office and started walking, heading for the back rooms, the smelly bars, the dumps and dives.

The word was spreading over the L.A.'s underworld wireless that Shell Scott was paying for info about Yates, Andon Poupelle, people named Redstone. But it was four-thirty before I got a lead. Word reached me that a man named Three Eyes, a middle-aged character

with one good eye and one artificial one, might have something for me. I phoned him, then headed for his room in the Manor Hotel.

I knocked gently at the door of room 27 and the door cracked. Three Eyes looked out at me, his face thin and bloodless. His good eye stared at my face, but the other one looked at the middle of my chest. He let me in, quickly shut the door and locked it.

"You got the money?"

"Yeah." On the phone he'd told me his info would cost a hundred bucks, and I had almost dropped the phone. "But I don't know if what you've got is worth a C."

"Me either. I got to have it — I want to blow town."

"Spill the story."

He licked his lips and looked at me. The glass eye didn't move along with the other one, kept staring at my chest. He said, "I'm down on my luck now, but a month or so back I had a roll. I went out to Castle Norman, and rolled a few. I seen this Poupelle there, and he was sweating, losing plenty."

The place he referred to was a night club fixed up to look like a castle. I hadn't seen it, but I'd heard of the "delightfully unique" new club, and of gambling in the place. It was owned by somebody named Ed Norman, hence the name Castle Norman.

He went on, "Well, Poupelle dropped a pile. I'm cashing in and I hear him chinning with the boss

man, couldn't cover with cash. He writes out a check." Three Eyes had been screwing up his face, twitching the skin around the glass eye, and he turned and went to a washbasin. His back was to me, but I saw him dig at the eye, then hold something under the water while he kept talking.

"A week or two ago I hear a rumble, that Poupelle passed a check for maybe fifty G's, and he's got nickels. It bounced, but he's still living, so he must have covered it somehow."

I said slowly, "He's got lots of nickels now, Three Eyes."

"Well, I go out to the Castle a couple times since. He's there. He loses mostly, but he plays all the time. That's about all. Any good?" He poked at his eye again.

"Not good enough." I knew he had more, and he'd spill it — unless he thought he could get the hundred cheap.

"You know a local con-guy named Brad Bender?"

"No. What's a confidence man got to do with this?"

"Understand, Scott, this is all air. Nobody's pinned it down. But the word is, Poupelle pushed this Bender."

"Poupelle? He killed the guy?"

"That's the word. It's just air, remember. Supposed to have happened at that Castle." He still wasn't looking at me.

"O.K. It's worth twenty bucks. What else you got?"

"Funny thing. You're the second guy asked me about Poupelle. I give him the same tale — about the check, I mean."

"When was this, Three Eyes?"

"Last month. Say a couple weeks after I was at the Castle."

"I think I know what you're getting at. Spit it out."

He turned around, a trickle of water running down his cheek like a tear. "You guessed it," he said. "It was Yates."

9.

It was almost eight P.M. when I went over a small hill on Forrest Street, and caught sight of Castle Norman. Lights illumined it and a big parking lot on its right.

The castle was remarkably realistic, square and solid, complete with towers, crenellated battlements, everything except people jousting. A stone wall surrounded the castle, and at the wall's base was a ten-foot-wide ditch filled with muddy water. A moat. There was what seemed to be a drawbridge lowered over the ditch, though whether it worked or not was a question. The truly medieval touch was a character wearing armor and seated astride a white horse under an arched stone entrance at the drawbridge's rear. A final anachronism was the neon sign under the stone arch: "Be Medieval In The Modern Manner."

I parked in the lot, walked over the drawbridge and past the knight,

As I approached a pair of big wooden doors, another armored knight, this one without a horse, opened them and I went inside. Sound washed around me as I went into a big room where about thirty people were eating and drinking. I saw several silver ice buckets keeping bottles of champagne cold. There weren't any dice tables or roulette wheels in sight, however.

A husky guy in a tuxedo stood before a set of red draperies at the rear of the room, arms folded over his chest. I knew him, not socially, but by sight and record. He was Chinese, a young guy but completely bald, taller and heavier than I. He'd been a star center in college and once, carrying a big rally sign that said "Football," the sign had torn and he'd run around carrying the part that said "Foo." He'd carried that name into his post-college and extra-legal activities, and because he was a youthful Chinese egg and bald, and hoods being hoods, his monicker had become, almost inevitably, Young Egg Foo.

I told him I wanted to see the boss. He chewed on his lip, then said, "Come on," and turned around. A door inside the drapes was painted to look like wood, but when he knocked it sounded like metal. The door opened and we walked through. There was noise here, too, but more subdued, more hushed, mixed with the unmistakable whir of that little ivory ball in its slot on the wheel, the clank of one-armed bandits.

Following Foo past one of the dice tables, I saw a blonde head that looked familiar. The nice slim body was in an orange-jersey gown this time, but even from the rear it was Vera Poupelle. At the opposite side of the table was Andon.

My guide kept trudging ahead as I went past Vera and around the table to stop by Poupelle. He hadn't noticed me, intent on the game. Stacks of blue and red chips were in front of him.

"Hi," I said. He turned toward me, preoccupied with the play, and I didn't give him a chance to get set. "What ever happened to Brad Bender, Poupelle?"

He gasped and his face drained of color. His hand flapped on the green felt's surface like a sick bird, toppling the red and blue chips from their neat stacks. He himself was a sick bird. I thought he was going to faint, but he clicked his teeth together and turned quickly away from me. His hands fumbled with the chips in front of him, trying to stack them, but Poupelle was throwing chips all over the "Don't pass" line.

Foo came up alongside me again. "You want to see Norman, or don't you, Scott?" I went with him to the rear of the room and a door which he kicked. It opened and another large ape-like stranger looked out at us, mouth ajar. He carefully studied my face, shook his head. Then he looked at Foo — and finally recognition grew in his eyes. "Yeah,"

he said, "Foo."

"Jesus, let us in," Foo said.

The mental giant walked with us to another closed door, opened it, let us through, then pulled the door shut behind us, remaining outside. This would be Ed Norman's office, and the big heavy-faced guy behind the desk would be Ed Norman. His coat was still too tight; he was still stolid and unsmiling. I'd seen him before — last night, in fact, at Mrs. Redstone's dinner party. The tall, broad character who'd been with Garlic, and briefly with Poupelle.

I said, "So you're Ed Norman."

"That's right, Scott."

The muscles at the side of Norman's thick jaw bulged. "Beat it, Foo." My guide went out. Norman pointed to a chair and I sat in it. His phone rang. He picked it up, grunted and listened, keeping his gaze on me. Then he hung up and sat quietly, staring at me, a big silent hunk of cold-rolled steel bars and springs, with eyes like those of a dead fish. He blinked suddenly, put on a big smile. "Well, Scott. What was it you wanted to see me about?"

Norman was being charming, mine host, but that smile had all the warmth and friendliness of Nome, Alaska. He looked like a man biting a rattlesnake's head off. I smiled back and said, "I didn't realize you were the guy I saw at Mrs. Redstone's last night. With Andon Poupelle and Garlic, I mean."

He frowned slightly, but kept

that skull-grin on. "Yeah, I saw you, but I wasn't with Andon or — what was that other name?"

"Garlic."

"Said hello to Andon, but I was with some other people. Friends of mine. You working, Scott?"

"Uh-huh. You never heard of Garlic, I take it."

"Nope. Who you working for?"

"Client. Odd you never heard of Garlic. He was going to bash my head in, or maybe shoot me last night. I thought maybe you'd sent him at me. Didn't know you were Ed Norman last night."

He chuckled through clenched teeth, a soft dry sound as if that rattlesnake were still alive and flipping about.

"Speaking of Poupelle," I asked, "didn't he slip you a stiff a while back? For fifty G's or so?"

"Where'd you hear about that, Scott?"

"Got it off the wire somewhere. It's the McCoy, huh?"

"It's all settled."

I grinned. "That figures. I see Poupelle's still playing the games. Must mean he paid up, right?"

"Scott," Norman said, unsmiling. "You didn't come here just to ask me about Poupelle, did you?"

I had to tell him something fast so I said, "No, I've been trying to run down this Garlic creep. He had at me with a forty-five canister, besides which he exhaled at me."

"I told you I never heard of the man. So I guess we've got no more

to talk about.”

“Right.” I stood up.

Norman said, “Don’t come out to the Castle any more, Scott. I’ll have to insist.” He went on, but I wasn’t paying attention. The office floor was covered by a beige carpet, and under a chair in the corner, not quite hidden, was a darker spot. If somebody were to be shot, I thought — somebody like me, say — and he bled freely, and the blood were then mopped up, the stain would look very much like that darker brown spot.

I said, “Nice place you’ve got, Norman. See you.”

At the first steel door the large man stood, still wearing an expression that indicated great perplexity. He looked at me for what seemed a long, long time, and I could imagine him thinking, “Now, where’d I see him before?” Finally he grunted, turned and slid back a bolt, opened the door and let me pass.

Poupelle and Vera were no longer in the game room. I asked the dealer at the dice table, “What happened to Poupelle? The guy that was shooting craps here.”

“Mr. Poupelle left about five minutes ago, sir.”

“Did he maybe make a phone call first?”

“Why yes, he did make a call, sir.” He pointed across the room at a small table. “I noticed because he seemed ill.”

“Probably phoning a doctor. Thanks.”

Good old Doctor Norman. He fixes things. I walked to my convertible, and drove slowly out of the parking lot, but once out of sight of the Castle, I tramped on the accelerator hard for a mile, swung right on a side road and doused the lights. In half a minute a sleek black car ripped past like a rocket. I smoked a cigarette, wondering, then headed for Fairview.

Laurel wasn’t in her cabin. The bed was mussed, but empty. I had a couple bad minutes until I saw a light in the cabin she’d indicated this afternoon as mine, ran to it and found her in the bedroom. She was on the bed.

Light filtering in from the front room of the two-room cabin was barely bright enough so that I could see it was Laurel. I stood over her letting my breathing become normal, oddly surprised to find that my muscles had been tense, nerves tight. In the soft light, her features relaxed in sleep, she looked even lovelier than she had in daylight, and younger, more defenseless.

Right then, looking at her, I realized that I was getting emotionally involved with this lovely. This last minute or two had been bad ones; it had frightened me to find her cabin empty, and then seeing her had been a relief that was almost a shock. I stared down at her, feeling the tension and tightness drain from me. Then her breathing stopped. I saw her move slightly, her eyes open wide. Suddenly she gasped

and scrambled off the foot of the bed, jumped toward the door.

"Laurell!" I yelled.

She stopped, one hand against the doorframe. "Shell?"

"Yeah, honey. What's the matter?"

"I didn't know it was you. I thought . . . I was asleep."

She had turned to face me, and the light from behind her outlined the shadowy darkness of her body in silhouette, a line of brightness tracing her arms and sides, the tiny waist and flaring hips, the long shapely legs. She laughed softly, nervously. "You startled me, Shell. Let me get hold of myself."

"You'd better go wrap yourself in the bedspread again, or both of us will get hold of yourself. Or ourselves. I mean, I have just come from the outside world, where everybody —"

She laughed, climbed onto the bed again. "Sit down, Shell," she said. "I'm all right now." I looked for a chair. No chair. "Sit on the bed," she said.

I sat down. "Well," I went on, "I guess I'd better get back to my place. Ha, ha — *this* is my place, isn't it? Nice having *you* in my place."

"I'm sorry I acted like such a fool. What startled me so was that you had your clothes on."

"It was? Well, that's, uh —" I cleared my throat — "we can fix that, all right."

"The last thing you expect to see here in Fairview is a man standing over your bed in a sports outfit."

"Yeah, it is pretty sporty, isn't it? Guess I should have turned the lights on, what? Still can, you know." Words just spilled out of me. "Shall we get a little light on? This chatting away in blackness is for the birds." My voice sounded like an old man's, but I didn't feel old, I felt full of youth, full of beans, full of wild, red-hot corpuscles that were scorching my brain and everything. "Laurel," I said in a cracked old voice, "Laurel, do you remember when we met? I mean, how I explained that I'm all full of beans — ah, that I am not used to —"

She pressed two soft fingers against my lips. "Shell, I came here because I was frightened. There alone in my cabin, and not knowing when you'd come back. Or even if you would. I feel better now, but I'm still afraid . . . to be alone."

She had raised up on one elbow to press her fingers against my mouth, and she still held herself partly off the bed, light from the front room, seeming brighter now, casting a silvery mistiness over her bare shoulders and proud breasts. She was looking at my face, long-lashed eyes almost closed, lips parted.

I leaned closer to her and she tilted her head slightly, the tip of her tongue flicked against her lips. "You won't be alone," I said. Her lips parted even more, then they were against my mouth, softer than the whispering wind outside. Softer at first, then they writhed and curled as my arms went around her,

and she pressed her lovely soft body deliberately against mine.

10.

I woke up suddenly in the morning. Laurel was wallowing all over me, shaking my head and saying, "It's time to get up!"

"Yeah, sure," I said sleepily. "Call me in a couple hours."

Here is this beautiful naked babe wallowing about and I tell her to call me in a couple hours. I'm not myself in the morning. Laurel said, "You've got to get up. You have to lead the membership in calisthenics."

It hit me all of a sudden. I sprang clear into the middle of the room. "What!" I shouted.

There was a flurry of bedclothes and Laurel's tousled hair and beautiful face emerged from them. She was smiling. "Calisthenics," she said, "you remember." Then she stifled a delicate yawn and stretched, arching her back, thrusting with tightly closed fists at the ceiling. The covers slid down, down.

I sprang back on the bed. "Ah, yes! I remember! Calisthenics!"

She wiggled briefly, laughing, then squirted out of my clutches. "You got away," I said dismally.

"Oh, you crazy — not those calisthenics. There are a hundred people you've got to lead in calisthenics."

"Say that again. I never heard of such a — a *hundred*? Hellfire, woman, how am I —"

"Shell. Listen carefully. Every

morning the Health Director leads all members of Fairview in calisthenics. It gets the blood circulating, stimulates you, wakes you up, gives you an appetite."

"Not me it doesn't."

"It's for health. Tones the body and blood, gets oxygen into the lungs. And you're Health Director. Pretty soon the bell will ring — there it goes." There it went. It sounded like somebody beating on a metal triangle with a sledgehammer, and a horrible sound it was. "Come on," she cried and spun around.

"Wait! Where you going?"

"To the front of the Council building. You're supposed to be there already. At the bell, everybody runs out there and lines up. Then you face them and tell them what to do."

"I'll tell them what to do, all right," I grumbled. "But as for facing a hundred crazy —"

"Come on!" she cried, then sped out the front door.

I ran out after her, but at that point I didn't really intend to lead those nudists in calisthenics, I was just running after Laurel, grinning. I honestly didn't know quite where I was yet, and Laurel looked like a rambling aphrodisiac which was rambling away from me. I could see her fairly well, flying ahead there, since the sun was just coming up, casting a cold light over everything. Cold. It was pretty cold. All over me it was cold.

I stopped. "Wait!" I shouted. "I forgot my pants!"

She spun around and ran back to me, grabbed my hand. "I'll not stand for any more of this nonsense. You —"

"Nonsense, fooney, I'm serious, I forgot my —"

"— come along with me."

I went along, and then she let go of my hand and rambled ahead. I will never know quite how it happened. I merely know that I was intent on Laurel, who was about a yard ahead of me, and then suddenly she was gone. In her place was something I shall not even tell you about, much less describe.

I realized that Laurel had tricked me. She had lured me out here onto an open plain in front of a hundred naked people. They all looked at me. I looked at them. This seemed to go on forever.

I could see Laurel to my right, in the center of a row of people, several other rows lined up behind that front row. I backed away from them as the sun seemed to spring up over the horizon, but finally I overcame the impulse to wheel about and run into the woods. I was stuck with this. No question about it, I had to lead these characters in calisthenics; I was the Health Director, even though there had probably never been a Health Director who felt more nauseated than I did, and by God I would show them a thing or two. *Ha, ha*, I thought sadly, *as if I haven't*.

I plunged into it. "Here we go," I shouted. "Fall out."

Nobody moved. But then I noticed a strange thing. All hundred or so of them were standing scrunched over in a peculiar position, with one leg lifted, bent at the knee, and held before them in a protectively coy gesture. I thought they had all gone nuts but then I understood. I let out a hollow laugh and straightened up. They straightened up.

"All right, men," I shouted. "And . . . women. Here we go." I sprang into the air clapping my hands, and I never felt sillier in my life. But talk about silly — you should have seen those nudists. They went up into the air like small fizzled rockets, and came down bouncing and popped into the air again. I was springing up and down like a 205-pound Nijinsky, and they were trying to keep up with me but not succeeding. I tried to think of something else to do, some other damn calisthenic, but it's pretty hard to think of anything sensible when you're leaping about clapping your hands, so I just kept on until I started getting pooped. So I stopped. Everybody stopped.

Everything after that happened in a kind of daze. I ran in one spot, then I spun about, then I did numerous other things, and finally some deep knee bends with my hands on my hips, all of which those people did, and it was that last one that finished me.

"That's it," I said. "You're dis-

missed. *Go away!*"

People tottered off in all directions; others sank to the ground. Tired, huh? I'd sure fixed them. Healthy, bah, some healthy bunch . . . I began to feel faint.

Man, I was exhausted! I sat down on the grass, the landscape reeling. Somebody reeled toward me, then plopped at my feet. It was Laurel. She glared stonily at me. Finally she gasped, "You trying kill everybody? Woo. You must have pranced around for an hour. Woo. I think everybody's going back to bed. Woo."

"Woo, that's a fine idea. Woo."

"Oh, shut up." Laurel was all out of sorts. Probably everybody was all out of sorts. And there were plenty of sorts to be out of here in this joint. Laurel said, "I hope you're satisfied. But I'm proud of everybody at Fairview. Nobody quit. Nobody fell out. Nobody had a stroke."

Unbelievable as it was to what was left of me, there was already a game of volleyball in progress. Half a dozen people were splashing in the pool. And I lay here quaking in every limb. Even Laurel's breathing was almost back to normal, and I was snorting like a male ape downwind from Tarzan and Jane. "Hey," I said, "maybe there's something to this health kick after all."

"Of course there is," she said.

"I could sure use a smoke," I said, feeling for one. Naturally I had no damn smokes. "Guess I better not smoke at that," I said. "Wind's

bad enough as it is."

Of all those people who had been sprawled on the grass, only two besides Laurel and me were left. A man and a woman. Memory came slowly back to me. During a particularly strenuous conniption I had seen one of them reel, stagger about, and then fall like a stone. The other had done an almost identical maneuver shortly afterward. At the time it had seemed natural enough, but now that the frenzy had passed I began to worry about them.

I got up, walked over to them. They lay as if dead. I poked the man with my toe and his eyes opened. "You sonofa —"

"Hold it, my friend. A lady is present."

"Fran? Where's —" then he got his head craned around and lamped her. "You've killed her!" he shouted. "You've killed Fran!"

But then the babe let out a long moan. He patted her face, grinned up at me, a slim-faced guy with brown hair and lots of teeth showing. "Sorry." He was either grinning or snarling.

The gal let out another moan and sat up, wobbled her head. She had long black hair and deep, dark, unfocused eyes.

Laurel came up alongside me then and after a few more words the two revived characters got up and walked away. "No casualties after all," I said to Laurel. "They must be new here. Like me."

"Not quite. That's Mr. and Mrs.

Brown. They've only been here a few weeks. I think it was mean of you —"

"Brown, huh? Everybody's Brown here."

"There're only four sets, and I don't like your insinuation. Bob and Mary are wonderful people. So are all the rest. It's a healthful way of living here, healthful physically and —"

"Whoa, sweetheart. I believe you. Incidentally, who are Bob and Mary?" I suppose I should have tumbled, but Laurel was saying, "You're impossible, Shell. Let's go get breakfast."

"No, thanks. I never feel like breakfast till lunch."

"You'd better eat. You might have a big day ahead of you."

"I've got a big day behind me. Anyway, I want to make a phone call." Laurel gave me a resigned look, walked away. I found a phone in the Council Room, dialed Mrs. Redstone's number. Nobody answered. I checked the number, dialed again, but there was still no answer. I headed for my cabin, thinking there was probably no reason to hurry. But I ran anyway.

When I arrived at the Redstone house, the front door was open. I found her in a bedroom, wearing a quilted robe and seated in an overstuffed chair.

The vibrant, healthy, even lovely, Mrs. Redstone was dead, mottled brain pushing from the side of her shattered skull.

I went to her finally, touched her skin, looked at her eyes. She'd been dead for hours. At her feet was a .32 Smith and Wesson revolver. On a table to her left was a newspaper spattered with brown stains, the headlines proclaiming: "Society Beauty Discovered In Nudist Camp." In smaller type above a story covering the right-hand columns was: "Daughter Of Mrs. Ellen Redstone, Society Leader, Queen Of Sunbathing Group." I called Homicide.

When Lieutenant Hansen came out from the Wilshire Division, I told him I thought Mrs. Redstone had been murdered, though the props had been arranged to make it look like suicide. Hansen wouldn't buy that, but said they'd check all the angles. He let me phone Laurel and she dressed, met us at the Fairview gate. She wouldn't believe it until we took her to the Viewing Room in the Hall of Justice and she'd looked at her mother's body. Then she believed it. I drove her back to Fairview, then headed for City Hall and Homicide.

Captain Samson growled around his cigar, "Some dope on Poupelle just came in from Washington — he he was mixed up in a badger game in Cincinnati, also Philadelphia, only instead of a shapely babe and furious husband, Poupelle played the babe's part and arranged for a

house dick to catch him with the gals. The women paid off the detective, who split with Poupelle. Charges brought once in Cincy, once in Philly — and both times the complaining witnesses blew cold.”

“You talk to him yet?”

He nodded. “Yeah, we brought in him and the wife, Vera. They’ve got air-tight alibis. They were with this Ed Norman and half a dozen other people last night. Out at that Castle. Until a couple hours after the place closed.”

I’d stopped by my apartment, changed clothes and got the report Paul Yates had given Mrs. Redstone. A couple telegrams had also arrived for me. I gave Sam the typed report and the two wires. “The Kellogg agency in New York is doing some checking for me, got a line on the Cincinnati episode of Poupelle’s. So you and I both got a little on Poupelle in no time; but not Yates. Not a word in his report about Andon’s being a lover-boy. It smells worse than your cigars.”

“These are good cigars. The stuff we got just came in, so we weren’t able to ask Poupelle about all this. We will.”

“How about Bender? The con-boy Three Eyes mentioned?”

“Cackle-bladder expert, worked the wire mostly, got a record over half the country. He’s part of the bunch that hangs out at the Afrodite. But the last time we’ve placed him there was on June first. Then he disappeared. No connection with

Poupelle.”

That was about all Sam could tell me, and I took off.

I’d had an idea about that bullet at Fairview, so I phoned Jay Carter, a dealer in government surplus, told what I wanted. He said he could have the stuff ready for me in about eight hours. Then I started on the same route I’d gone over yesterday, the bars and back rooms. I talked to an usher in the Follies Theater, and wasted a whole minute admiring the life-size photos of Merry Cherry Blaine, the Mad Woman of Burlesque. I talked to a couple barbers, some winos, several hoodlums, a bookie. I got nothing but sore feet and a curiosity about Merry Cherry Blaine.

I did pick up word in a couple places that Three Eyes had been around the bars last night spending that C note I’d given him. He’d been sounding off about where he’d got the dough. I headed for the Manor Hotel, walked up the rickety wooden stairs, wondering if Three Eyes had left town yet. He shacked halfway down a dark, gloomy hall that smelled of mildew and worse. I knocked a couple times but there wasn’t any answer. After the sound of my knuckles on the wooden door, the silence seemed to increase. The entire hotel was quiet, only noise from the streets outside filtering in here.

I tried the doorknob, and it turned. When I started to push the door open, it hit something with a

light click. After that click there was another odd sound I couldn't place at first. It was something rolling, like a marble rolling over the uncarpeted floor. Then the hair moved on the back of my neck. The thing inside hit something, a table or chair leg, or the wall, then rolled a little farther and stopped. Even before I went inside I knew what it was.

It was an eye.

12.

I swung the door open and stepped inside. The glass eye was small and across the room from me, but its whiteness stood out even in the gloom, the artificial iris nearly hidden against the floor.

Three Eyes was crumpled against the left wall, twisted, his face battered and that one empty socket staring like the hole in a skull. His lips were puffed and split, his face bloody — and cold. A chair and table were overturned, his clothing was torn. The fingertips of his left hand were stained with somebody's blood. I turned away from him. There are few things uglier than the face of a man who has been choked to death.

Using the phone at the desk downstairs I put in a call to Homicide and Samson, gave him the picture. Twenty minutes later I went up to the fourth floor of the Parker Building, found the frosted-glass window lettered "Yates De-

TECTIVE AGENCY." Sergeant Billings was inside, seated in a swivel chair with his feet on the desk. He was a husky, good-looking young bachelor with six years in the department. He got up and stretched as I walked in.

"Hi, Shell. The Captain just gave me a call, said you'd be in." He pointed to a gray filing cabinet against the wall. "That's all the paper." He yawned. "You gonna be here long?"

"Half-hour anyway. Maybe more. Depends."

"I'll grab a fast hamburger."

He stretched again, then went out. I glanced around the small office. One of the windows was open and I looked out it, down at Eighth Street and little figures moving four stories below, then went to the single filing cabinet. All four of the drawers were nearly full, index tabs separating groups of paper-filled manila folders. I grabbed one at random to compare the style of the report with the one Yates had given Mrs. Redstone. It was dated '54, but the form was the same.

Under "R" I found a folder labeled "Redstone," pulled it out. There were only the same three sheets I'd already seen, carbons of the report to Mrs. Redstone. I looked for the names Poupelle and Norman, but there wasn't anything like them in the file. And then I saw a funny one.

I was squatted on my heels before the filing cabinet, flipping through the folders, just glancing at them,

when a name caught my eye. At the same time I heard footsteps outside in the hall, but figured it must be Billings coming back with his hamburger and kept fumbling through the papers to find that name again.

The footsteps came up to the door and I heard the knob turn. Then I had the paper in my hands. It was actually a sheaf of papers, two or three pages held together with a clip — and there was no name of the client at its top. Just “Client.”

The door opened and somebody came inside. I said, “You’ll get indigestion,” looking for that name again. I found it — the name was Fairview. Then I realized Billings hadn’t said anything in reply. The footsteps were coming toward me fast when I straightened, started up and tried to turn at the same time — but I didn’t make it.

I got my head turned far enough so I saw the guy, just a blur of movement with one arm swinging fast toward my face. I tried to jerk my head away, but something crashed hard against my skull. My knees suddenly wouldn’t hold me up; roaring pain ricocheted inside my head. I felt myself falling, grabbed at the legs before me, wrapped my fingers in cloth and tried to pull. My head exploded into blackness.

13.

Everything was moving. I couldn’t see, but there was movement, I

could feel pressure underneath my armpits. Everything was swimming, mixed up, but vaguely I remembered what had happened. Thoughts moved thickly in my brain, sluggishly. My eyelids seemed stuck together. Paralyzing pain throbbed inside my head. There was that sickening swirl of movement again, and something hard pressed against my arm, then against my chest. The redness behind my eyelids grew brighter, whiter. Cooler air brushed over my face and, dimly, I heard the sound of traffic below.

My mind cleared a little — and those movements and sounds, the light and cooler air on my face, told me what was happening. Yates’ office was on the fourth floor of this building; whoever had slugged me had hauled my body across the room to the open window I’d looked through earlier. And that shocked me into the first movement.

It was a small movement, not enough. I got one arm pressed against the wall beneath the window, forced my eyes partly open — and I was looking down. Looking down the sheer side of a building that was like a cliff, down four stories to the street below. Looking down a dizzy, frightening distance at blurred movement and color that spun and swirled in front of my eyes. I felt hands on my ankles. He lifted, pulled my feet off the floor.

I heard him grunting and tried to yell but couldn’t. All my muscles felt weak, felt like jelly, but I

strained my right arm against the wall, tried to kick with my heels. I heard him swear filthily, surprise in his voice, then I was trying to turn, reaching back for the walls at either side of the window, kicking with my feet.

There was sound at the other side of the room, a voice cried out. The man holding me jerked his head around. One of his hands left my legs, slapped his chest and moved outward again. I jerked my leg as a gun roared, but I was looking at his face. With that blast from a gun the whole side of his face seemed to leap away from his skull. His head snapped around as the gun boomed again and I felt the impact myself, shivering through his body, jarring my flesh where he touched me.

Blood splashed against one of my hands, blood and something wet and more solid. Then hands pulled at me, jerked me back inside the room. Sergeant Billings squatted in front of me, still hanging onto my coat.

For a while I just sat and chattered at him, then I slid away from the window, managed to get to my feet and spotted the guy on the floor. "You know who he was, Bill?"

"Punk named Kid. Young hoodlum, part of the crowd that works for Norman. Hope I didn't shoot anybody I shouldn't have."

"Anybody who's pushing me out a window is a guy you should shoot. I wonder what — did you say Norman? Ed Norman?"

"Yeah. Guy that owns that Castle.

Kid must not have expected anybody else to come in. And he'd probably have been alone in here if he hadn't stopped to burn something before taking care of you." He pointed to some black ashes on the floor in the center of the room.

The worn carpet still smoldered and now I noticed the smell. Before the Kid had come in, I'd just finished looking unsuccessfully for any report about Ed Norman in the file drawer. And the papers I'd found had been filed under "N." That report was what Kid had burned.

While Billings put in a call to headquarters, I took a good look at Kid's body. What was left of his face had a couple deep scratches along the cheek. The knuckles of his right hand were skinned. I said, "Bill, who you got on the phone?"

"Captain."

"Tell Sam this might be the guy who pushed Three Eyes; the coroner's scraped skin from under his nails by now." I pointed at Kid's cheek. "I've a hunch it came from there."

While Billings talked to Samsón I was doing a lot of thinking, and when he hung up an idea slapped my brain almost as hard as Kid had. I jumped to the desk, dialed Fairview's number asked for Laurel. In a minute she said hello.

I let out a sigh of relief. "Shell, honey. You O.K.?"

"I'm all right, Shell. Now that I believe it."

She was talking about her mother's death, but that wasn't why I'd

called. I'd thought she might be dead herself by now. I interrupted her. "This morning we talked about a Bob Brown and his wife. Tell me all you can about those two."

"Bob and Mary? Why, they left this morning. Packed up and checked out early, Mrs. Blore told me. It was the oddest —"

I was swearing. "That settles it. Their names aren't Bob and Mary Brown. Your Bob Brown is the guy who took that shot at me yesterday. And tried to kill you earlier."

She gasped. "You can't think . . ."

"I do, and one reason is that you characters at Fairview are so disgustingly healthy. There were only three people really beat after my calisthenics this morning: the Health Director, me, plus Bob and Mary Brown. We were the only people who couldn't take it. Another thing. The first thing the guy called that babe this early A.M., was Fran. That's probably her real name but I was so unraveled I didn't notice."

Laurel checked the Fairview records and found that the Browns had entered Fairview on June 15 — the same date on which detective Paul Yates had made his phoney report to Mrs. Redstone. It was also just one day before Andon Poupelle and Vera had been married.

Laurel said, "Shell, are you coming back to camp?"

"Yeah, later tonight. And I'm going to need your help. I'm going to get that bullet."

"Bullet? The one in the cliff?" I told her that was the one and she said, "How in the world are you going to get up there?"

"I told you yesterday, sweetheart. I'm going to float up." She babbled something crazy and I hung up.

It was after nine P.M. when I reached the Afrodite. A five-piece combo at the rear of the small dance floor was playing the wildest, thumpiest, hottest Afro-Cuban music that had ever banged my eardrums inward. I liked it, but I liked even more the tall gal standing before a mike in the dance floor's center and singing. She was active all right, with a couple maracas in her hands, and shaking everything like molasses in a Mixmaster. This, from Carlos' description, would be Juanita.

I walked closer to the dance floor, thinking this should be an enjoyable trip. Then I reconsidered. At the opposite side of the floor was a shapely gal I recognized, an ex-queen of the burlesque circuit. Years ago I'd seen her at the New Follies wearing a G-string that only went up to A, plus flashing rings on all her fingers, slithering about the stage while the pit band played a hot, rasping, gut-tickling *St. Louis Blues*.

That had always been her big number, the climax of her act five years ago when she'd been in the big time. Then she'd been known as *Bebe Le Doux* — a name it was said she'd made up herself because it had class, which is evidence of how

brainy a gal she was. But now she was known among the racket boys she ran with as Babe Le Toot. She was with a couple of those boys tonight: A hood named Garlic, and a hood named Young Egg Foo.

Maybe, I thought dismally, this trip isn't even necessary.

14.

They spotted me at almost the same moment.

Foo leaned over the table and said something to Garlic, then they both leaned back and watched the show. Or pretended to. Well, I meant to stay here until I had a chat with Juanita. And maybe with Foo and Garlic. I leaned against the bar.

This Juanita was a cyclone with long black hair flying every which way, and a dark, full-lipped, sensual face, her lips writhing as she moaned words in some foreign language. The way she sang, could have moaned in English and it would have sounded like a foreign language.

The rest of her looked as if five feet, ten inches of well-stacked woman had been mashed down into five-feet, seven inches, the excess bulging out and overflowing in enjoyable places. It was overflowing even more because of her frantic gyrations. She was almost reluctantly wearing a net brassiere, plus a G-string that looked as if it were made from the smoke of one cigarette.

Then there was a wail from the band and the music stopped. Juanita stopped. Guys stamped their feet and whistled. I glanced across the room to see what my friends were doing.

They weren't doing anything. They weren't there.

At least the two guys weren't. Babe sat alone at the table.

Involuntarily I ducked, thinking they would be behind me swinging saps, brass knuckles, tables, anything at my fat head. But nothing happened. I was disgruntled. But I'd never seen Juanita before. And a guy's got to have one or two little vices.

A peculiar scene occurred then. As Juanita walked off stage toward an open door in the far wall, I noticed the band members nudging each other and yakking back and forth. A couple of them looked at Babe Le Toot, who was drooping a bit. Then the band members stepped apart, and started to play again. And they didn't sneak into it, they hit it with even more lung power than they'd displayed before. It was a loud, wild, gutbucket *St. Louis Blues* — and Babe's head snapped up as though somebody had yanked on her hair. A big, happy, all-gone smile spread over her chops and she leaped to her feet.

While a trumpet went *waah-waah* she ankle-d out to the middle of the floor — and she seemed to have lost none of her technique. She looked good, graceful, and was beaming on

everybody. She had her blouse half off when the band stopped suddenly.

Babe seemed to come out of a trance, looked around dazedly. Then she swung toward the band and laughed, ran to the men and threw her arms around a couple of them. They laughed it up and I said to the bartender, "What was that?"

"They pull that every other night or so when Babe's here. She gets a couple, and seems like the hooch plus *St. Louis* makes her want to dance. Like she can't help it. They never let her go all the way, and she gets a boot out of it."

I walked to the doorway Juanita had gone through and into a hall. Light streamed from a room on my left. Inside, Juanita was sitting in a chair before a dressing table, putting on some lipstick. She should have put on more than lipstick. I said hello, showed her the photostat of my license, and she asked me to sit down.

"Really enjoyed your act, Juanita," I said. "First time I've caught it — not the last, though. You've a beautiful voice, you know." She beamed. She must have heard about that body of hers a thousand times, but this was music to her ears. But I had to get on her good side somehow. Not that she had a bad side.

"You're a pleasant liar," she laughed. "I can't sing for sour apples, and I know it. But it sure sounded nice."

"You should worry. Kirsten Flag-

stad doesn't dance so good."

We yakked like that, real stupid, for a couple minutes, and got along famously. There wasn't anything I hadn't learned from Carlos or Sam: Yates had been here Saturday night, the night he'd been killed. In the club had been Babe Le Toot, Foo, Garlic, and a guy she called Sardine Lambert. Sardine, she explained, was the armored knight who sat on the horse in front of Castle Norman. The police had talked to her about Andon; he'd been in the club several times, but not lately, and not on Saturday. Finally I asked Juanita if she knew anything about Brad Bender.

"I know him. Why? I . . . go out with him quite a bit."

"When was the last time?"

"Over a month ago. What about him?"

"The word is, maybe he got hurt. Maybe fatally."

Her lips parted. "Oh, no . . . he said he'd see me again in a month or so. He phoned me from Vegas and said —"

"From where? Las Vegas, Nevada?" She nodded and I said, "Baby, when was that call? It's important."

"June tenth," she said. "It was exactly a month after I started working here. I hadn't seen him for over a week then." She paused. "It was sort of funny. He just said he had to stay out of town for a while. I wasn't supposed to mention it to anybody. But if he's hurt . . ."

I got up. "Don't worry too much about Bender, Juanita. I think maybe your boy-friend's all right."

She gave me a big smile as I left.

I headed for Castle Norman. Getting into the place would be the easy part, even though it seemed likely that Ed Norman would shoot me on sight; but getting out through those steel doors and muscle men struck me as impossible.

There was, however, one way I might get in, do what I wanted to do, and get out alive. But it would take some doing, and I'd need some help. I would need some help from Sardine Lambert.

15.

Sardine never knew what hit him. There'd been nobody in sight when I walked over the drawbridge, pulled him off his horse and onto his head. Now he lay behind a big bush on the lawn fronting Castle Norman, bound and gagged, and hunks of metal were laid out before me like pieces of a 3-D jigsaw puzzle.

Finally I had on a helmet, a gorget, and gauntlets over my hands, plus other stuff I had probably never heard of. The part over my chest and back was in one solid piece that I'd had to wiggle into like a stiff girdle. The helmet's visor moved up and down, and when it was down I couldn't see too well, looking out through vertical slits, but nobody could look in at me, either. I started creaking toward the Castle.

The armored knight on duty at the entrance opened the door and said something, but I ignored him. A few guests looked at me, but knights in armor were old hat to them. A husky guy stood beside the red-draped entrance to the game room, but I kept walking straight at it, as though there wasn't the slightest possibility that he wouldn't open the door. He opened it, and I clumped by him into the game room. Then I saw Ed Norman talking to Garlic and Foo, his back to me. My stride faltered for a moment, but I kept going across the room to the metal door, kicked it gently with my foot.

I glanced around with a creaking sound. Norman and his boys still hadn't noticed me. When I turned back to the door it was half open, and before me stood the Mental Monster, the Brain. We stared at each other: Mental Monster Meets Metal Monster.

"Haw?" he said.

"Yuh." I said.

"Sardine?"

"Yuh."

I walked at him like a tank and he stepped aside. With my voice twisted, I said, "Boss sent me for something," and clumped into Norman's office, shut the door and sprang into action. Yeah, I could just about spring an inch off the floor in this outfit. But I made it to Norman's desk, took off my gauntlets, and started tugging at drawers. Only the middle desk drawer, was locked

and it seemed likely that it was the one I wanted, if any of them was.

The drawer was of wood, so I just kicked its bottom out, then pawed through the papers that fell to the floor. I found one thing I wanted: three sheets of typed paper, the original of Yates' report to "Client." Clipped to them were six photos, unmistakably of Laurel, and apparently of her in Fairview. I managed to stuff the whole batch under my metal breastplate. None of the other papers were of interest to me, though I leafed through them and then stood up.

My stomach muscles were starting to knot with tension; I could feel tightness at the base of my skull and in my neck. But I went to that chair I'd noticed last night, kneeled down, pulled at the stained carpet with my fingernails and got a little pile of nap. There wasn't any way to get it into my pocket, so I stuffed it down inside one of my stockings.

I was kneeling on the floor, just pulling my gauntlets back on my hands, when the door behind me opened. Somebody said, "What in Christ's name are you doing?" It was Norman.

16.

My back was to the door, but I recognized Norman's voice. The hell of it was, there were a couple other voices. But apparently Norman didn't yet know I wasn't Sardine. So as I turned to face the doorway

I took a step toward it.

Norman stood just inside the room, staring at me, his thick, scarred face frowning. On his right was Garlic, and beyond them in the hallway, peering past them, was The Brain. I took another step forward and said, "Somebody busted in. Lookit the desk."

Norman kept looking at me, his frown deepening. Suddenly his right hand slapped his hip, came up with a snub-nosed gun. But by that time I was swinging my fist, plus a couple pounds of metal, at him.

Garlic yelled and started toward me as my fist landed with a horrible crack on Norman's chin. His head snapped back and he spun sideways, fell souldlessly to the carpet. I went down with him as far as Garlic's middle, then pivoted toward Garlic and my left fist sank in, and in, and in. He made a great whistling sound, bent over with his arms sticking out ahead of him. He fell, not clear out, but disabled, and as I straightened up, The Brain was jumping toward me.

I raised both gauntleted hands and he stopped, actually backed up, his face captured by that perplexed expression I had noted upon it before. Brainy drew back a great big right fist, his face a montage of flickering emotions, of delicate — for him — reflections of what must have been passing through his mind. His mouth dropped open, way open, and he just stood there, gawping at my gleaming armor. All that took

only a second or two, and just as he said "What the —" I raised one metal-covered fist up into the air over his head like a hammer.

He actually lifted his eyes to it, sheer hopelessness in his expression. And then, *splat*, I hammered him good. His face got a peaceful look and his eyes partly closed, glazed and appeared to look at each other. I had finally seen one individual looking eye-to-eye.

I jumped over him. That is, I meant to jump over him, but went about a foot and landed on him. Then I clumped to the door and through it into the game room. Foo wasn't in sight. I clumped through the game room, out its now unguarded door, and headed for the exit. It began to feel as if I were carrying a mountain on my back.

I almost made it. When I'd got past the people in the room and was near the front door and the armored knight before it, there was a hoarse, weak shout from behind me. "Stop him! It ain't Sardine!"

I glanced around to see Garlic, bent over with his hands pressed to his stomach. Then he fell — and when I turned my head back the knight was coming toward me. This was different from the last brawl; we were starting out on even terms. But I guess I was so accustomed to slugging guys and having them go all loose, I thought the same thing would happen this time. Sometimes a confident air isn't enough.

I hauled off and slammed a hard

right to his chin and crossed with a chopping left to the bread basket: *Clang-clang!* He didn't go loose, but my knuckles felt like they'd spread about eight feet. The guy staggered, then swung back gamely and slugged me a couple times. He had no more sense than I did.

There was one hell of a lot of noise, guys yelling and women screaming, but ringing loud and clear over everything else was the clamor of battle. All we needed was a band playing the Anvil Chorus. *Clang . . . clang . . . clang-clang . . . clang-clang.* We sounded like two streetcars at the same crossing. But I finally realized that nobody was winning this struggle.

The guy had his right fist drawn back and when he launched it I jerked my head aside. As it whistled by I pushed up his visor, and hauled my right fist around in an arc that ended on his chops. Teeth went every which way and the only clang this time was when he landed flat on the floor.

Boy, *everybody* was screaming. I glanced over my shoulder as I went at a staggering trot into the courtyard. People were spinning around, and I guess it was all the confusion that gave me time to get to my convertible. I slammed the Cad into gear and took off as some gay partygoers arrived. They stared at me.

In half an hour I was at Jay's surplus yard, "Anything For A Price." Jay had the stuff I'd ordered

by phone ready for me. I saw it right away. Couldn't miss it, for that matter. Three heavy ropes loose into the air like a triple Indian rope trick, lower ends anchored by big hunks of lead, top ends held up by a number of large gas-inflated balloons. All I had to do was lift the hundred-pound lead chunks and carry them to the convertible, then drop them behind the seat. The hundred pounds of lead, with the balloons tugging upward at them, seemed to weigh only about twenty pounds apiece.

Jay put the battery-powered light, shovel, rope ladder, coil of piano wire and a hunting knife into the car seat and I wrote out a check for him. He pursed his lips and looked sorrowfully at me. "Them balloons is filled with natural gas, so don't light no cigarettes around them. Blow yourself up maybe. What you gonna do with all this junk?"

"I am," I said, "going to hang a ladder in the sky. And I'm going to climb up the ladder and dig a bullet out of a cliff." He was still laughing, sort of wildly, when I drove off.

Laurel was in my cabin again. After a touching scene of reunion she drew back from me. "Honey," I said, "want to help me in a little operation I've got planned?"

She smiled wickedly. "Uh-huh."

"I refer to the operation I mentioned this afternoon. Getting that bullet."

Laurel said, "All right. What do

you want me to do?"

I told her. She told me I was mad. I told her I wasn't. After a bit of that she said, "Can you really do it?"

"Of course. I've got it all figured out. Cost me a fortune, but now that it's ready it will be simple. If I don't fall and break my neck. But nothing can happen to me tonight. This is my charmed night. This night is magic."

Laurel looked at me in the light from the lamp, then up to where the balloons were, invisible in the blackness above us. Using piano wire and rope I'd tied all three bunches of balloons together so that their combined lifting power was two hundred and forty or fifty pounds, more than enough, with the lead weights now removed, to support me and several extra pounds. The ropes holding them were fastened to a long curved bar like an overgrown staple which I'd driven into the ground; tied to the thick lines and hanging down to the ground was the rope ladder. Now I could climb into the sky.

I went up the ladder, carrying the lamp and shovel, tied the small line to the big ones, gave Laurel the end of the small line. She walked to the opposite side of the pool. Soon, with her pulling gently on the small line, I was exactly where I wanted to be. I wired the lamp to the rope ladder

over my head, then started scraping at the side of the cliff with my shovel.

Getting the slug itself was nothing after all the preparation. I could see the day-old bullet hole in the cliff, and it was just a matter of scraping at it till I got in deep enough. In a few minutes I had the slug in my hand. The point had expanded and folded back on the jacket like a beat-up metal mushroom, but the ballistics boys downtown wouldn't have any trouble identifying it and comparing the marks on its barrel with another bullet. And I had little doubt that they'd identify this one, too, as a Silvertip .30-.30. I climbed down to earth again.

Laurel trotted around the pool, her body a pale glow in the darkness, getting more substantial — and prettier — as she got closer. She stopped before me, smiling. Then she sobered and, in mock surprise, said, "Where in the world did you come from?"

"From there," I said solemnly, pointing up.

"My God!"

"Not at all. I am Eekle from there." I pointed up. "I claim this joint in the name of Arcturus. I have traveled many light years. I have very light vehicle. I claim *you* in the name of Eekle. Argle zoop slangslop."

"What's this argle something?"

"Language Arcturus. My language. I bright as hell, speak all kinds."

She was laughing and said, "Oh, argle yourself. Let's go back to the cabin."

"I've got to get this slug downtown." I grinned. "But after that I'll be back, and I mean to framblot you."

"What's that?"

"Old Arcturian custom. Come on, let's go."

I just left the stuff there, balloons and all. Tomorrow the nudists were going to be surprised when they saw it. At least that was my thought then. If I had known the truth, I'd have slashed my wrists. Everybody was going to be surprised.

18.

Morning found me in Fairview, a small-capital shell of Shell Scott. What with everything — I had got very little sleep. Last night I'd given the bullet and bits of Norman's carpet to the boys in Scientific Investigations. Samson had told me a paraffin test made on Mrs. Redstone hand showed that she'd fired a gun. Skin and blood from Three Eyes' face had been found under the Kid's fingernails. The police hadn't been able to locate Poupelle or Vera, and it looked as if they'd skipped.

I'd given Sam the report I'd filched from Norman's office. It proved that Yates had discovered Laurel's presence in Fairview; he'd put a tap on Mrs. Redstone's phone and heard a conversation between her and "Sydney," at Fairview,

whereupon he'd gone near there and snapped his pix with a telephoto lens on his camera.

It was also interesting that the report to "Client" was dated June 14, one day before Yates' report to Mrs. Redstone. And just before I'd left City Hall Sam's phone had rung and the report came in on that slug I'd dug from the cliff. It was identical with the bullet that had killed Paul Yates.

Right now detectives all over Nevada were looking for Brad Bender. Or his body. More were hunting for the so-called Bob Brown. Sam had made it clear to me last night that I was to do nothing more until I heard from him. Or Nevada.

Well, I got through the calisthenics this morning without much trouble. I had about two hundred in the class, since a number of conventioners had arrived last night. And I didn't mind so much this time, either. I was turning into a real dyed-out-of-the-wool nudist.

By nine A.M. the sun was warm and it had turned into a beautiful balmy day, with a startlingly blue sky tufted with puffy white clouds. Between three and four hundred Sunbathers from all over the U. S. were expected, and by nine almost everybody scheduled to arrive had put in an appearance. Laurel and I were at the center of the clearing in the middle of much jovial conversation and loud hellos as old friends or acquaintances slapped each other on the back. High on the back.

We stood near a long table groaning under the weight of fresh fruits and vegetables, cold meats and nuts. In its center was an enormous punch bowl of freshly squeezed fruit juices. And all around us were naked people. The overall quality wasn't as high as I'd become accustomed to, but at least there was no deception. This was one place where you couldn't take it with you unless you had it to begin with.

I took Laurel by her soft brown arm and pulled her to the big punch bowl, scooped out two cups of the reddish fluid.

Laurel sipped at her drink and said, "Good turnout, isn't it?"

"Dandy. More arriving all the time." I swallowed at my punch and frowned. "What's in this?" I said. "I thought I tasted something stronger than beet juice. About a hundred proof."

"You mean whiskey?" Her brows pulled way down over the bright blue eyes.

"Something like that. Hard to tell in all this muck."

"Oh, Shell. Nobody'd spike the punch. Not here."

I guessed she was right. Hell, nobody would spike the punch. Not in a nudist camp. Whiskey isn't even allowed. So I tossed my juices off, then Laurel and I both had another cup and wandered around looking at the scenery. I thought I heard something.

"What's that?" I said. "Was that something tootling?"

"You mean the music? The Sacramento group's band must have started playing. Hard to hear in all this conversation."

I listened closely and said, "There was another tootle."

"I heard it. Good, the band's going to start."

My eyes snapped open wide. "Band? Music? You mean dancing!"

"No, silly. There isn't going to be any dancing. It's a band, not an orchestra. You know, tuba, piccolo, bass drum and so on. It's for the community sing later, and just for fun. Besides, in all this noise there has to be something loud to signal the start of each event. They're certainly loud enough."

I had to admit that the *oompah-oompah*, plus other noises all mixed together, did add a bit to the general hilarity. For the merest fraction of a second everything went out of focus.

I shook my head. "This fruit juice has fermented."

She gave me an odd look and we walked back to the punch bowl. The fermented taste seemed quite discernible now. I finished swallowing and grinned widely at Laurel, "What do you know? Some fiend spiked the punch."

There was a great blast from the band.

Laurel said, "There it is. Hurry. You've got to be there."

"Where, where?"

"There. The race."

She trotted away from me, weav-

ing through the crowd. "What race?" I yelled, and started weaving after her. I really was weaving. Then I remembered. She'd told me there'd be a foot race to choose Miss Speedy of the Fairview Convention.

We burst out from the edge of the crowd and I noticed a great mass of women gathering in a straight line about fifty yards to my left. More women were running toward them, getting into position. Laurel ran to the right.

I caught up with her when she stopped, and she said, "This is the finish line. You stand right here. I'll be there—" she pointed—"and Mr. Blore, the third judge, will be there—" she pointed in the opposite direction. You'll be in the middle."

"I'll . . . be in the middle?"

I looked back toward what was now a seething mass of women. There were at least fifty of them. I could hear them squealing and shouting even though they were all of a hundred yards away. On our left the non-participants were forming a separate mass to watch.

There was another blast of sound from the band. It terrified me. I gasped. "You mean I'll be in the middle—and *they're* going to run at me? What if they run me down?"

"They won't." She blinked. "I feel woozy."

"They might run me down and trample on me! I can think of bet-

ter ways to get massacred by a bunch —”

A bugle blew, cracking on the high note.

Laurel said, “That’s the warning.” She ran away.

A bugle sounded again, loud and clear.

There was a monstrous, blood-chilling squeal from my left and I snapped my head around. And stared. A mountain of flesh was in motion, coming at me. At first it was a pink landslide, a volcanic lava-flow of flesh rolling this way to inundate me, but then I began to pick out individual segments of the mass: women. Women, all running as if each absolutely had to win, arms flying, legs pumping, everything doing something.

As they got closer, all of them looking as if they were going to fly apart, it became actually appalling. Never in my wildest moments, and there have been some pretty wild ones, had I even dreamed of seeing anything remotely like this. There was a drumming sound like buffalo stampeding; a whinnying, ululating shriek as of elephants stuck in swamps.

Suddenly the race was over. I didn’t have any idea who had won. All I knew was that three figures had streaked past me — and then I had been inundated. I was drowning in naked babes. Bedlam and Babel were here. *Swish* and a form flew past; *whoosh*, and another body veered around me. Squeals and more

squeals and laughter billowed in the air.

I just lay there, my mouth hanging open like a trap door, while with something approaching horror I thought: *I am losing my interest in women!*

Suddenly three girls were near me. They were all arguing pleasantly, and all three of them looked down at me — yeah, down; I was flat on my back staring at dust in the sky — and all three said in unison, “I won, didn’t I? Didn’t I?”

I got to my feet and looked down at them for a change.

I made a snap decision. “You won,” I said, pointing to the girl in the middle. “You won by a nose.”

She clapped her hands. The prize was a pair of silver wings for her feet, but she should have been awarded a platinum brassiere. She had practically no nose at all.

They left, the losers taking my decision in good grace. And there was Laurel beside me. She said, “Well, that was fun.”

I laughed hollowly. All my life I had thought that something like this would be the ultimate, the crest, the absolute unsurpassable peek. Now it had happened — and it had been horrible. I realized that Laurel was looking at me strangely. No wonder, I was still laughing hollowly.

She said, “I’m glad you spotted the winner. Neither Mr. Blore nor I could see into the middle.”

"Baby." My voice was thin. "After the first wave everything went blank. I was knocked down and trampled on. They streamed by forever. You have no idea . . . Oh-h." I stopped.

I was scraping a cup in the bottom of the punch bowl when Laurel caught up with me. "Gone!" I cried. "All gone!"

Ah, but I'd had two more cups. "Laurel," I said, "I resign. I'm done. I'm a shambles. This is the —"

A crash of sound came from the band.

"No!" I shouted. "I won't."

"Shell!" Laurel said sharply. She took me by the hand and started pulling me after her. "This is the beauty contest. It's really the most important contest of the whole day."

"Beauty contest. Huh. You know, I was looking forward to it once. But the joy has gone out of —"

"Hurry," she said. In moments we were at a raised wooden platform with steps at each end. Laurel said, "I'd better explain the procedure."

"Just so they don't get up there and jump off at me."

"There are twenty-two girls, one from each camp represented here. One at a time they'll walk up the steps onto the platform, then they come across."

"They come across up there on the platform?" I was silent for a moment, "Maybe I'll judge this affair after all."

Laurel said, "They slowly come across to here —" she pointed to our left — "and then down the steps. We three — you, Mr. Blore, and I as last year's queen — judge them, compare our ratings, and you announce the winner."

"I never heard of anything so complicated. I suppose I can judge it all right, but how in hell are they going to *do it*?"

"It's really very simple. Oh, here they come."

A few minutes later Mr. Blore, Laurel, and I, sat in wooden chairs before the stand. The twenty-two girls were lined up, one behind behind the other, before the right-hand steps. The conventioners were scattered in back of us on the grass. The band was on the far side of the stand, playing. After much concentration I recognized the number as *Stardust*.

Nice. Gave everything a touch of real class. The band stopped, a bugle sounded, then the band reverted to *Stardust* again. I had calmed down by now, but everything was woozy. Oh, I could see well enough. As a matter of fact, I had already picked out a little red-head who looked like a winner.

A man — an old, old man — was waiting by the phone in the event that a call came for me. But none had. So, as the first girl walked up the steps and started mincing slowly across the raised platform, I settled back to judge a real, down-to-earth, honest-to-goodness beauty contest.

Nobody was going to tap-dance in this one. The first gal wasn't bad; she paused in the middle of the platform and turned slowly around, then went on down the steps on our left. The second girl started up. The band finished *Stardust* and swung into its opening bars again. I had a hunch I was going to get tired of *Stardust*.

I glanced at the band and noticed a guy standing near the musicians with his back to me. There was something vaguely familiar about him, but I happened to look to my right then and saw a man and woman standing apart from the others, both carrying small leather bags like briefcases. As I watched, they both reached into the cases and each pulled out a piece of brown cloth. I thought: What the hell? And then I really saw something funny.

They slipped the cloths over their heads and I saw that the cloths were brown hoods with eyeholes they could look through. I was full of fruit juice, of course, and maybe that's what made me think I saw the gun. The man dropped his briefcase and something tumbled out of it, which he quickly grabbed and shoved back into the case. That gave me a chuckle. Suppose a criminal nudist, one among four or five hundred nudists, put a hood over his face and shot somebody. Off with the hood's hood, he leaves — and he's safe. Who could identify him? How?

Almost laughing, I looked back at my redhead — and then came the first cracked note, the first inkling of real screaming pandemonium. *Stardust* had ended. The band was playing something new for a change. And over there near the line of girls I saw a female face that jarred me, though at first I didn't know why. There was something vaguely familiar about it, too, and also about that number the band was playing.

Among the oompahs and all the rest it took me a few seconds to figure out what the melody was. And by that time it was too late to stop it, to stop anything. I suddenly recognized that slow, draggy "Oompah, poo-pah-pah" and sprang to my feet. Now I knew who that big guy at the band had been. I'd seen sunlight glinting off his completely bald head. The bald head of Young Egg Foo.

And the band was playing *St. Louis Blues*.

A series of shocks swept over me one after the other and I yelled: "No! Stop the music!"

But I was too late. The band kept playing. And there, suddenly, was — Babe Le Toot.

19.

For a little while after that I just stood there, paralyzed, staring at Babe up there on the platform in place of my redhead.

I knew, all at once, what Foo had been doing near the band, what

those brown hoods were for, maybe even what had happened to some of that punch, and if not it, some other fermentation, because Babe was so drunk she thought the platform was U-shaped.

She was weaving around now, grinning and winking, snorting and chuckling. Babe was in her element at last; and it was a heating element. She started doing some little ones, gently, as if she were merely waving at the audience, but then she went back to the rear of the platform, raised one hand over her head, and drew back her entire midsection.

It was one of those moments.

I couldn't have yanked my eyes away for anything. One of the greatest bumps ever seen was about to be bumped. I knew, I just knew, that this was going to be an epic bump, one to cherish in memory. She was wound up to put her all into this one, all her training and practice, and *St. Louis Blues* conditioning.

But Babe was out of practice. The weight hanging in back there overbalanced her and she slowly, in position but not quite ready, toppled backwards. That, incidentally, was also quite a sight to see. She lit on her head and just lay there.

That broke the spell. I had to let the crowd know that a bunch of hoods — with guns — were here. I sprang to the platform, but staggered woozily, and that fool band began playing *Stardust*. I swung around yelling for silence, and the

band stopped. It was suddenly quiet.

"It's Foo!" I shouted. "And Babe Le Toot, too!"

The echo of my voice came back from the hills like the whistle of a faraway locomotive. People ogled me, but didn't move. The fools didn't believe me. I shouted, "It is, too, Foo. And Toot. Ah, the hell with it. They're criminals!"

Several people drew back from the front of the platform, then a shot rang out and everybody drew back in some direction, me included, because the slug whistled past my ear and suddenly I was six feet off the ground clutching handfuls of air.

I started to run toward my cabin, where my clothes and gun were, but spotted a couple more hooded characters. I spun around and saw a big guy loping toward me, a gun in his hand. He, too, now had a brown cloth over his head, but it was big Foo. Near him the scene was indescribable, people running left and right and around in circles, shrieking and falling down. Foo aimed his gun at me. And then he fired it at me.

I spun around and took off, banging into male and female screaming people. I had been dizzy to begin with, but I had spun around so much I was extremely dizzy, and I didn't know in what direction I was going, but I knew I was *running*.

Trees loomed ahead. I glanced over my shoulder to see three guys racing after me, guns glinting in

their hands. In the trees I kept going fast enough, but my lungs felt like used gum and my head throbbled. A gunshot cracked, and bark flew from a tree on my right. I saw water ahead. The pool. I had run into the damned blind canyon. And I sure as hell couldn't go up that cliff; I couldn't get back out of here now, either. When I turned I saw a man coming through the narrow passageway, another guy right behind him.

I was trapped.

But then I saw my ladder in the sky. No, I wasn't trapped. Not me. Not old Eekle from Arcturus.

Everything in those next few seconds was blurred, but I remember running toward the rope which anchored those balloons, spotting the hunting knife I'd left on the ground last night, grabbing it and looping one leg over a rung of the rope ladder. There was a shot and the slug pinked my arm at almost the same instant when I slashed at the rope holding down the balloons. And then *zoop*. I was airborne.

At first I couldn't understand why there weren't further shots, but when I looked down I saw that all three men had yanked off their hoods, probably to see better, and one of them, neck craned up, was still running. He ran right into the water. Both other guys were stock still, arms hanging at their sides and heads bent back almost far enough to snap. But Foo suddenly yanked up his gun and blazed away at me.

At Foo's last shot there was a little puffing noise above me and I looked up. At least a couple of my balloons sighed softly and collapsed. I got a sinking sensation. But only for a little while; my craft kept carrying me skyward. I looked over the trees to the clearing and what I saw drove other thoughts from my mind.

Over four hundred naked people, their bodies white against the green grass, were streaking every way except after me. I was still close enough to pick out individual details and I noted that many were on the ground, rolling aimlessly. Others were beating their heads with their hands.

But that was getting farther and farther from me. I was way up in the air and a stiff wind was blowing, pushing me along. I didn't seem to be going any higher, but was moving over the scenery below at a fast clip. It was fairly easy to hang onto the rope ladder, both feet securely placed on separate rungs.

Time passed. I thought a bit about the case, and several things became more clear. I dwelt on the fact that Samson had said Brad Bender was, among other things, a cackle-bladder expert. A "cackle bladder" is a little bag of chicken blood that a con-man puts into his mouth and bites on when somebody fires a pistol filled with blank cartridges at him. Blood squirts out his mouth and the guy who fired the blank thinks he's killed him.

I also remembered a couple dates

and put them together: Yates' report to "client" was dated June 14; and on June 15, "Bob Brown" and his "wife" had entered Fairview. Several other things became more clear and I was quite pleased with my mental processes. It helps to get off by yourself. I noted casually that, as usual, the wind was blowing from Fairview toward L.A.

And then I grabbed my ladder and clung to it, crying out hoarsely. Los Angeles? *Los Angeles?* I got cold all over. *All over.* Not that. But, yes, there was Figueroa Boulevard. There was Sunset. I could pick out the City Hall, towering high over everything else. As minutes passed I could see the forms of people down there in the streets.

My mind was like mush. Suddenly, looking down with my eyes bugging, it actually seemed as though something snapped in my oatmeal. I knew, then, what had happened: This was a dream. It wasn't true. I was making it all up. This couldn't be happening. I wasn't up in the air, a soaring nudist, floating toward the Civic Center. Ah, but I was, and the thought sickened me.

The streets themselves were crowded; people below were even in the middle of the streets. Somehow I was much lower, and the sinking sensation I had now made the last one seem like a rising sensation. I could see the people very clearly, but that wasn't the worst of it, of course. Traffic had stopped. Way up here on my perch I could

hear horns blowing. The distant sound of a crash reached my ears. No, not all the traffic had stopped. Directly below me there was a police car, keeping pace with my progress. Its siren was wailing continually. I, too, was wailing continually.

I had dropped much lower in the atmosphere now, even lower than the top of City Hall which was pretty close at this point. Awfully close. And then my mind tottered, truly wobbled about. I told myself over and over that this was impossible. That nothing could make it happen. Not even a freak of winds separating and parting around that spike and mass of stone near me, setting up suction and eddying currents to push and pull me closer, could make it truly happen.

But finally I accepted it. The winds were right, the height was perfect. And I knew that years from now when this tale was told, few of the coming generation would believe it. But it was true. I was going to float through space like a Zepelin and moor at City Hall.

I think, then, that for a little while, I went all the way into howling madness. From then on what I thought and saw and felt was all mingled together like spaghetti. My brain felt loose inside my skull, like a pea. I had the feeling that Civil Defense people were watching me, marking my progress on a chart. In panic I tried to figure a way out of this. Maybe I could make people

think I was a visitor from another planet. A less inhibited planet.

My God, I thought, what if Civil Defense reports me and the Air Force shoots me down? Those balloons above me probably looked like a squadron of flying saucers — and they'd captured a human! This meant war!

Fantastic visions floated through my mind. I was looking into a room filled with radar and shining equipment. Guys at radar screens were going crazy trying to identify that crazy blip. Skywatchers trained binoculars on me; reports flowed into offices where bug-eyed men scribbled frantically. The Air Force went into action, jets took off with a whoosh, grim pilots wagging their trigger thumbs. At sea, battleships wheeled about and steamed toward shore.

I heard noises, shouts. Slowly I came back from wherever I'd been. In front of me was the wall of City Hall, dotted with people yelping from windows. One guy was leaning out a window and laughing so hard I thought he was going to fall down fifteen stories. I looked down. You guessed it: nothing but people.

You couldn't even see the damned grass around City Hall. Just a mass of upturned faces. And open mouths. And pointing fingers. Ten feet away from me in an open window was a man surrounded by a lot of other humans. He had a cigarette dangling from his lips and a lighter in his hand. Suddenly I thought of all

that gas up there above me.

"Don't!" I shouted. "Don't light it! I'm a bomb, a human bomb. I'll blow up City Hall!"

If I blew up, space travel would be set back a hundred years. People would cry: the Martians are bombs!

A lot of secretaries had their heads stuck out windows. Most were screaming, but the little hypocrites were still looking. One big-eyed blonde, even bigger-eyed now than usual, recognized me.

She pointed. "It is!" she screeched. "No, it isn't. My God, it is! It's Shell Scott!"

20.

I could have died of mortification. She didn't have to make it so obvious. But right after that I banged into the building's side; hands pulled me into an office. Three secretaries ran out the door. I was left with about forty men who had rushed to this vantage point. Pushing through the crowd came uniformed officers, some in plainclothes. I saw Captain Samson, his usually pink face a brighter hue. Alongside him was Lieutenant Rawlins, a good friend of mine. Once he had been a good friend of mine. He was laughing. Oh, yes, he was laughing.

I stuck my face at him and said, "Well, what's so funny?"

That did it. Rawlins choked and gurgled and finally sank to the floor roaring like an idiot.

Sam stopped in front of me, a

cigar in his mouth. Slowly his teeth ground together. The cigar bent, then fell to the floor. "Shell," he said in a voice taut with emotion, "you've done some crazy things before, but . . . really, this is too much."

"I've got to get back to the nudist camp." Well, what would you have said? Sam kept biting his cigar stub. More hilarious cops were in the room now. Guys slapped their thighs. Somehow we got out of there and I wound up in a police uniform which, I think, Rawlins found somewhere for me.

We were down in room 42 and Sam was saying, "Well, let's go over to the jail."

"Sam, I've been trying to tell you. We've got the whole thing. I've got to get out of here and —"

"We have to throw you in jail. All those people . . ." he threw his hands into the air.

Five minutes later I was still arguing, still explaining. Sam had told me that they'd picked up Brad Bender in Las Vegas and he'd been brought to City Hall half an hour ago. The crime lab had reported that the stain on the nap of Norman's carpet was blood, all right; but not human blood.

"Sam, listen. Toss me in jail later if you've got to, but let me talk to Bender. Then I'll join the foreign legion."

I won that point. Bender was

brought into room 42. I winked at Sam and went into a spiel about wanting Bender alone with me in a locked room. Bender was about six feet tall, broad-shouldered and handsome. His hands were manacled in front of him, the cuffs slipped under his belt so he couldn't raise his arms.

He shifted his feet nervously. "I don't get this. I haven't done anything. All of a damn sudden you haul me back to L.A." He paused. "You can't get away with working me over in there." He jerked his head toward the inner office.

"I can give it a good try," I said. "Unless you want to spill the story of your phony murder. We know you're a cackle-bladder expert. And we know Andon Poupelle's supposed to have knocked you off. He still thinks you're dead, doesn't he?" I paused. "Take your pick, Bender. We know it all anyway."

He looked at me, then glanced at Samson. I tried to make it easier for him. "The way I see it, Bender, it was just a gag. Wasn't that it?"

Bender chewed on his lip, thinking. Then he said slowly, "You talk to Poupelle?"

I hesitated, then said, "I'll give it to you straight. We can't even find the guy. Maybe he's dead for all I know."

He chewed his lip, swore. "He's in Vegas. Some friends told me, but he didn't see me there."

"Was Ed Norman the friend who told you?"

"Naturally." He squinted at me. "It was a gag, remember. Here's how it went. Norman said we'd play a joke on Poupelle. Night of June second we all three got in Norman's office at the Castle. Norman made sure a gun was on his desk, loaded with blanks. I slipped the cackle bladder in my mouth. We rigged a fight, made it look good. I was choking Norman. He managed to yell at Poupelle to grab the gun. Poupelle plugged me and I staggered toward him, squirted blood all over him. You know the rest."

While Bender talked, Sam was on the phone. Bender said, "That's about all. What happened after that I wouldn't know. Norman sent me to Vegas, told me to stay there till he got in touch. It was a gag, remember."

"Sure," I said. "Only Poupelle didn't know it, and Norman held that fake murder over his head, made him do exactly what Norman wanted him to do."

Samson hung up the phone and said to me, "The boys picked Bender up in a car, you know, on his way out of Vegas."

I swung toward Bender and said, "I thought you told me you were to stay there until Norman gave you the word? He call you?"

"No. I heard noise that cops were on my tail. Before I blew, I phoned Norman here, told him I was blowing, and why."

"What time was that call, friend?"

"Just before they picked me up.

Maybe nine-thirty this A.M."

Sam said, "Let's go." Two police cars were at the Main Street entrance. Samson slid behind the wheel of one and I sat up front with him, other officers piling into the second car. Sam jerked the wheel and gunned out from the curb. I kept talking trying to get the whole story straight. Sam listened, nodding once in a while.

"At first I thought Poupelle blasted Yates to keep him from messing up Andon's play for the Redstone dough," I said. "Figured Norman learned about it and was bleeding the guy. But finally there was so much pointing at Norman a blind man could see it. When I learned about Poupelle's dropping fifty G's at the Castle, I went out to see Norman about it; Yates also learned that item from Three Eyes and he'd have done the same thing I did: call on Norman. Yates sold out, started working for Norman."

Sam swung into Forrest Street, leading toward the Castle. He said, "Think Norman's got any idea we're on our way?"

"Bender phoned him from Vegas so he'll be jerky as hell. Especially with me still alive; right after Bender's call he sent some of his boys out to polish me off, remember. . . . Hell, yes, he knows, Sam."

"How you figure . . . oh. Yeah."

Yeah, indeed. By this time probably half the United States knew that Shell Scott had visited City Hall from Heaven. Plenty of Nor-

man's friends would have given him the word.

21.

We went over the hill and started down toward Castle Norman. And we both saw it at the same time, a car racing away from the castle, careening right, heading toward us. Sam had cut the siren once we were out of traffic and now he said, "Must be him." His cast-iron chin jutted out farther. He didn't slow down.

That long black car ahead began to look like a locomotive on our track. We were in the middle of the road, no more than fifty yards separating the two cars, when Sam hit the siren and it took off like a thousand banshees. I saw the other car veer, heard tires scream. He swung clear off the road, and went by us on our left, inches away. It was Norman, bent over the steering wheel.

I thought he was going to make it but the car skidded, kicked up dirt at the right of the road — then the brakes of our car were squealing and I was thrown against the door. Sam didn't even kill the engine, slid around, jerked gears, jazzed the motor and we were heading back the way we'd come. Norman's car was far off the road, right wheels in a ditch. The car door stood open. I spotted him, running up the weed-covered hillside toward a clumb of trees and thick brush, a gun in his hand. Sam slammed on the brakes

and I was out the door and running before the car stopped.

Norman got into the trees long before me. I kept trying to suck my chest in, zigzagged every few steps until I was in the shadows of the trees. I stopped. There wasn't any sound. I cocked the police revolver, then slowly walked forward, trying to look everywhere at once. Something rustled on my left and I spun in that direction, crouching, the gun held before me.

There wasn't anything there. Just a fist-sized rock still rolling over the ground. For a split second it didn't register. I was still turning when I saw the rock, and I stopped, but the next instant I dived forward flat on the ground, the dirt slapping my face and scraping the skin. It sounded as if the gun blasted in my ear; dirt geysered inches to the right of my head.

I rolled that way, squirmed onto my back, and even before I caught sight of him squeezed the trigger on the police revolver twice, not aiming at anything but praying that the sudden violent sound might jar him the fraction I needed.

Maybe that was what did it. His gun cracked again and the hot wind hissed past my cheek, but when I saw him, and I was firing again before my gun was pointed at him. But it was pointed at Norman's body before the gun clicked empty. I hit him twice.

He jackknifed forward but didn't go down. The gun dropped from

his fingers and he slapped both hands against his middle, staggered backward one step. Norman tried to straighten up, blood oozing thickly through his fingers, but he couldn't make it. Then his knees buckled and he crumpled, still holding his hands over his belly.

My throat was dry as I squatted before him. Samson had run up as Norman fell; behind him were four other officers. I doubt that Norman even knew they were there. He was half on his side, one elbow partly supporting him. I said, "You've had it, Norman. Go out clammed, or you can tell it. It's too late for anything else now."

A lot of what he did get out was disjointed, but it was more than enough. He said that Poupelle had come out to his Castle near the end of May with Vera Redstone and he'd recognized her; one of his boys told him about Poupelle, and Poupelle's "love" racket, and Norman had started getting the germ of his idea. While he talked, one of the officers scribbled in a notebook.

"All of it was my idea," Norman said. "Whole thing. Hooks in Poupelle, had him where he'd do anything . . . even get married. He was smooth enough to work it. I needed money bad, knew I could get it from Poupelle once he had it. All I had to do was make sure he got it. Hooked him first with a rigged roulette wheel. Then Bender helped."

He stopped for long seconds, then

went on, "I hadn't known about the girl till Yates told me, just meant to kill the old lady, but that changed it. Made it . . . better, would look more like the old gal really banged herself. Be rid of both of them. Yates . . . he'd have known, afterwards . . . couldn't afford what he'd do. He'd doublecrossed her already."

I said, "Who killed Yates?"

"Mike Hawkins. At the camp. Day after Yates' report about . . . girl, the daughter, I sent Mike there. Him and his wife. Saturday night I phoned Yates, had him take his own rifle out to Mike. Mike used it on him right there, that night . . . Oh, Jesus."

He paused, blinking slowly, his mouth open, then went on. "Mike messed up both tries on the girl and I gave up on her. Next night when you come to the club I'd already given the story about the girl, and the pictures, to the *Clarion* reporter. After that I couldn't wait, had to do it later that night when the papers hit the street. I kept Poupelle and his wife, some other people, in the club. Andon stayed in my office while I went out the back way; he waited till I got back then he told everybody we'd been together in the office. I went into town, got one of the newspapers and took it along, killed the old lady."

His voice was fainter now, but I could still hear him. "Andon had told me where her gun was. She knew I was going to kill her. Didn't

try anything, just sat there. She just sat there. Didn't say a word. I . . . almost didn't do it."

22.

Laurel and I lay on the warm sand, hot sun burning our bodies an even deeper brown.

It was long after Norman had died. When his body had been hauled away I'd gone with Samson and the police to Fairview. Two of the hoods had been there. Foo, Babe, and another brown-hooded couple had taken off for the hills, but they hadn't been hard to find.

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Brown — actually Mr. and Mrs. Mike Hawkins — had finally been picked up and were in the can. A large number of other criminal types, including Garlic, were out of circulation. And Sergeant Billings had told me I didn't have to shoot anybody to make us even — I'd introduced him to Peggy. The last time I saw him, he was almost as tanned as she was.

Andon Poupelle cracked during his first night in the pokey and admitted he'd known about Norman's plans to murder Mrs. Redstone. Consequently he went to San Quentin. Vera was in Las Vegas getting a divorce — since, among other things, the knowledge that Poupelle's proposal was Norman's idea had annoyed her quite a bit — and appearing in the show at the Sahara for \$10,000 a week which she didn't

need. Vera enjoyed show business, though, being Laurel's sister.

There had, of course, been quite a hullabaloo. I had been charged with everything from ballooning without a license to invading the planet, and other things too horrible to mention. One idiot even had the gall to charge me with being a press agent for the American Sunbathing Association. But that was all behind me now.

Laurel rolled over close to me, picked up a handful of white sand and let it trickle onto my chest. Then she leaned even closer and whispered in my ear.

"No," I said. "Thank you, no. Not that the thought doesn't appeal to me. It's just impossible. Ha, ha."

"I'll give you a million dollars."

I stifled an imaginary yawn. It was a little gag of hers.

"Oh, all right," I said pettishly. "You and your damned money."

Quite a while later I said in a weak voice, "Well, I guess you're about broke by now. I hope to hell you're broke. We'll figure it up later. What will you do when you're a pauper?"

Laurel smiled beautifully, sleepily. "Oh, I'll think of something."

I knew she would. She always did. But naturally I wouldn't really take any of her money. It was enough that we were together, enjoying today and looking forward to tomorrow. It was enough that we were here, on a secluded beach in Hawaii.

Hell yes, Hawaii.



Win \$50.00!

Here's your chance to be a detective! All the clues you need to follow Lieutenant Leeds' reasoning and come up with a killer are in the story. In 200 words or less, finish the story. Find the killer and the clues which point to him in the story. The best ending to this story, in the opinion of the editors of Manhunt, which reaches us before September 1, 1955, will win for its author a \$50 prize. The name of the winner and his entry will be published in our February 1956 issue. Duplicate awards will be made in case of ties. It is not necessary to purchase this magazine in order to enter the contest. Please address all entries to Contest Editor, Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Because of the volume of submissions, it is impossible to enter into personal correspondence regarding any entry.

YOU, detective

6.—The Burgled Apartment

BY WILSON HARMAN

LIEUTENANT LEEDS looked at the men in front of him. "And you both say you were out when the murder occurred?" he asked.

"That's right, Lieutenant," the elder man said slowly. His deep voice matched the quiet gentility of his pale face. "I came home at three o'clock, and my wife was — already dead. Lying there on the bed; she must have been killed in her sleep."

"How about you, Mr. Grimm?" the lieutenant asked. The younger man, a short, dark person, swung round suddenly.

"I was waiting downstairs," he said. "I had an appointment with

Charlie Rogers here. He told me to meet him at two-thirty, but nobody answered the bell. I guess Mrs. Rogers was sleeping. Charlie didn't get here until three."

"What was the appointment about, Mr. Grimm?" Leeds went on.

Grimm licked his lips nervously. "Nothing important," he said. "Just a family matter — the fact is, Lieutenant, we wanted to talk some things over with Mrs. Rogers. You see, her will provided that Charlie and I — I'm Charlie's cousin, you know — inherit her fortune equally. There were a few technicalities I wanted to get straight. Inheritance tax, income, things like that."

Rogers smiled silently. "Silly, isn't it, Lieutenant?" he asked. "We went in the front door, up the stairs and through the upstairs door of my apartment, talking about my wife's money. Then we — saw her."

"Didn't you notice anything strange?" Leeds asked the elder

man in his quiet voice.

"Strange?" Rogers repeated, "No, I — unless you mean the broken glass. Yes, we noticed that, just before we went inside. Whoever broke in must have broken the glass of the upstairs door near the handle."

"No one could have used a key on the door?" Leeds asked.

Rogers shook his head. "No. The downstairs door is usually left open, but the upstairs one is locked. My wife and I have the only keys. Her set is probably still in her handbag."

Leeds turned to one of his men. "Check that, will you?" Then he went on: "But Mr. Grimm, here, was standing in front of the downstairs door."

"I went down to the corner a couple of times," Grimm said quickly. "Just walking back and forth. You know. Somebody could have come

in and gone out while I was at the corner."

"Both of you could have used the money Mrs. Rogers' will provides," Leeds said flatly. Rogers was the first to recover.

"Yes," he said. "I could — can use the money. I'm in rather a tight spot just now." He smiled again. "But I didn't kill her, you understand."

"Neither did I," Grimm cut in.

The man Leeds had sent off interrupted them. "There's a set of keys in the lady's handbag, Lieutenant," he said. "One of the keys fits the upstairs door."

"You see?" Rogers asked. "No one could have used a key. Someone broke in — there's all that broken glass just outside the door — and killed her in her sleep."

"Someone killed her, all right," Leeds said. "And now, I know who."

Contest Winner: YOU, detective

No. 3 — THE SWEET DEATH

*Miss Betty Mersereau
265 Conejo Road
Santa Barbara, California*

"It's impossible to prove —" Rawlins started.

"All right," Regan said. "Let's skip all that. There aren't any fingerprints on the package, and the Manhattan postal clerk can't identify the sender. But we do know one thing." He stopped, looking at Raw-

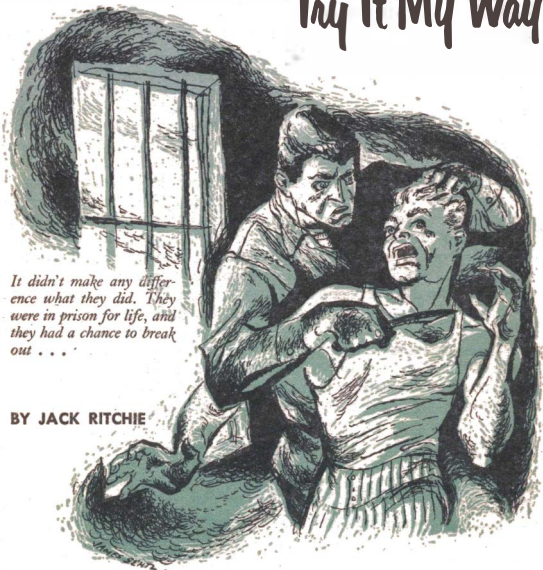
lins and Paula Kincaid. Neither of the suspects moved.

"We know how long it takes to get here from New York," Regan went on. "Five hours. And Miss Kincaid arrived at two in the afternoon. That means she must have left at nine in the morning. And since the package was mailed in Manhattan at eleven, two full hours later —"

Rawlins whirled and started for the door, but Regan was there before him.

"There isn't any way out," the detective-sergeant said. "You'd better come along quietly, Mr. Rawlins."

Try It My Way



It didn't make any difference what they did. They were in prison for life, and they had a chance to break out . . .

BY JACK RITCHIE

AT FOUR O'CLOCK they thought of shutting off the water. I took the half-filled saucepan out of the sink and poured it into one of the big cookpots lined up on the floor. Keegan stopped fooling with the

automatic long enough to pour me a glass of vanilla extract from the quart bottle.

I took a couple of swallows and wiped my mouth on my sleeve. Then I pulled the bill of the guard

cap lower and walked to the other end of the kitchen.

They were both in their underwear. Brock sat cross-legged, staring at the backs of his big hands without interest, and Stevens hugged his legs tight to his chest, his eyes trying not to look up at me.

I grinned. "Here we got two types," I said. "Notice the nice gray hair, the clear healthy skin, and them baby blue eyes on Stevens."

Turk was at the big window keeping an eye on the exercise yard. He turned his head. "A real nice grandpop. I remember the twinkle in his eye when he used his stick on my kidneys."

"Watch this, Turk," I said. I reached down and put my hand on Stevens' shoulder. He shrank away and began trembling.

Turk laughed. "That's good to see. I'm glad I lived so long."

"Stevens is remembering all the little things he used to do to make life interesting for us," I said. "And now he's scared silly that we got better imaginations."

I shifted my smile to Brock. "Now this here boy's got no imagination at all. He's got free hand but he can't think of the clever things like Stevens can."

Brock met my eyes. "I'm thinking of some now, Gomez."

I grinned at him a long time and then I went to the window.

The guards were in a straggling arc around the three sides of the messhall wing. Some of them were

standing, but most were taking it easy, hunkered on their heels and waiting for the warden to think of something.

I went back to my chair. "Keegan," I said. "I'll tell you about Davis. You're too young in here to remember him."

I lit a cigarette and exhaled smoke. "Davis was afraid of cats. Crazy afraid about them and everybody knew it. And one day he made the mistake of using disrespectful words to Stevens and he got tossed into the hole."

I put my feet on the table. "Davis had one peaceful day and then he began screaming. Real interesting screaming and it was all about how there was a cat in the hole with him."

Keegan took the clip out of the automatic and examined it.

"After a couple of hours, Davis suddenly didn't make any more noise. When somebody bothered to wonder about that and take a look, he found Davis had beat his brains out against the wall."

I looked at Stevens. "In one of the corners was a black as spades cat licking his paws. Now I wonder how he could of got in there."

Turk turned away from the window. "The warden's waving a hanky and he's coming around to the main door."

Keegan got up and went into the dining hall and I could hear his footsteps as he made his way through the emptiness of it. He began mov-

ing some of the tables and benches away from the double doors.

There would be guards in the corridor, but they wouldn't try to force their way in as long as we had Brock and Stevens with us.

In five minutes, Keegan returned with Warden Cramer.

Cramer's eyes went to Brock and Stevens.

"They're doing just fine, warden," I said. "But they might be a little chilly."

His eyes moved to the uniform I was wearing and his mouth tightened. "This isn't going to get you anywhere, Gomez," he said.

"Tell us what we got to lose, warden," I said. "I'm the short-timer here and I got ninety years to wait."

He shifted his attention to Keegan. "For one thing, you got your lives to lose if anything happens to Brock or Stevens."

Keegan sipped his glass of extract and smiled at him.

"All right," Cramer snapped. "Let's have what you expect from me."

"A nice fast car and an open gate," Keegan said.

The warden's eyes were hard. "It wouldn't do you much good. You couldn't get far."

"We'll have Brock and Stevens along to show us the way," Keegan said. "Something clever should come to us when it gets dark."

Cramer walked over to Stevens and Brock. "They haven't tried

anything rough on you, have they?"

"Just words," Brock said.

Cramer came back to us. "You have one hour to give this up."

I smiled. "And if we don't, warden? Are you going to try what you haven't got nerve enough to do now?"

Cramer's face colored angrily.

"Remember," I said. "Keep it quiet and orderly out there. If you come for us, start thinking of words to use for Stevens' widow."

Keegan took the warden back out and, while he was gone I searched through the kitchen drawers until I found a whetstone. I began sharpening the nine-inch meat knife I carried.

When Keegan came back, he refilled our glasses.

Brock uncrossed his legs and rubbed circulation back into them. "Before that stuff goes to your head, Keegan, do some thinking. If Cramer lets you three get away with this, there won't be a guard safe in the country. He's not going to let that happen."

"Start hoping you're wrong," Turk said. "Work on it real hard."

I got to my feet and went over to Stevens. "Maybe I should cut off a few ears and toss them out into the yard for Cramer to admire. It might impress him that we mean business."

I got down on one knee in front of him. "Whose ears should it be, Stevens? Yours or Brock's?"

Stevens licked his lips and tried to look away, but his eyes came back to

the knife in my hand.

I grabbed a handful of his hair and jerked his head back. I put the tip of my knife under his jaw. "You got two seconds to make up your mind."

His voice was the strangled whisper of terror. "Brock. Make it Brock."

I let go of him and stood up. "See, Brock," I said. "He wants his ears real bad. He don't love you at all when it comes to that."

Keegan was watching me. "Did you get your thrill, Gomez?"

"Sure," I said. "I got a mean streak in me and it has to be fed."

Keegan lighted one of the cigars we'd found in Brock's uniform and took Turk's place at the window.

I went back to the table and sat down. "With Davis it was cats," I said. "With some people it's the dark or maybe high places."

I watched Turk pouring himself a drink. "I'm thinking of the time the drier in the laundry flared up," I said. "Just a short in the wiring and nothing to get excited about. Remember the size of Stevens' eyes when he thought he might get burned?"

I picked up a pack of bookmatches and lit one. I let it burn low and Turk watched it. When I blew it out, Turk took the pack and went over to Stevens.

Turk stood there grinning and then he tore one of the matches out of the pack and lit it.

Stevens' eyes got wide and he backed away as he watched it burn.

"Let him alone, Turk," Keegan said from the window.

"Ali I want is a little fun," Turk said. "I got it coming."

Keegan came away from the window. "I just told you something, Turk."

Turk met his eyes for a few moments and then he shrugged and walked away.

"Gomez, the idea man, and Turk, the pupil," Brock said. "You got nice company, Keegan."

"Stevens is with you," Keegan said. "Want to brag about him?"

Five o'clock passed and nothing happened. I relieved Keegan at the window and waved to the photographers who were behind the line of guards taking pictures.

The warden finished talking to a knot of reporters and then he started through the guards.

"Cramer's coming back," I said. "And he hasn't got a car under his arm."

Keegan left to let him in. When he came back with the warden, they took seats at the table.

"Well?" Keegan asked.

"You might as well quit this before somebody gets hurt," Cramer said. "You're not getting out of here and that's that."

"We're stubborn and we think different," Keegan said. He glanced at the wrist watch he'd taken from Brock. "We're not going to drag this out until there's snow in hell. It's ten after five right now. We'll give you until seven."

"It's out of my hands," Cramer said. "I talked to the governor and he says positively nothing doing."

"You got almost two hours to change his mind," I said.

"You know what will happen if you let anything happen to Brock or Stevens. You'll all be held equally responsible." Cramer's eyes went around the three of us and settled on Keegan. "You got sense enough to know that this won't work."

Keegan smiled thinly. "I'm the outdoor type and I been in here six years. Don't count on me being able to think clear."

The warden got up. "Seven o'clock is going to come and go. It's not any special time on my clock."

He looked at the pots of water. "We can wait a long time out there. Longer than that will last."

When he was gone, Keegan sat at the table slowly smoking his cigar. It was quiet except for the sounds the guards made as they talked to each other in the yard.

At six, Turk took my place at the window. I refilled my glass and lit a cigarette. "Cramer's got the notion that we don't have the guts to do like we say. I vote to build a fire under Stevens. He should get loud enough for even the governor to hear."

I let a whole book of matches flare up and tossed it at Stevens.

He shrieked as he skittered away from it. His face got pasty white and twitched with fright as he crouched in the corner watching me.

Keegan got up. "I thought I said words about doing things like that."

I glanced up. "Not to me."

"You're getting told now."

I looked at the bigness of his shoulders and the way his hands hung, ready to use.

I picked up the knife and smiled. "We'll leave it at your way for now. When it gets past seven we can argue about it."

At six-thirty the dusk began pushing into the room. Keegan went to the light switch and tried it. Nothing happened.

It was quarter to seven when the floodlights in the yard were turned on. Inside the kitchen pillars of light leaned against the windows.

Seven o'clock came and passed.

At ten after, I finished the last of the vanilla extract and threw the glass at the sink. "Now let's do it my way," I said. "Let them listen to Stevens die and they'll find us a car real fast."

Cellophane crackled as Keegan unwrapped another cigar. "Stop smacking your lips over Stevens and start thinking."

I sat on the edge of the table and began flipping the knife at the piece of light that lay over one corner of it and waited.

"Let's look at this thing with brains," Keegan said. "The party's over. We've had it."

I kept playing with the knife and neither Turk nor I said anything.

Keegan went on. "Like Brock said, if we get away with it here, the

same thing will be tried in every pen in the country. That's why Cramer's not going to let it happen."

"He'll have to," I said. "If we do it my way. We give them one body. That makes them know we got nothing more to lose. We can burn only once and it'll be no cost to us to give them another corpse if they don't do like we say."

Keegan reached for his glass and then saw that it was empty. He pushed it away. "Use that beautiful imagination of yours now, Gomez. Suppose even that doesn't work. Start thinking about the hot seat."

Brock spoke from the darkness. "I watched a dozen of them take the walk. Ask me how scared they were."

I looked toward Brock and Stevens. They were in the shadows, but I knew they were watching and hoping.

Turk broke the silence. "It's not going to be a happy time for us when Brock and Stevens put on their uniforms again."

"I'm not looking forward to it either," Keegan said. "But it's better than frying."

There was another long quiet and then Turk sighed. "That part about being alive persuades me."

Keegan's face came into the light as he leaned forward. "Make it unanimous, Gomez."

Brock spoke again. "It's something to see when they turn on the juice. They jump against the straps like the devil was burning inside of them. They're supposed to be dead

in a second, but it don't look like that to me, Gomez. Not when they fight it like that."

I stuck the knife into the table. "I'm finished," I said. "Just like you are."

Keegan relaxed back into his chair. "First I finish this cigar. It'll be a long time before I taste another one."

And then I saw it.

I whirled toward the window and it was there on the sill, a small silhouette against the light.

I whipped off my cap and smashed at it again and again until it was a broken stain on the stone.

"Jesus!" Turk said sharply. "You scared the hell out of me, jumping up like that. It wasn't nothing but a little cockroach."

Another floodlight flashed on outside and a slant of light cut across the room and fell on Stevens.

Iciness gripped at my insides. Stevens knew about them now and I knew what he was thinking about. He knew what I was afraid of. When we were back in our cells he'd know what to do to me.

I jerked the knife out of the table and went after him.

Keegan shouted and moved forward, but he was too late to stop me.

Keegan pulled at me, but I didn't let go of Stevens until I was through.

Keegan looked down at the body and then his eyes met mine.

"All right, Gomez," he said quietly. "Now we got no choice. We try it your way."

MUGGED AND PRINTED

RICHARD S. PRATHER, creator of Shell Scott, the famous private peeper who appears in Prather's best-selling Gold Medal books,



returns to *Manhunt* this month with the complete new novel, *Nudists Die Naked*. Obviously a man of enormous energy, Prather's now at work on another new novel, as well as some more *Manhunt* stories, though he could easily rest on his laurels with such

popular books as *Ride A High Horse*, *Always Leave 'Em Dying* and *Case Of The Vanishing Beauty* to his credit. He lives in California with his wife, Tina, and his collection of tropical fish, and claims that he's a tougher man than Shell Scott — at the typewriter, anyway.

FRANK KANE's newest story about Johnny Liddell, the hard-as-nails private eye whose adventures spark such books as *Poisons Unknown*,



Slay Ride, *Grave Danger* and others, appears in this issue, and we think you'll find it one of the toughest and most realistic Kane stories yet. Kane's newest book about Liddell, *Red Hot Ice*, will soon be in the bookstores, and while you're waiting for it you

can read *Make It Neat*, as well as the other Kane stories we'll be bringing you soon.

CRAIG RICE returns to *Manhunt* in this issue with a new story about her world-famous detective character, John J. Malone: *Shot In The Dark*.



The rye-drinking, insolvent little lawyer, who's appeared in virtually every entertainment medium from books and magazines to radio, TV and the movies, was based, Miss Rice writes, on a real-life lawyer she met while covering a trial for a Mid-

western newspaper. The real-life lawyer, she claims, was every bit as tough and smart as Malone himself. Miss Rice, now at work on her autobiography and on some more *Manhunt* stories, lives on the West Coast, where, she states, the weather is sunnier and the people healthier.

RICHARD DEMING is the author of *Gallows In My Garden* and *Tweak The Devil's Nose*, two Rinehart novels featuring Manville Moon, a



popular one-legged private eye. Deming's latest story, *The Happy Marriage*, is one of the most unusual and shocking we've ever seen, and we're sure you'll enjoy it just as much as you've liked previous Deming stories in *Manhunt*. Deming's now at work on

a new novel, and has promised a special story for *Manhunt* readers, which we'll present soon.

EDWARD D. RADIN's True Crime feature for this month is the unusual and exciting *Bug Doctor*. Radin, whose clear vivid style comes from his years of newspaper experience, considers this case one of the most unusual he's ever heard about. ♦ BRYCE WALTON, whose newest story for *Manhunt* is the brutal *Red Hands*, is a New York TV writer whose work has appeared on many top TV shows as well as in virtually every major magazine on the stands. ♦ JACK RITCHIE's *Try It My Way* is a realistic story of a prison break, a story we'd rank with the finest Ritchie's done as yet. You'll be seeing more of his work soon. ♦ JACK SWORD makes his debut in *Manhunt* this month with the first of a new and unusual series, the Casebook story *Pass The Word*. We're sure you'll go for his original and unusual approach.



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Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband Ed. All Perry finds is — blank paper! The police say Perry hid the **REAL** letter!

3 THE CASE OF THE
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Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an empty safe. Then a blonde slams the safe shut. Not sinister . . . except that the tenant had been **MURDERED!**

4 THE CASE OF THE
GREEN-EYED SISTER

Grogan, a black-maller, wants \$20,000 for a piece of evidence against Fritch. Then Fritch is found **DEAD!** Grogan has an alibi—but not Mason!

5 THE CASE OF THE
HESITANT HOSTESS

The first woman says she saw Perry's client at the scene of the crime. The second should not have appeared—but did. The third—Perry's star witness—**disappeared completely!**

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