



NOW IT CAN BE TOLD!



THE LONE GUNMEN, AUTHORS

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The Rational Shampoo's More or Less Incomplete but Probably Inaccurate Yet Strangely Compelling Account of the Desanguination of Resident Shawn Fatsgarbled Threnody in Phallus, Taxes on that Gay Afternoon of 20 Seconds of No Remember in the Year of our Lard 1693 by the Hendrix Calendar

1.

The embittered unemployed Twitter repairman Wee Hairy Torvald fidgeted impatiently in his chair to the side of a podium in a large conference room on the thirteenth floor of the Charenton Hotel in Phallus, Taxes, waiting for the arrival of the other members of the Conspiracy. He had gotten a good deal on the conference room rental because being on the thirteenth floor, it literally didn't exist, due to the citizenry of Phallus being a mite superstitious. This was in Torvald's favor, however, for there was literally no chance of their conference being spied upon. As the minute hand on the large wall clock at the other end of the conference room finally edged its way to 9AM, the doors to the conference room were flung open to allow the large contingency of co-conspirators to enter.

As they filed in, stealy-eyed and lantern-jawed with grim businesslike expressions on their furtive faces, they took their places at the various long tables that had been set aside for each group.

From left to right these tables were occupied by:

1. The Morphea. They were peeved at Resident Threnody for his habit of recording his speeches, then placing these recordings on trucks equipped with loudspeakers which randomly roamed the streets of most major urban cities throughout the day and most of the night, loudly blaring the Resident's message to his beloved countrymen. Thus the members of the Morphea had been for some time now suffering severe cases of sleep deprivation and vowed revenge in no uncertain terms upon their loudmouthed leader.

2. The Seeing Eye Agency. This was the agency that was charged with gathering information about events taking place in the world which might adversely affect the Unified Straights government and then steadfastly refusing to divulge this information to anyone else. Therefore, working in a self-imposed vacuum, it was hard for them to distinguish between real information, dis information, and dat information. This problem had been responsible for the disastrous Bay of Pork campaign that they had attempted more than two years earlier. Their self-imposed mission had been to assassinate the recently self-proclaimed dictator of the nation island of Ruba, the revolutionary leader Vidal Costco. The Seeing Eye plans had failed so miserably that they had caused a massive pork spill in the waters of the Gulf of Mosquito, thus alarming environmentalists who feared for the delicate balance of cholesterol in the region and a possibly severe outbreak of swine flu. Upon learning of this disaster, Resident Threnody had put out the head Seeing Eye and had turned a blind eye on the agency's repeated requests for further budgetary consideration. Thus the Seeing Eye Agency was out to get Threnody as well.

3. The Taxes Soilmen, who together had conspired to own all of the agricultural land in the great and vast state of Taxes, therefore virtually controlling its food supply. Even the state law enforcement agencies were fearful to act against this powerful cartel for, as one top law enforcement official put it, "They not only know where the bodies are buried, they own the land." They wanted to be rid of Threnody because upon his demise the pride of Taxes, Ice Resident Swyndon Swanson, would then become the first Resident ever from that great state, thereby ensuring the delivery of more barrels of pork than even the entire Taxes legislature could consume.

4. The pro-Costco Rubans. The motivations of this group were easy to determine. They hated Threnody because of his victorious stand just the previous year during the Ruban Bissel Crisis in which he caused the Ruban dictator Costco not only to lose face, but more than a bissel sales as well.

5. The anti-Costco Rubans. It hardly needs to be restated that the reason for this group's hatred of Threnody was the failure of the aforementioned and ill-fated Bay of Pork adventure, which had caused the majority of poor Rubans to be condemned to a diet of chickens ever since.

6. The last group but one was a puzzled-looking contingent of nondescript individuals who for some inexplicable reason were all dressed like Juan Valdez. They called themselves the Undecided About Costo Rubans who nonetheless wanted to see Resident Threnody thrown out of office due to his economic policy of the island's blockade, which was swiftly and precipitously driving up the price of rum and severely threatening the availability of the national drink of Ruba, the banana daquiri. They figured that with Swanson in, it would at the very least be a rum go for their native country.

[Editor's note: It should be explained here that since the Ruban dictator Costco had decreed that the Ruban national language would no longer be Spanish, but henchforth be a little-known island dialect called Rube, all the members of the three last mentioned groups were speaking nothing but Rube to each other and anyone else who happened to get in the way. This made them almost impossible to understand and not a little irritating.]

7. The last group to enter the Charenton Hotel conference room that morning looked around at the already occupied tables and then unhesitatingly took themselves to a group of empty chairs in the far corner of the room. This group, the powerful Consumerati, seated themselves with regal bearing and expressionless faces. Moreover, they paid little attention to the general discussion as they were busy playing with their smutphones and listening to music that issued from their personal iZods. The Consumerati wanted Threnody out of office because of the rumor that his administration was going to impose a redundancy tax on all handheld electronic devices so that it would be difficult for the average American to be able to afford more than six or seven of them.

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Wee Hairy Torvald thoughtfully looked around the room, surveying the grim-visaged co-conspirators carefully. Then he stood up and began to address the assemblage. "Gentlemen," he began, "I thank you for your confidence and faith in choosing me to carry out your expressed wishes. But please, do me a favor and put out those lanterns. They're giving me a headache."

Torvald, at the tender age of only four score and twenty, was still in the process of trying to find himself. He suspected that he had lost himself some months before when he had been working at a ham radio factory in Minsk. He thought that it might have happened on a particularly drunken night when he was hanging out at a dissident bar called The Weary Cossack after work in Minsk's notoriously sleazy Red Star District. Some days later when he had first noticed his self's disappearance it was too late to remedy the situation, as he'd been fired from his job for eating most of the ham and had been shortly thereafter summarily kicked out of the country.

"But," he continued, "how would be the best way to carry out your wishes? How can I get close enough to Threnody to do the deed, and what is the best way to do it? I leave it to you gentlemen to come up with a serviceable plan."

There was a general muttering from the assembled co-conspirators, and then some moments of confusion while they were in the process of rounding up all the mutts and removing them from the room.

Finally, the leader of the Soilmen spoke up. "We're of the opinion," he said, addressing Torvald directly, "that all you're gonna need is a good ol' Taxes shotgun. That does the trick ever' time."

Immediately, there was dissent from the leader of the Seeing Eye Agency, who stood up and told the Soilmen harshly, "That might be okay for hunting rabbits or whatever you people do down here, but it's only got two shots. What if he misses?" For this, the Soilman seemed to have no answer, and the Seeing Eye representative continued. "No, what's needed is more subtle, more on the order of the famous Zambezi poisoned dart blower. It makes no sound, and we have many untraceable poisons that darts can be coated with. All you have to do is to keep firing darts at the Resident until you pierce his skin and the poison will do the rest."

No sooner had he finished speaking than the spokesman of the Morpheia spoke up. "That's an ingenious plan, sir," he replied somewhat sleepily, "but you're forgetting the question of proximity. Mr. Torvald will have to be within ten or fifteen feet of the Resident to be assured of a hit."

Even as the Morpheia spokesman was finishing his speech, one of the pro-Costco Rubans stood up and pounded his shoe on the table for emphasis. "Gentlemen," he said in a thick, almost unintelligible Rube accent, "Dis argument is all very good, but it not get us nowhere." He looked around the room, then lifted his eyes to the ceiling in mock supplication. "Does nobody have plan worth a wooden centavo?"

A hush fell over the room. After they had removed it, a member of the Consumerati slowly got to his feet and said in a languid, limpid, liquid voice, "What you gentlemen obviously need is the latest, most cutting-edge revolutionary iconic weapon that our advanced technology has been able to create. A weapon so advanced, so re-imagined, if you will, that it is clearly the only weapon that could be effective in this situation." He took a laser pointer from his pocket and pointed it at the blank white wall directly behind Torvald, who immediately turned around so as to better view the projected image. What he and everyone else in the room who was paying attention saw was this: In the middle of a grassy field was a large device mounted on what looked to be a rather massive tripod. It had a large barrel, which an attached graphic helpfully pointed out was 4.2 inches in diameter. Visually, the thing looked like a cross between a giant mortar and a 50-caliber machine gun.

"Gentlemen, this is what you need," continued the Consumeratum. "Let me introduce to you the very latest in assassination technology. We call it the Mankiller 2000 XKE. When set up, positioned, and operated properly, it is capable of firing a succession of knives up to fifty per minute, reaching under ideal conditions a muzzle velocity of at least fifteen miles per hour. This device overcomes two of your more pressing problems, that of proximity, as it has a range of one hundred yards, and when aimed properly, unobtrusiveness, since the only sound it emits when fired is a sort of whooshing sound, much like a high wind."

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There was thunderous applause, and not a few oohs and aahs, at the revelation of this marvelous technological development. As the Consumeratum who had spoken again resumed his seat, a self-satisfied smirk was evident on his lips.

“Great,” commented Torvald, obviously relieved at both the unanimity of the decision and of not having to make it himself. “This is what I shall use to complete the solemn and important task that you have given me.” As he said this, however, a worried look crossed his face. “But marvelous as this device seems to be, one question remains: Where am I to operate it from? It might be just a bit too obvious if I set it up on the sidewalk.”

At these words, a little man who had been sitting quietly in a far corner of the room, away from and unnoticed by the conference participants, stood up. “Let me introduce myself,” he began. “I’m the chief of the Phallus Police Department, Les Furry.” And he was, too. His clean-shaven face and cueball-like head gleamed in the florescent lights that were unaccountably fixed to the ceiling.

As he finished his words of introduction, all hell broke loose in the conference room. Amid cries of “Oh shit!” and “We’re fucked now!” the participants began to push and shove and trample each other in their efforts to get to the exit as fast as possible. But Furry, having perhaps anticipated this reaction, had drawn his gun and moved quickly to the door before anyone else could get there. Calmly, he fired two shots into the ceiling and then remarked in a friendly voice, “All right boys, let’s settle down. I ain’t here to arrest nobody. So y’all just go quietly back to your seats and listen to what I got to say.”

There were many murmurs of relief as the conspirators slowly resumed their seats.

When all was quiet once more, the Chief returned to where he had been sitting but remained on his feet. "Boys," he said again, "far as I'm concerned, what's said in this room stays in this room." He looked around at the various faces as if to reassure them. "First of all, and off the record, lemme tell you this. I ain't no fan of Resident Threnody. Fur as we's concerned down here, he's jes' another damn Yankee. True Southerners like us ain't got no use fur him. With him outta the way, the true Southerner and native of this great state of Taxes Swindon Swanson'll get to be the Resident, bringin' joy to loyal Southerners everywhere. So it shouldn't come as no surprise to y'all that I think yer doin' a fine and noble thing here. In fact, sounds to me like you boys got a plan. So, lemme see what I can do to help y'all out."

He directed his gaze for the first time at Torvald who, as relieved as anyone else, had resumed his place at the podium. "So yer the one that got elected to do this thing, right son?"

Torvald nodded his assent, saying, "Yes, sir. I'm proud to be the instrument of victory for my fellow comrades here." He turned his head and, spitting on the floor, continued, "Far as I'm concerned, Threnody ain't worth a plug ruble."

Furry nodded his head in approval. "That's great to hear, son. But I believe that jes' a minute ago you was sayin' you had a problem with location?"

"That's right, sir," replied Torvald. "This weapon that the Consumerati recommended ain't exactly something you can carry under your coat."

"Yeah," agreed Furry, "I've been followin' that." He walked up to the podium and stood next to Torvald while he pulled a piece of paper out of his jacket pocket. Unfolding it, he showed it to Torvald. "This is a map," he explained. "A route of the Resident's Gatorade. You see this here buildin'? The one that's marked with an X? It's right there on the corner right next to the Frozen Stiff Ice Cream Parlor and jes' across the street from Crazy Morty's Moratorium a Go-Go. The Gatorade is gonna pass right by this building on its way to Big Dealy Plaza."

He handed the map to Torvald, who studied it while Furry continued. "Reason I mention this here buildin' is it's under the control of my boys. See, it's kind of a social club for the, ah, shall we say, alternative businessmen to hang out in. People in the know call it the Taxes Cool Crooks Repository. All ya gotta do is when y'all's ready, when the time comes, jes' stroll inta that buildin', hand the guy at the door a C-note, and he won't ask no questions. Hell, you could bring a damn arsenal in there and nobody'd raise an eyebrow. There'll be a guy behind the desk in the lobby. Say, "I'm on the Threnody Detail," and he'll tell you where to go. Is that clear, boy?"

Torvald nodded in assent.

"All right, then," said Furry as he turned around and faced the conspirators once more. "Have we got a deal?" There was a general murmuring in the affirmative as expressions of confidence had quickly returned to the conspirators' faces.

"All right, then," Furry said again, heading for the door. But before he exited, he turned to the group once more. "From now on," he said, pointing his finger at them for emphasis, "Y'all don't know me, and I don't know you. Jes' get it done, and ain't no cop will bother you." Then without another word he quickly went out the door, closing it behind him.

The assembled crowd grew noisy again, but Torvald quieted them with a wave of his hands. "All right then, let's iron out the details. First of all, I gotta have the bribe money."

One of the Taxes Soilmen quickly walked over to Torvald and handed him \$200. "That should cover your bribe," he said, "and cover expenses as well. Let us know if you need any more." Torvald quickly crumpled the bills into his pocket and then looked over at the Consumerati who had once again lost interest and returned their attention to their smutphones.

"The Mankiller 2000?" Torvald prompted.

One of the Consumerati stood up. "Sorry, man," he said. "We'll have it for you in a couple of days. There's an illegal weapons shop just down the street and the guy that runs it owes me a favor. You'll get the gun and he won't say nothin'."

"All right, then," said Torvald. "I think that brings our meeting to a close."

As the conspirators filed out, Torvald's mind was racing. This is it, he thought to himself. Either I win or I lose. And right now, I don't really give a damn which way it goes. If I make it, I can sell my memoirs and go live in seclusion in that little cottage in upstate New York I've had my eye on. Then I can live happily after Evers.

Thus the stage was set for that fitful day in Phallus, Taxes, after which most common taters agree would change the nation's monologue forever. However, most mythtorians are of the opinion that the events of that grisly day would probably not have occurred if Torvald had been himself at the time.

2.

The morning of the Residential Gatorade dawned with the rising of a thin and watery sun over the city of Phallus. Torvald was able to slap himself to consciousness by about 10AM. Groggily, he took several healthy gulps out of a bottle of Lone Star beer that he had opened the night before. As he drank, the task that lay ahead of him gradually swam into focus.

The Consumerati had done their part by delivering the Mankiller 2000 XKE the evening before to Torvald's rooming house on North Bixby Avenue. He had taken the fearsome weapon inside and was just in the process of wrestling it up the stairs to his room when he was surprised by Mrs. Mulligatawny, his half-Irish, half-Indian landlady.

"Land sakes, Wee," she called up to him, a puzzled look clouding her features. "What in tarnation is that contraption you're luggin' up the stairs?"

Thinking quickly, Torvald replied over his shoulder, "It's a telescope, Mrs. M. I'm gonna do a little stargazing."

"Why, whatever for?" she persisted.

"I'm gonna take a course in astronomy next semester at the community college," he lied, whispering under his breath, Yeah, that's the ticket. "And I wanna get a head start," he concluded.

"Well, ain't that nice," Mrs. Mulligatawny said, a maternal smile on her lips. I always said you was gonna amount to somethin'. You're such a good boy."

And without further comment she left the parlor and hurried into the kitchen to check on a batch of beernut cookies she was baking, leaving Torvald to complete his arduous journey up the stairs.

Now, the next morning, Torvald, after finding himself completely awake, hurriedly dressed and stuffed the Mankiller into a duffle bag which he strapped to his back. Leaving his room and locking the door securely, he stealthily made his way down the stairs, gratefully escaping the prying eyes of Mrs. Mulligatawny, who was in the kitchen enjoying her spartan breakfast of pork fat on toast and stewed prunes. He tiptoed his way across the parlor to the front entrance and exited the building, closing the door noiselessly behind him. Descending the front steps, he noticed that the thin and watery sun had left numerous puddles of sunlight on the neighborhood's streets and sidewalks, but had done little to abate the chill that was still evident in the morning air. Torvald shivered a little, glad he had remembered to wear his lucky brown corduroy jacket. Turning left on Bixby, he walked briskly down the street to the corner of Walston where he turned to the right and headed downtown, only a fifteen or twenty minute walk from his rooming house.

Upon arriving in the business district, he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the map which Chief Furry had given him at the meeting. Noting that the building Furry had jocularly referred to as the Taxes Cool Crooks Repository, he hurried to Dutch Elm Street, its supposed location. Preceding to the corner of Dutch Elm and Poison Oak, he had no trouble finding the building which still bore Furry's large black X on its exterior. Proceeding to the building's entrance, he wasted no time in pressing the door buzzer. Immediately a small window in the entrance door opened, and an impassive face looked him up and down.

"Ya got a membership card, buddy?" it inquired.

Silently, and without hesitation, Torvald reached into his pocket and withdrew one of the 100-dollar bills he had been given by the Taxes Soilmen and thrust it at the face in the window. A grimy hand appeared and snatched the bill. Without further comment, the door swung open.

As he entered the dim interior of the lobby, Torvald looked around and saw that reclining and sitting on various upholstered couches and chairs were perhaps a dozen burly men who appeared to have no necks. They were dressed almost uniformly in pinstriped double-breasted suits and most carried violin or guitar cases. The jaws in their unshaven faces were clenched around short stubby black cigars and they occasionally addressed each other in low mumbling tones emitted from the sides of their mouths that didn't hold the cigars. None of them paid Torvald any notice as he strode into the room.

Returning the favor, Torvald looked neither to the left or the right, but walked briskly over to a large desk where a small bald-headed man was sitting, a telephone receiver in his left hand pressed to his face, and a pen in his right with which he was furiously scribbling notations on a large scratch pad.

"Look, Lefty," Torvald could hear the man say into the phone, "I toldja already, five to one's the best I can do. Now you wanna take it or not? Uh-huh, uh-huh," he continued, then said with some exasperation, "It's your funeral," and immediately banged the receiver back on the phone. Turning to Torvald he said impatiently, "Yeah buddy, waddaya want?"

"I'm with the Threnody Detail," Torvald intoned.

The little man didn't raise an eyebrow, but quickly told Torvald where to go.

Torvald was barely able to restrain himself from reacting to the man's rudeness but managed to proceed without comment to the far side of the lobby, where he found an ancient elevator. Stepping inside and punching in number 6, he waited what seemed like several minutes while the creaky mechanism groaned and shrieked its way up to the top floor. Exiting the elevator with relief, Torvald went looking for his window of opportunity.

It didn't take him long to seek out his objective. After trying three or four doors spaced along the corridor, all of which were locked, he finally found one that was unlocked, opened it, and went inside. The room was bare and deserted, devoid of either furniture or decoration. The only evidences of recent human habitation were a few dilapidated cardboard boxes along the other walls containing a few of what appeared to be torn and mutilated school textbooks.

Looking around, Torvald instantly decided that this room would be perfect for his purposes, especially when he noticed a large paneled window set in the wall opposite the door. The window was streaked with grime and dirt, but upon closer inspection he noticed that each separate panel of the window had its own latch and could be made to open outwards independently of the rest.

Humming happily to himself and noticing that it was now nearly 11:30, Torvald went over and securely locked the door of the room. Then he went back over to the window, slipped the heavy duffle bag containing the Mankiller 2000 XKE and its ammunition from his shoulders, and quickly set to work assembling the monstrous device.

More than half an hour later, he was nearly finished when he suddenly heard a sharp knock at the door. At the sound Torvald froze, his mind racing. No one was supposed to know he was here, he thought. Had someone set him up, that little twerp at the desk perhaps? Or had Furry double-crossed him?

"Yes," he managed to croak.

"Thirty minutes, Mr. Torvald," intoned a bland, bored voice from the other side of the door.

"Thank you," Torvald replied more confidently, now beginning to relax. He wiped the icicles from his nose and looked at his Swatch. The two hands were pointing straight up at a tiny square of plaid material. This usually meant that it was either noon or midnight, depending on the time of day. This all made sense to Torvald now. Pulling Furry's map out of his back pocket, he quickly double-checked it. Beneath the building which Furry had designated with an X and which Torvald was now occupying, "12:30!" had been written. Torvald sighed with relief and replaced the map in his back pocket.

He took this to mean that the Residential Gatorade would be passing the Cool Crooks Repository Building at about 12:30. According to his complex mathematical calculations, he divined that he had approximately 30 minutes to wait, which was precisely what the unseen voice had told him. Giving a little shrug of his shoulders and making sure that the Mankiller was firmly in place, its barrel extending slightly from the open lower right window panel, Torvald pulled a well-worn copy of *Crime and Punishment* from the left side pocket of his lucky brown corduroy jacket, and began to thumb through its dog-eared pages to pass the time.

Outside on the sidewalks the sparse groups of people Torvald had noticed when he entered the building had grown in number to such an extent that people were now in danger of being crowded into the street on both sides of Dutch Elm. The Phallus Police Department were attempting to effect crowd control but meeting with only varying degrees of success, until a black late-model sedan pulled up at the corner of Poison Oak and parked defiantly in front of a fire hydrant.

The awed Phallus police watched curiously as all four doors of the vehicle sprang open simultaneously and half a dozen black-suited men wearing narrow black ties, black shades, and grim authoritative expressions exited the car and strode briskly towards the throng of onlookers.

These men were a special and elite task force whose job it was to serve and protect the dignitaries, including the Resident himself, who would soon be arriving with the Gatorade. This squad of elite, fearless, well-muscled and single- but tiny-minded men were known as the Seacrest Service. All of the members of this fearless detail were well-qualified for their positions, having scored top marks in their grueling training on such television shows as *American Eyeful* and *Prancing with Celebs*. Their pride in their profession and their organizational skills were soon evident as they began demonstrating to the Phallus police the rudiments of crowd control. This involved aligning them in various formations such as the T, split-T, I, and Shotgun, all of which the puzzled members of the Phallus Police Department had trouble mastering, but did their best to comply with.

Down the street a little ways from the Cool Crooks Repository Building stood an open area known as DiGrassi Mall. It was essentially an open field which surrounded a cement pavillion, now cracked and pitted from lack of maintenance. DiGrassi Mall (named for its founder, the robber baron Thaddeus P. DiGrassi) had once been a popular centerpiece of the downtown Phallus shopping district. But upon the opening of the Little Giant Phallus Mall about two miles north on Toadstool Avenue about ten years ago, it had become less and less frequented until now there were only about half a dozen small forlorn-looking stores ringing the pavillion.

Nearest the sidewalk of Dutch Elm Street was a hot dog stand called Sirius Eats. Hung from its roof was a large plastic banner which read, "Try Our New Footlong Cheese and Egg Chili Dog—Only 99 Cents". Next to this reasonably attractive and well-kept establishment was a smaller, tawdrier shack with cracked and begrimed windows, which on a large hand-lettered sign proclaimed itself to be "Rocco's Socko Tacos". Across its dirty smudged exterior was strung a sheet of rather dingy white shelf paper, on which the following message had been hastily scrawled: "Try Our New Footlong Egg-and-Cheese Chili Tacos—Only 98 Cents".

Beyond these two somewhat dubious eating places and set further back towards the middle of the pavillion were, on the one side, a used produce market which called itself Strange Fruit. A sign in the window read, "Special Sale on Pre-Pinched Tomatoes—Only 69 Cents a Quart". This store, for some reason, was only open on holidays. Across from it was a rather dodgy looking second-hand fish and chips diner called Carp Diem. At the far end of the pavillion and facing it sat an electronic shop with a sign which read, "Virgin Immobile Phones". Under it hung a banner which read, "Check Out Our World's Largest Cell Phones—Now With Dolby Stereo Ringtones". Beside it was a puzzling little store, a stationary shop with blank sheets of paper covering its windows and a small sign which bore its appellation, Paper the House. The few passersby who looked at it curiously shook their heads and decided that it wasn't going anywhere.

The pavillion itself, as has been noted, was in disrepair, with numerous cracks in its concrete surface wide enough to allow plentiful amounts of grass and weeds to poke through. In its center was a large bronze statue of the DiGrassi Mall's founder, Thaddeus P. DiGrassi. The statue was heroic-sized and featured DiGrassi himself standing on a large cube-shaped base, in a running position, right leg on its surface and left leg extended high in the air. In its right hand was a large laundry bag which bore a \$, while its left arm was extended back over its shoulder, a large revolver in its hand. The base of the statue bore the inscription, "Thaddeus P. DiGrassi, 1605-1660." Below it was written the slogan, "He gave as good as he got." Around the statue were a few cracked and broken concrete benches which served mostly as receptacles for pigeon-droppings.

On the south side of the pavillion was a narrow concrete path which led past the Strange Fruit produce store into a grassy open park, its open exterior dotted with only a few low bushes and stunted trees.

As the hour for the Gatorade's arrival came closer, two PPD officers were dispatched to make sure that DiGrassi Mall and its adjoining park were free of suspicious characters. As the two policemen, Officers Toody and Muldoon, approached, the first thing they saw was three young women sitting together on one of the few usable park benches. They were feeding a multitude of pigeons by tossing in their direction large handfuls of chocolate-covered tortilla chips, which they had obtained remarkably cheaply from Rocco's Socko Tacos. As the officers approached more closely, they could see that the young women were all identically attired in white vinyl miniskirts with matching fringed white vinyl boots and black fishnet stockings. They each wore a western-style shirt, its top two pearl buttons open to reveal the upper portion of their ample bosoms. Around their throats were cute little plaid neckerchiefs, and they each wore a wide-brimmed, white vinyl cowboy hat.

"All right, ladies," said Muldoon, trying not to blush, "let's see some ID."

By way of reply, the girls pointed to the plastic nametags that were pinned to their shirts just over their left breasts. The nametags read, "Phallus Chowboy Cheerleader". Below it was the cheery message, "Howdy, y'all!" Below that appeared each girls' name in the manner of "Call Me Lindsay", "Call Me Paris", and "Call Me Taylor".

"What are you girls doing here?" ventured Officer Toody. "Come to see the big Gatorade?"

"That's right," replied Lindsay.

"We're here to audition for the Resident himself," added Paris.

"And if he likes us," put in Taylor, "we're never ever ever getting back together with the Chowboys."

"That's right," agreed Lindsay.

"They play too rough," Paris pouted prettily.

At that, Officer Muldoon scratched his head thoughtfully with his nightstick. "We-ell, I guess that's all right," he said slowly. "But don't you girls go getting yourselves into any trouble, or we'll have to run you in."

"Oh, we wouldn't dream of it," Taylor assured him.

"You have our word," Paris quickly added.

"Yeah, that's right," put in Lindsay. "I'm already on probation."

Satisfied, the two officers quickly moved towards the interior of the park where they noticed a tall, thin young man who was busily setting up a large tripod, upon which he placed a massive old-fashioned camera.

"Hey mister," yelled Officer Toody, "what do you think you're doing?"

"Getting ready to take pictures of the Gatorade, of course," replied the man with equanimity. "I got a permit from your Chief Furry. Wanna see it?" He produced from the pocket of his safari jacket a piece of paper with an official-looking seal on it.

Muldoon took the paper from him, gave it a cursory look, and then returned it. "Seems to be in order," he said. He looked around. "Is this all the equipment you've got?" he asked, noting that the only other evidence of photography was a small leather bag that hung from the man's shoulder.

"Nope," the man replied, and patted his ancient oversized camera. "Just my good ol' Yell & Howl."

Toody was suspicious. "I'm going to have to ask you to open that bag, sir," he said, an authoritative edge to this voice. "And while you're at it, let's see some ID."

The man quickly complied, unzipping the bag and producing a wallet from which he extracted a California Driver's License bearing the name J.S. MacGruder.

Toody looked at the ID, then nodded and checked the contents of the bag. Finding nothing suspicious, he zipped up the bag and told the man, "Well, everything seems in order."

"I've got to ask you, though," put in Muldoon, "Why'd you come all the way out here to photograph this Residential appearance in particular? I mean, he goes to California all the time, doesn't he?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "You got me there," he replied, "but my boss sent me, said it was important. He's got some weird idea that there's gonna be something special about this event, so he told me to be sure and get it all on film, and that's what I'm gonna do."

Intrigued, Muldoon asked him, "Just who is your boss, anyway?"

By way of reply, the man produced a business card from the inside pocket of his safari jacket and handed it to Muldoon.

Muldoon took it and read the following: "Nick Dixon, Plumbing Contractors". Beneath it was an address, a phone number, and the legend, "Serving San Clemente's Plumbing Needs Since 1648".

Satisfied that everything was kosher with the strange photographer, Toody and Muldoon turned away from him and proceeded further into the interior of DiGrassi Park.

"Ooh! Ooh! Francis!" exclaimed Toody as he excitedly tugged Muldoon's arm.

A look of concern crossed Muldoon's face. "What is it, Gunther?" he asked.

"I think I saw something moving in the bushes over there," Toody said in a low conspiratorial voice.

"Well, let's go investigate, then," said Muldoon. Then he added, "But just to be on the safe side, we'd better unholster our weapons."

“Yeah, good idea, Francis.”

So the two policemen, their guns drawn, stealthily advanced towards the bushes about ten yards away. Sure enough, there was something moving in the bushes, and as they drew closer, Toody called out, “All right, mister, freeze! And put your hands over your head!”

Confused, the figure in the bushes, which turned out to be a middle-aged man, did his best to comply. As he stood up straight with hands high in the air, Toody and Muldoon had a full view of his strange apparel. He was dressed in a loud Hawaiian shirt and baggy white Bermuda shorts that hung down nearly to his knobby knees. Below that he wore a pair of scuffed brown leather sandals, complete with mid-calf-length gray wool socks. Partially covering his torso was an ancient rumpled and stained brown raincoat which was completely unbuttoned. His face was middle-aged and nondescript, his sparse uncombed salt-and-pepper hair crowned with a Chicago Cubs baseball cap that was obviously too small.

“All right, mister,” said Muldoon, approaching the now stationary figure. “What are you doing sneaking around here in the bushes?”

In reply, the man slowly lowered his right arm and put a forefinger to his lips. “Shhh!” he said, in a loud stage whisper. “I’m under cover.”

Now it was Toody’s turn to scratch his head. “Yeah, I can see, you sneaking around in the bushes like that. But what we want to know is, what are you doing here?”

The man gave them an ingratiating smile. “Can I put my hands down now, fellas? I’m getting a cramp.”

Muldoon pondered this for a moment. “Yeah, I guess that’d be okay. But frisk him first, Gunther.”

Toody did as he was told. “He’s clean, Francis.”

Muldoon allowed himself a smile. "I'm not so sure about that," he said. "But it's okay, as long as he doesn't have any weapons, let him put his hands down."

The man did so with a sigh of relief. Then he said, slowly and carefully, "I'm reaching into my raincoat pocket now. I'm—going—to—show—you—my—credentials." And he moved his right hand in agonizing slow motion to an inner left pocket of his raincoat from which he produced, several seconds later, an official-looking booklet which he handed to Muldoon.

Muldoon took it and opened it to the first page, on which was neatly typed, "Lt. Frank Drebin, Police Squad." On the opposite side was a gold shield containing the words "Police Squad" and the number "1122".

Toody moved over a little closer and looked over Muldoon's shoulder. "Wow!" he said. "Police Squad! I've heard of them!"

With an odd look on his face, Muldoon handed the booklet back to Drebin. "Gosh, Lieutenant," he said in an almost boyish voice, "so you're out here on some kind of big secret mission?"

"You bet," said Drebin, now self-assured.

"Tell us! Tell us!" the two policemen cried excitedly.

"Well, if you must know..." began Drebin teasingly.

"Oh, we must! We must!" they chorused.

"Well," said Drebin again, "it has to do with the Residential Gatorade. You know the one that's due to pass here in—" He checked his watch—"about fifteen or twenty minutes from now. He leaned his head close to them. "Can you boys keep a secret?"

"Oh, we can! We can!" they whispered back.

"Okay," said Drebin, now using his hard cop-like voice. "Here's what's going down. Police Squad has received definite intelligence reports from our vast network of agents that a person or persons unknown is-slash-are going to strike at the Gatorade. We don't know specifically who their target is, but we think it's the head of the parade himself."

"Gosh," breathed the two policemen together.

"That's right," said Drebin. "And I'm here on the lookout for suspicious characters. Have you guys seen anybody that looked suspicious?"

Muldoon gave a puzzled frown. "Well, no, not really," he replied. "Just some girls on a park bench over there and a weird guy who's filming the event."

"And you're sure they're okay."

"Sure we're sure," said Toody.

"Okay then," said Drebin, extracting a cigar from the pocket of his raincoat and lighting it, "you boys run along now. I'm in charge here. By the way," he added, leaning close to the two officers and inadvertently blowing smoke in their faces, "I like you boys, so I'm gonna tell you the name of this very top-secret hush-hush operation. But don't tell anybody."

"Oh, we won't! We won't!" chorused the two cops.

He removed the cigar from his mouth and whispered in their ears, "Operation Allegate."

With that, he ducked back into the bushes, not saying another word, and leaving the two policemen to ponder this latest close encounter.

As they walked briskly out of the park toward Dutch Elm, Toody was the first to break their silence. "Gee, Francis," he said breathlessly, "what are we gonna do?"

"That's a good question, Gunther," replied Muldoon with a frown. Then he brightened. "I know! We'll go tell Sergeant Sekulevich. He'll know what to do."

"Good idea," said Toody.

And the two officers walked briskly out of the park looking for their sergeant.

3.

Meanwhile, in the unused storage room of the sixth floor of the Taxes Cool Crooks Repository Building on Dutch Elm Street, there was another knock at the door.

Torvald, who was getting used to it by this time (this was the third time he had been similarly disturbed), answered with a peremptory, "Yes?"

"Five minutes, Mr. Torvald," came the same bored but helpful voice. Then it added, "Break a leg."

Torvald, who had little knowledge of the theater, thought that a rather insulting remark, but gave no reply, having other things on his mind. He looked at his Swatch. The longer hand was indeed near the completion of its downward arc at the nadir of the instrument marked by the burlap patch. Regretfully, he closed his well-worn copy of *Crime and Punishment* and thrust it back into the left side pocket of his lucky brown corduroy jacket.

Standing up, he opened the portion of the window just above his weapon and stuck his head out into the cool gray air. Turning his gaze to the right and looking all the way down Dutch Elm Street, he could barely make out a sort of a blur that seemed to be very slowly heading his way. He strained his ears until he could barely make out the distant gunning and throbbing of powerful engines and the faint strains of raucous rock music.

Satisfied, he pulled his head back inside the room, re-closed the window section, and crouched down once more upon the floor, his right hand as if by its own volition wrapping itself around the stock of the Mankiller 2000 while his forefinger strayed toward the trigger housing.

It won't be long now, he thought grimly.

And indeed, on the sidewalks outside the building, the closely packed throngs of Phallus citizens were beginning to erupt in cheers and other exclamations of surprise as the Residential Gatorade gradually became both visible and recognizable. In the years to come, the people who witnessed this spectacle would write volumes about this occasion, many of them saying that even if the hemorrhagic events of the feral day had not occurred, it would still have been an event they would remember for the rest of their lives.

As the procession slowly proceeded up Dutch Elm towards the Taxes Cool Crooks Repository Building where Wee Hairy Torvald lay in wait, the first thing one saw, had one been lucky enough to be there, was a phalanx of six Phallus policemen astride powerful motorcycles, wearing knee-high jackboots and other black leather motorcycle apparel, and revving their engines to a thunderous pitch, even though they were only proceeding at a rate of about five miles per hour. Behind them proudly strutted the Gatorade's grand marshal, a huge alligator. Around its neck was a long leather leash grasped firmly by the alligator wrangler who marched proudly at its side.

Next came a large flatbed truck on which was securely fastened a huge glass-walled tank containing a phosphorescent green liquid which filled it to its brim. At the far end of the tank, a miniature diving board was attached, and around the tank capered four grinning midgets dressed in old-fashioned striped one-piece bathing suits. Every now and then one of the midgets would ascend the diving board, wave to the crowd, and dive into the liquid, where he would make wry faces and splash around for a bit before climbing out of the tank in deference to the next diver.

Behind this truck was another similar vehicle. On the four corners of its spacious flatbed were set four gilded cages, each containing a young bikini-clad girl—one white, one black, one Hispanic, and one Asian—all of whom were gyrating frenetically to the deafening, pulsing music that was issuing from a stereo system in the center of the bed. Four six-foot tall amplifiers were producing a cacophonous techno-disco beat.

Now It Can Be Told!

Even though the Gatorade was still several blocks away from the building in which Torvald crouched, the music's volume was already so high that Torvald absently reached into the right-hand pocket of his lucky brown corduroy jacket and pulled out a couple of pieces of moldy camembert, which he stuffed into his ears to avoid being distracted from the task at hand by the so-called music. Even through the camembert, however, he thought he could discern lyrics to the song that was now playing, a song he recalled that was a current hit as recorded by the newest Hyena Records recording star, Henna Fur Judson. As far as he could tell, the lyrics went something like this:

*Oh beautiful your spacious thighs
And ample weight you gain,
For hurtful sounding tragedies
Loved by your stupid brain,
O Mary Kay, O Mary Kay!
Todd shed his faith for thee.
And now you should try motherhood,
And cease your whining plea.*

[With deep and sincere apologies to the late, great Walt Kelly.]

Behind the sound truck was a squad of perhaps half a dozen blonde teenaged girls, all wearing identical but modified versions of the motorcycle cops' apparel—short black patent leather tasseled boots, black satin blouses and miniskirts, topped with cute little black motorcycle caps. Each carried a silver baton which they twirled furiously, threw into the air, and caught again as they marched in time to the music, much to the delight of the crowd. On their left upper arms they each wore a velvet armband emblazoned with two stylized intertwined versions of the letter S, blood-red against its black background, this being the logo of their school, Swindon Swanson High, located in nearby Scorched Earth.

Immediately behind the goose-stepping baton twirlers was another group of six motorcycle cops identical in every way to those which had preceded them. But behind them was truly a sight to behold!—a sleek, shiny, black 1691 Slinkin' Confidential which had been customized into an open car with three seats instead of the normal two. In the front seat, of course, was the driver Phil Leadfoot Gear, an old but faithful Seacrest Service retainer. Beside him sat another Seacrest Service man sporting the usual jutting jaw and gimlet eyes behind the official dark glasses. In the second seat however, were the dignitaries, the Dishonorable Goobernor of Taxes, Johnny Cannoli. He was frequently rumored to be in bed with the Morphea. This however could not be verified, as the Goobernor had steadfastly refused to discuss his sleeping habits with anyone, including his long-suffering wife, Smellie, who rode beside him waving a little hesitantly to the gathered multitudes. He was much beloved by the people, though, being a native son hailing from the west Texas town of El Pasta.

Behind the Cannolis in the third seat were the stars of the show—Resident and Mrs. Shawn F. Threnody. The Resident was resplendent in his best dark-blue Marx Bros. suit and conversative red-striped tie. The tie was rather obtrusively clipped to his shirt front with a large solid-gold tie clip which portrayed a building on its left side and an open book on its right. It was emblazoned with the legend “PS 109”. The Resident wore it proudly, for it was the only school he had ever graduated from. As he waved to the crowd, he sported a million-dollar smile to go with a two-million dollar shag-cut hairstyle. On the middle finger of his left hand, next to his rather ostentatious diamond-studded gold wedding band, was his famous benzine ring denoting his membership in the Benevolent and Protective Order of Benzines. As he waved and grinned at the crowd, he often extended this finger towards them, so that the curious might get a better look.

Beside him was the country's darling, Mrs. Shawn F. Threnody, the former Mandolin Groovier. Mandy, as she was called by practically everyone, was wearing for the occasion her best pink clown suit, complete with size-16 pumps. Her ensemble was completed by the cute little pink fez she wore perched precariously on top of her blue beehive hairdo. Although she was only about half the Resident's age, at a mere three score and ten, she had already borne him two beautiful children, Adeline and little Shawn, Jr. Today, however, she was alone with the Resident and squeezed his arm occasionally, nearly cutting off his circulation as she grinned and nodded to the thrilled crowds. Always the madcap, with her free hand she showered the onlookers with handfuls of Footsie Rolls and Footsie Roll Pops that she dispensed from a large basket in her lap, and which had been provided by the manufacturer himself, J.R. Footsie, for the occasion.

Behind the Resident's car was the not-quite-as-luxurious vehicle bearing the Ice Resident, Swindon Swanson, and his wife Whirlybird. Swanson was wearing his trademark white ten-gallon hat from which he constantly sipped Lone Star beer from a straw that connected it to the keg concealed in his hat. He too waved to the crowd while flashing a series of slightly-dazed smiles.

The rest of the Gatorade was really not worth mentioning. There were the usual cars containing the city's officials and notables, followed by several cars containing journalists of all stripes and color. But the rearmost vehicle was an old and rather creaky bus in which rode the stringers, the freelance journalists. There was nothing really unusual about this bus, except for the lone figure that sat perched atop it cross-legged in the lotus position and staring straight ahead.

This was none other than that famous gonad journalist, Fisher S. Frampton. He had removed himself to the roof after complaining that his fellow passengers were all snakes and lizards, and besides that smelled bad, and he needed the fresh air. The other passengers on the bus took surprisingly little offense at his remarks, for he was well-known to be a frequent and copious user of hallucinogens.

Now he sat on the roof of the bus, a pleasant smile on his face as he stared straight head towards the beginning of the procession. "By golly," he remarked casually to his imaginary companion, a large and rather evil-looking rabbit named Frank, "there's something you don't see every day." He directed Frank's gaze forward with a pointed finger. "Look there," he continued, "a whirling cluster of knives. And they seem to be heading straight for the Residential lame-o-scene." Frank made no reply, but grinned an evil grin.

4.

A few minutes earlier and about fifty yards further up the procession, the requisite number of Seacrest Service men trotted obediently behind Threnody's lame-o-scene, looking for all the world like a pack of hunting dogs at heel. Some of them were even acting similarly to their canine counterparts as they were panting heavily with their tongues hanging out of their mouths. This was probably due to the fact that most of them were rather out of condition and had not gotten much rest the night before.

In their midst directly behind the Residential car was their leader, a Mr. Bent Quill. His particular job was the protection of Mrs. Mandy Threnody, and as he trotted behind the car watching her cute little pink fez bobbing up and down atop her fashionable beehive hairdo with its tassel fluttering in the breeze, Quill put his mind on automatic pilot as he thought back to the previous summer.

He had been on duty at the Threnody Compound which was located in Hyena's Sport, a small community just off the coast of Marsha's Shoefits which was located just down the road from that exclusive resort for the rich and famous, Marsha's Shinguard.

He was alone on the private beach that lay just behind the main Threnody house with Mrs. Threnody, who was sitting on a beach towel and wearing a fetching one-piece but nonetheless revealing pink swimsuit, while Quill rubbed Coppertone onto her bare back and shoulders.

About twenty yards up the beach from where they were sitting were a couple of boys playing at whatever ten-year-old boys play at during the long hot summer days. It was just before the Fourth of July and one of the boys, with a devilish grin, chose this moment to ignite the fuse of an unusually large and powerful cherry bomb.

The resulting explosion delighted the boys but caused Quill to instinctively dive at Mrs. Threnody, knocking her flat on her back and covering her body with his. His groin was next to hers. His breast was next to hers. His lips—well, you get the picture.

After several minutes of this, Mrs. Threnody had had enough. “I think the danger has passed, Mr. Quill,” she said evenly. “You can get off me now.”

As he rather shamefacedly did so she picked herself up, and with a little huff she turned and walked back up toward the house to shower off the sand and the Quill smell.

Quill's pleasant reverie was broken at that moment by a sort of gentle whoosing, whirring sound, as if someone had turned on a large exhaust fan. Clearing his head and looking up, he saw to his horror what he could only describe as a whirling cluster of knives flying through the air and fast approaching the back seat of the Confidential where the Threnodys, unmindful of what was occurring, smiled and waved to the crowd.

Instinctively, Quill jumped onto the trunk of the lame-o-scene and, spread-eagled, began to attempt to claw his way toward Mrs. Threnody, just as the cluster of knives found their target, embedding themselves in the chest and groin of the Resident. As the grin on his face literally melted into nothingness, Mrs. Threnody began to scream as the blood began to spurt. Soon the entire car as well as Mrs. Threnody's best pink clown suit was awash in blood. By the time Quill was able to reach Mrs. Threnody, she was screaming, “Look what they've done to my suit, Ma!” while the Resident had slumped over in his seat, apparently unconscious.

Now It Can Be Told!

In the front passenger seat, Seacrest Service Agent Floyd Smellerman had finally stopped rubbernecking and noticed the screams, confusion, and blood coming from the back seat. Turning his head to Gear, he commented perceptively, "The Resident's been hit, Gear! Get us out of here!"

Obligingly, Leadfoot stomped on the break, bringing the car, as well as the rest of the procession, to a screeching halt. Turning to Goobornor Cannoli, Smellerman said, "You know the territory. Where's the nearest hospital?" Then he added, "Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him?" apparently unsure about which play he was in.

Cannoli turned to Smelly. "You were a nurse before we got married," he prompted. "Take a look at him."

She obligingly turned and bent over her seat back towards the Resident. "He's still alive," she said after a few seconds. "But I would lay you odds on how much longer."

"We've got to move fast," said Cannoli to Smellerman. "There's only one hospital we can get to in the next fifteen minutes or so, but it's a good-news-bad-news sort of situation."

"How do you mean?" asked Smellerman.

"Well, it's only about ten minutes away, just around the corner, onto the freeway ramp, and then you're practically there," said Cannoli.

"So what's the bad news?" asked Smellerman.

"Well, the hospital is Barkland Veterinary Hospital, but I imagine if we get there in time they can stitch him up just like they would a dog or a cat."

"That's good enough for me," replied Smellerman, then he turned to Gear. "You heard the man, Leadfoot. Floor it. And this time use the accerlerator."

Now It Can Be Told!

Within seconds, the powerful engine of the custom-made Slinkin' Confidential led out a mighty roar, its tires squealing on the pavement, as Gear expertly steered it out of the Gatorade and shot around the corner towards the freeway.

Within a minute or two, they were already hitting the freeway on-ramp at over 40MPH, with agent Quill still hanging on to the trunk of the car for dear life almost literally by his fingernails. Fortunately his ordeal did not last long as the car, quickly accelerating to a speed of 80MPH, took less than 10 minutes to careen into the barking lot behind Barkland Veterinary Hospital where the emergency entrance was located.

Agent Smellerman had used the car phone en route to phone the hospital so that by the time the car had screeched to a halt and its occupants were hurriedly getting out of the blood-soaked car, Agent Quill gallantly helping Mrs. Threnody to exit, two men in white hospital attire, one large and beefy, the other small and wiry, had hurried out of the emergency entrance with a stretcher on which they expertly and quickly placed the unconscious body of Resident Threnody.

"Not to worry," said the large beefy one, "I'm Doberman and he's Poodle. We'll get your guy into the OR before you can blink." And with that they hurried off, carrying Threnody on the stretcher between them.

Quill quickly took charge. "Okay," he said briskly. "Here's what's gonna happen. Leadfoot, you take the Cannolis and Mrs. Threnody to the Scorched Earth Airport where Hair Farce One will be waiting for them. Smellerman, you're to go with the Resident. I want you to secure the emergency exit and make sure that it's safe. We don't know who's involved in this attempt on Threnody's life or how many there are. So as soon as you see Threnody safely into the OR, guard the emergency entrance. If any unauthorized personnel try to gain entrance, don't hesitate to shoot to kill."

"Gotcha, Quill," said Smellerman, briskly saluting, then hurrying after Doberman and Poodle.

Quill watched as Leadfoot began to back the car out of the parking lot, then walked around to the front entrance of the hospital where he climbed six cement steps onto the hospital's front porch, then went through the main entrance into the reception area.

It apparently being a slow day for the hospital, there was no one waiting in the reception area. Behind a large desk, a bored-looking woman was alternately buffing her nails and glancing at an open copy of *Modern Scream* magazine which lay on her desk.

As Quill entered the room, she looked up at him and, with a chirpy voice which belied her bored expression she exclaimed, "Welcome to Barkland Veterinary Hospital. How may I be of service?"

Quill looked at her grimly, then removed his shades so she could get the full effect of the steely glint in his eyes. "This hospital is going into lockdown," he snarled. Then he paused, "Ms..."

"I'm Ms. Beagle sir, at your service," she said in the same chirpy voice, "and if we're going into lockdown, I guess there's no need for me to hang around." Almost magically she produced a hat, coat, and purse from somewhere under the desk, then stood up and began to walk towards the door. As she passed Quill, she turned and looked at him. "You know, you're kinda cute." Producing a card from her coat pocket, she handed it to Quill, saying, "Why don't you give me a call sometime?"

Quill blushed and said nothing, but accepted the card and quickly jammed it into a jacket pocket.

As Ms. Beagle opened the door to leave the hospital, a large man built like a block of granite muscled his way in before Quill could react. Quickly turning and locking the entrance door behind him, the man turned to Quill and said in a guttural voice, "Special Agent Tongueblood, Feral Burrow of Instigation." He took something from an inside jacket pocket and flashed it briefly at Quill.

Quill had a momentary uneasy feeling that he was looking at a mirror reflection of himself. The agent before him was wearing the same kind of dark suit and shades and was approximately the same size and shape as Quill himself.

"I'm in charge here," continued Tongueblood. "We heard about the attempt on Threnody's life and figured he'd be brought here, it being the only hospital within range of the attack."

"Whaddaya mean, *you're* in charge?" said Quill harshly, recovering himself somewhat. "It's our job, we proud band of blubbers, to protect the Resident."

"Oh yeah?" said Tongueblood, softening a bit. "Kinda looks like your guys blew it, didn't they? So step aside, little man. Like I said, I'm taking charge here. I've got orders from the Director himself, Gay Headgear Hoofer."

"Oh yeah?" was Quill's brilliant comeback. "Well, I've got orders from the head of the Seacrest Service himself, McAleister Crowley."

"Oh yeah?" responded Tongueblood a bit monotonously. "Well, my boss can lick your boss."

"Are you kidding? My boss can wipe the floor with your boss."

"Cannot." "Can too."

"Double cannot!"

Quill's voice suddenly changed. "Hey, look out there!" he said, pointing to the window. "Isn't that Alvin Karpis?"

"What? Where?" said Tongueblood, turning to the window and drawing his gun. "I've been after that guy for years!"

As Tongueblood turned toward the window, Quill quickly drew his pistol and used the butt of it to deliver a vicious blow to the back of Tongueblood's head. Tongueblood gave a faint moan and fell to the floor.

“Ha!” exclaimed Quill, holstering his gun and spitting on Tongueblood before continuing, “That’ll teach you.” He went over to the entrance door and propped it open with one of Tongueblood’s shoes, then took the unconscious FBI agent’s arms and dragged him unceremoniously out the door and onto the porch, where he positioned Tongueblood just right. Then he delivered a swift kick to his kidneys, which sent the hapless agent tumbling down the stairs to the sidewalk below where he settled into a crumped heap, still unconscious.

“Ha!” said Quill again, removing Tongueblood’s shoe from the door and hurling it carelessly in his direction. Then he went back inside, closed and locked the door, and looked around in triumph.

“Nothing else happening here,” he muttered to himself. “I’d better go back and see how they’re coming along with Threnody.” So saying, he passed Ms. Beagle’s desk and went down the hall towards the OR.

But about halfway there he changed his mind. “Hmm,” he thought to himself, “awfully quiet around here. I’d better go check on Smellerman.”

When he reached the barking garage, inside the emergency entrance the first thing he saw was that the massive garage-style door had been pulled down and locked tight. The second thing he saw was agent Smellerman sitting on a folding chair nonchalantly cleaning his service revolver.

“How’s it going, Smellerman?” said Quill, eyeing the gun with some apprehension.

“There was a little disturbance,” said Smellerman cheerfully, “but nothing I couldn’t handle.”

“What kind of disturbance?” said Quill, now even more apprehensive.

“You wanna take a look?” said Smellerman almost proudly.

“A look at what?”

"You'll see." Smellerman rose to his feet and led Quill around to a side door that opened onto the ramp to the emergency entrance.

"See?" said Smellerman, waving his hand toward the ramp. "Everything's all quiet now."

Quill looked toward the ramp and gasped with astonishment. What he beheld was three ambulances parked with extreme carelessness on the ramp which was littered with dead bodies of various sizes, sexes, and species.

"What the hell did you do, Smellerman?" cried Quill.

"Just following your orders, Agent Quill, sir," said Smellerman, now not quite as sure of himself. "You said that if any authorized persons tried to gain entrance I was to shoot to kill."

"Smellerman, you asswipe," screamed Quill, "I said unauthorized. *Un*-authorized."

Smellerman scratched his head in dismay. "Oops," he said, "must have misheard you. My bad."

"So just who or what did you kill?" demanded Quill.

"Let me see." Smellerman ticked it off on his fingers. "Three ambulance drivers, three old ladies, two puppies, and a kitten. Yeah, I guess that about accounts for it."

"I'm surprised you had enough ammunition," replied Quill sarcastically.

"Oh, that's okay, I always carry a few spare clips."

Quill buried his hands in his face for a few seconds, obviously trying to regain control of himself. Finally he looked up at Smellerman. "Go get those two guys. What were their names again?"

"I think they were Doberman and Poodle," supplied Smellerman helpfully.

“Okay, just go get ‘em and tell ‘em to clean up this mess and be sure they don’t talk about it to anyone.”

“Aye-aye sir,” said Smellerman, saluting briskly and then hurrying off.

5.

Quill turned and strode back towards the OR, wondering what else could happen. Within a few minutes, he had reached the OR. Its door being closed and locked, he retreated to the waiting room where he sat down on a vinyl covered couch and prepared to wait. Idly, he picked up a month-old copy of *Bitter Gnomes with Hard-Ons* and absently began leafing through it.

A few minutes later, Smellerman joined him and wordlessly sat down beside him on the couch and began reading the latest copy of *Murder Trend* magazine. He had just gotten to the article entitled “*Murder Trend’s* Mass Murderer of the Year” when the door opened and a tall, stately woman in white entered.

“You are agents Quill and Smellerman, I believe?” she said upon entering. The two men got up and nodded in assent. “I’m Nurse Bassett. Cleo Bassett. You can call me Cleo. As you can probably see by my blood-stained body,” she continued, “I am the nurse who assisted with the procedures performed on Resident Threnody. It was a new experience for me, since we don’t get many humans in here.”

The two agents regarded her for a few moments without speaking. Finally Quill said, “Well, don’t keep us in suspense! What happened? Is Threnody still alive?”

“Oh, yes,” she replied, “In fact, he’s recovering quite nicely. Would you like to see him?”

“Yes, of course,” said Quill.

“Right this way, gentlemen,” she said, opening the door that led from the waiting room to the OR.

As the two agents entered the OR, the first thing they saw was two men standing on one side of the room, one of them wearing a blood-stained surgical smock and the other one a rather ordinary gray suit and tie. They had been having a whispered conversation, but looked up when the two agents entered.

The second thing they saw was a small cot on the side of the room furthest from the entrance. On this cot sat a figure dressed only in white boxer shorts. It had a peculiar appearance with which neither Quill nor Smellerman was familiar.

"Nurse Bassett broke the silence. "Agents Quill and Smellerman," she began formally, "I'd like you to meet Dr. Jack Russell—" here she indicated the man in the surgical smock, "our chief of surgery. And this—" she said, indicating the man in the gray suit, "is our Chief of Stuff, Mr. Tom Manx."

The agents mumbled a greeting to which Russell responded with a brief wave of his hand, and Manx gave a cheery "Hi-de-ho!"

Nurse Bassett then gracefully withdrew, saying only, "Call me if you need me, Dr. Russell," before exiting back into the waiting room.

Quill and Smellerman looked at the two men, then at the figure on the cot, then back to the two men. "Well," said Quill, "what have you done with Threnody? Your nurse tells me he came through surgery all right." "Well," said Dr. Russell, "yes and no. I guess you might say this is a good-news-bad-news kind of deal." "The good news?" prompted Quill.

"The good news is that the Resident is going to make a complete recovery," said Russell. "We took all the knives out of his body—" here Quill nudged Smellerman with an elbow, causing him to give a little chuckle as Russell said to him in an aside, "Boy, didn't he just look like a bloody pincushion, though?" Then, turning back to both the agents Russell continued, "Miraculously, not one of the dozen or so knives we pulled from his body injured a vital organ. The only thing really wrong with him was that he was on the point of bleeding to death very soon, so we gave him massive transfusions and his vital signs stabilized very quickly, and almost immediately he regained consciousness."

"That's great," responded Quill. "But what's the bad news?"

Here, Manx shuffled his feet uncomfortably, but manfully took up the narrative. "You see, gentlemen," he began in an apologetic voice, "this is a veterinary hospital. All we had was animal blood and naturally there was no time to get any human blood from the nearest blood bank, which is several miles away."

"So you see," Russell took it from there, "we had to give him dog's blood. Now this had never been tried before, so we also gave him massive doses of antibiotics to attempt to prevent his body rejecting the dog's blood."

Smellerman could contain himself no longer. "So look, Doc," he pleaded, "don't keep us in suspense. Where is Threnody? When can we see him?"

Russell pointed to the strange figure on the cot. "You're looking at him," was all he would say. The two agents scrutinized the figure more carefully. It seemed smaller and more compact than Threnody had been, the arms and legs were definitely shorter and the fingers and toes seemed to be growing together so that they more resembled paws. On his head the shock of reddish-brown hair was still evident, but somehow it had grown thicker and coarser. Its liquid brown eyes seemed larger than before and its nose and mouth protruded into the beginnings of what could only be called a muzzle. Its lips seemed larger and fuller and it was panting in a curious but rhythmic way, its seemingly longer tongue hanging out of its mouth. As it was clad only in boxer shorts, the numerous sutures Russell and Bassett had made to close its wounds had begun to sprout thick luxurious patches of coarse reddish-brown fur.

Quill was overwhelmed. Smellerman was aghast. Finally Quill managed, "You're telling me that this is Resident Threnody?"

"Yes," admitted Russell simply. "It was either that or let him die."

Manx broke in. "Of course, we had no way of knowing what the results of this procedure would be. After all, it's never been tried before."

Quill took a deep breath and steadied himself. "You're telling me," he said evenly, "that you've just turned the Resident of the Unified Straights into a—a—dog's body?"

"We're afraid so," admitted Russell. "As we said, it wasn't our intention."

Smellerman spoke up, the disbelief plain in his eyes. "So, can he speak? Can he understand us?"

At that, Russell walked over to the cot, reached under it, and pulled out a large dog dish full of water, saying, "Here, boy."

As he did so, "Yip yap, woof woof," said Threnody, immediately jumping off the cot and onto all fours as he started lapping up the water.

"Good boy," responded Russell, patting him on the head.

Smellerman turned to Quill. "All right," he said, "you're in charge, Mr. Quill. So what are we gonna do?"

Quill thought for a minute, then shook his head. "This is not good," he said to no one in particular, "not good at all." Then with a manly effort he snapped himself back into agent mode. "All right," he said, putting as much authority in his voice as he could muster, "here's what's going to happen. First of all, I want everyone in this hospital to sign a non-disclosure agreement."

"That's easy," replied Manx. "You think we want this to get out? That we turned the Resident of the Unified Straights into a dog? No problem."

"Good," said Quill. "Smellerman, when we're done here, I want you to get on the phone, call all of the media outlets and Hair Farce One, which should be halfway to Waxington, AC by now. Tell everyone that Threnody died on the operating table. Mrs. Threndoy should be on the plane, along with Ice Resident Swindon Swanson and his wife Whirlybird. When they get to Waxington, have them met by someone authorized to install Swanson as the next Oaf of Office."

“Got it,” replied Smellerman, checking his notebook and making a few notes. “Judge Vera Cruz should be available to swear at Swanson.” Then he closed the notebook and replaced it in his pocket. “But sir,” he added, “don’t you think it’s cruel to tell Mrs. Threndoy that her husband is dead when in all actuality he’s still alive?”

Quill scratched his chin thoughtfully before replying. “What, and tell her her husband’s now a dog? You don’t know her like I know her. To put it bluntly, she’s not the swiftest horse in the stable.” His eyes got a faraway misty look to them as he continued. “Remember last spring when she organized that Easter egg hunt for underprivileged children on the Blanc House lawn?” He chuckled a bit with the memory. “Somehow, she forgot to make sure that the eggs had been boiled. The groundskeepers were cleaning egg yolk out of the Rose Garden for weeks.”

Smellerman nodded and smiled. “Yes, but the kids had a lot of fun anyway.”

Quill snapped his attention back to the present. “Now,” he said, “what we need is a body. Smellerman, go see if you can find Doberman. Find out if they’ve disposed of—” here he looked at Manx and Russell— “that, ahem, mess you created?”

“I gotcha, boss,” said Smellerman, and hurried out of the room.

Quill turned to Manx and Russell. “Thank you, gentlemen, for your efforts and your understanding in this matter. We’ll have those non-disclosure agreements drawn up very soon for you to sign. Until then,” he waved his hand dismissively, “just go on doing what you usually do. And take my word for it, I’ll make sure that no one in this facility is harmed by what happened.”

Looking relieved, Manx and Russell exited, never to be seen again.

Within a few minutes Smellerman returned with Doberman in tow.

“Mr. Doberman,” said Quill in his most authoritative voice, “you are a loyal citizen, are you not?”

Doberman nodded.

"And you are willing to do anything to serve your country, is that right?"

Doberman again nodded.

"Have you and Poodle finished cleaning up that mess yet?"

"Well, just about," said Doberman. "Poodle's cleanin' the blood off the entrance ramp and I'm gettin' ready to dispose of the bodies in the pet sematary out back. Anyone asks, they never got here. Actually," he said with a grin, "you did us a favor, Agent Smellerman. When Manx finds out he's missing three amulance drivers, who do ya think's gonna get promoted." Without waiting for a reply he continued. "Me n'Poodle, that's who. We'll be drivin' around all day 'stead of cleanin' everythin' in sight."

"Good, good," replied Quill, "but I wonder if you could do us one more favor. You remember what Threnody looked like when he was admitted here, right?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"Anyone of those three dead ambulance drivers resemble him at all?"

Doberman considered the matter. "Well, one of them, name of Pomeranian, was about the same size and shape. I see what you're gettin' at. We could get this mortician I know, Crazy Morty, to do him up so that he looks more like the Res and dress him up in Threnody's clothes, which we've still got."

"Glad to see you're taking this the right way, Doberman," said Quill warmly. "Then all you gotta do is put him in a coffin. We'll take him out to the airport. And Smellerman will radio Hair Farce One to come back as soon as they drop off the Swansons and Mrs. Threnody. By the time the plane gets back, probably this evening sometime, you'll have the body all ready to go. We'll tell everyone it's Threnody and no one will be the wiser. Oh, and one more thing, Doberman. Can you fake up some X-rays we can take back with us, you know, to show the folks at home? And we'll need a death certificate."

"Sure thing," replied Doberman with a wink. "We do it all the time."

Now much relieved, the agents left the OR area and walked back up the long hall towards reception. "I guess it was fortunate after all," began Quill, by way of apology for his earlier outburst, "that you took care of those ambulance drivers. That body is sure gonna come in handy."

"Yeah," replied Smellerman, "I guess it just goes to show, trust your instincts."

As the two men reached the reception area, they saw Nurse Basset at the desk that Ms. Beagle had vacated.

"Oh, hi fellas," she said as she saw them enter. "Everything all taken care of? You know, this is not my usual job. I can't think what's happened to Ms. Beagle." Ignoring this last, Quill and Smellerman went over to her desk. "I'm just curious," said Smellerman. "What's going to happen to Threnody now? I mean, we obviously aren't going to take him with us."

"Oh, that's okay," said Cleo. "If you boys don't want him, we'll just do what we always do." She pointed to a sign above the reception desk which had hitherto gone unnoticed by the two agents. It read, "All Animals Not Claimed Within 30 Days Will be Sold."

"I see," said Quill. "that sounds reasonable."

"Yeah," said Cleo. "We've got a good side business going with our unclaimed animals. We ship them to a city down in the southeast part of the state. It's right on the Gulf of Mosquito. Houndston. Maybe you've heard of it? It's close to Gulf Western and Porpoise Frisky. The people down there just love animals, especially dogs. We'll put a collar on him and attach a note that reads, 'Hello, my name is Fido, please give me a good home' or something like that. They'll just eat it up down there."

"Well, that's reassuring," said Smellerman.

"Yeah, we'll be shipping him down in a couple of days," continued Cleo. "Dr. Russell said the change should be complete by then."

"Wow," said Smellerman. "You mean he's gonna look like a dog just like any other dog?" He leaned over and spoke to her confidentially. "Just between you and me, what kind of a dog do you think he'll turn out to be?"

Cleo gave a little chuckle. "With his background and heritage, I imagine he'll probably make a fine Irish setter."

They all had a good laugh at that, then Quill spoke up more seriously. "Well, Cleo, good to meet you and all that, but we've got to be going. Duty calls, youknow."

"Sure, boys, I understand," she said. "But here, take my card." She opened the desk drawer, took out a card, and handed it to Quill. "Call me next time you're in the neighborhood. Maybe we can have some fun together."

"Sure thing," said Quill, pocketing the card. "Come on Smellerman, let's go."

As they strolled out of the main entrance together into the late afternoon sun, Smellerman looked at Quill. He had a worried look on his face as he said, "Do you think we're gonna get away with it?"

Quill turned to him. "Why, Agent Smellerman, I'm surprised at you. Imagine anybody thinking the Seacrest Service would ever do anything dishonest."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, Agent Quill. I guess I'm just being paranoid."

Quill put his arm around Smellerman's shoulder. "That's okay," he said reassuringly. "Come on, let's find a taxi. I wanna get back to the hotel and have a few stiff drinks, a good dinner, and maybe find some girls. After all, the body probably won't be ready to load onto Hair Farce One for the trip back to Waxington till late tonight."

"Sounds good to me," said Smellerman as he sprinted out of the parking lot to try to hail down a cab.

6.

Several hours earlier at about the same time that an alert Fisher Frampton had noticed the deadly whirling knives of doom, Chief Les Furry was sitting behind the wheel of his police car in the Gatorade about halfway between Frampton's vantage point atop the stringers' bus and the Residential lame-o-scene itself. He too was quick to spot the whirling cluster of razor-sharp instruments of destruction and watched with relish, and not a little mustard, as the knives unerringly swooped down on their intended victim's chest and abdomen, turning Resident Threnody into a veritable Trevi Fountain of blood. As he watched the Resident slump forward in his seat, apparently on the way out, Chief Furry rubbed his hands together and allowed himself a heapin' helpin' of glee. Then a few seconds later, all business once more, he turned himself to the task at hand.

Picking up the hand mike of his car radio, he depressed the speak button and said in an authoritative voice, "Central Dispatch, this is Chief Furry. Do you read me? Over."

A momentary crackling from the speaker ensued and then a diffident tenor voice was heard, "Yeah, Chief. Read you loud and clear. What's up?"

"Listen carefully, Yablonski," said the Chief, "I'm in the Gatorade on Dutch Elm Street. There's been an attempt on Resident Threnody's life and it looks like it's pretty bad. From where I sit, it looks like they're rushing him to a hospital. Meanwhile, all hell's broken loose here. People are running up and down screaming their heads off, and our boys are having a devil of a time restoring order. However, I've got a prime suspect. Over."

"With ya so far, Chief," came the nonchalant reply. Whaddaya want me to do?"

“Goddamnit, Yablonski, the least you can do is follow procedure and say ‘Over’ when you’re finished. Anyway, I’m gonna give you a description of the prime suspect. Now take this down.” Furry took the next few seconds describing Torvald in detail to Yablonski. Then he concluded with, “Read that back to me, Yablonski. Over.”

Yablonski complied, adding a rather snarky ‘Over’ as he finished.

Ignoring that, Furry continued. “Now here’s what I want you to do. Get a hold of Sergeant Sekulevich and have him send two men in a patrol car to the Taxes Cool Crooks Repository Building at the corner of Dutch Elm and Poison Oak. I think the suspect may still be in the building. Now this is important, Yablonski. Just in case he gives them the slip, put out an APB with his description. He is apparently not in possession of a motor vehicle and not very well-heeled. So have the bus and train stations watched and phone in his description to the airport just in case. You got all that, Yablonski? Over.”

“Got it Chief, yadda yadda yadda. Under.”

Sighing, Furry replaced the mike, and decided to calm his nerves with a little light lunch. Swerving his police car out of the Gatorade, he turned around and sped southward down Dutch Elm, barely missing several screaming pedestrians in the process.

A few minutes later he had pulled into a parking space about a mile and a half away in front of his favorite restaurant, Hog Heaven, located at the corner of South Pork Street and West Bacon Avenue. Upon entering the restaurant he said, rubbing his hands expectantly, “Let’s see, what do I want today? I think a double order of ribs, potato salad, macaroni salad, baked beans, corn on the cob, cole slaw, and corn bread, with a couple pints of Lone Star ought to do the trick.”

Meanwhile—even a few minutes earlier than that—from his window in the vacated storage room on the sixth floor of the Taxes Cool Crooks Repository Building, Torvald also rubbed his hands together with something approaching glee as he watched the whirling knives of doom he had launched from the Mankiller 2000 XKE execute a perfect mid-air arc and then plunge unerringly into the unsuspecting body of Resident Threnody as he sat in his powerful customized lame-o-scene waving to the assembled multitudes.

As Threnody pitched forward in his seat, apparently going to meet his maker, Torvald would have applauded the skill and acumen by which he had achieved his objective, were it not for the nagging thought that there might be repercussions occurring from this deed that would not be to his liking. Accordingly, he lost no time in breaking down the Mankiller into its components, stuffing them hurriedly into his duffel bag and, placing it securely across his shoulders, made haste for the door to the storage room.

Once he had unlocked and opened it, he decided not to wait for the ancient creaky elevator, but flew down the stairs taking them three at a time, being careful to replace them on his way down.

By the time he had reached the third floor, however, he found his mind settling into a more rational mode. “What am I doing?” he thought. “Didn’t Chief Furry give me a map to this place knowing full well what I was going to do here?” His mood lightened considerably as he thought, “Hell, I’m probably safer here than I am on the street.”

As he then began descending the last two flights of the staircase at a more normal speed, and with a more nonchalant attitude, he realized by the time he reached the lobby that Residential assassination had given him a prodigious appetite and a searing thirst. So it was fortunate that upon crossing the lobby towards the front entrance of the building that he spied a door just to the right of the building’s entrance that he had heretofore not seen. A sign above it read, “Cool Crooks Cafeteria”.

"That's for me," he thought, and quickly entered. The room was filled with a number of tables and chairs, at which maybe a dozen people were heartily gulping down what seemed to Torvald to be some sort of food. He went over to the counter and hastily scanned the blackboard on which were written the dishes comprising the menu du jour. His heart fairly leaped in his chest when he saw one of his favorite dishes of all time written in simple white chalk upon its unyielding black surface: "Spam and Vienna Sausage Melt with Chili con Queso. Only \$1.99." Quickly and reverently he made that his order, along with a large Mr. Pibb with which to wash it down.

He then quickly found an empty table close to the counter but at least fifteen or twenty feet from the entrance. Sitting down, he removed the duffel bag from his shoulders and strapped it onto the back of his chair. Within a few minutes his order was ready.

But his reward was not to be. Before he had taken more than a few slurps of the chili con queso and a scant gulp of his Mr. Pibb, his peripheral vision strayed to the cafeteria entrance, through which he noted with some dismay two uniformed policemen entering. Even more alarming was the fact that even though his table was quite a distance from the entrance, they looked neither to the right nor the left, but walked straight over to him.

Once again, Torvald's paranoia took center stage. "Damn that Furry!" he thought. "This time I know for sure he's sold me up the river. The best I can do is to try to brazen it out." And so, putting on his best and most fetching stupid grin, he looked up at the approaching officers and said, "Good afternoon. Anything I can help you with?"

The two officers in full Phallus police uniform, one of them a large beefy black man, the other a smaller younger nervous-looking white man, each took a chair at Torvald's table and sat down.

By way of introduction, the large black man intoned in a deep voice, "I'm Officer Bill Blake and this is my partner, Officer Jack Milton. Your description fits a suspect we've been looking for, a suspect in the attempted murder of Resident Shawn F. Threnody. Let's see some identification."

Torvald had no choice but to produce from his greasy wallet his driver's license which he handed to Blake.

Blake nodded knowingly and then handed the license back to Torvald.

Torvald by this time was becoming more than a little panicky. His mind, running on adrenalin-driven overdrive, caused him to blurt out, "How do I know you're really policemen anyway? Let's see your badges."

At this, Milton stiffened and stood up. "Badgers?" he fairly screamed, it being evident that he was a little hard of hearing. "We don't need no stinking badgers. Who do you think we are? Animal control?"

Blake shot him a pitying look. "Calm down, Jack," he said reassuringly. He only wants to see our IDs."

"Oh," said Milton, relenting and sitting down again. "That's very different. Never mind."

Blake and Milton then showed their badges and accompanying identification to Torvald, who by this time was at his wit's end as his following speech attested. "Okay," he said, "but I need to see two forms of identification with pictures." As the officers scrambled for more proof, he said, "Oh, and I'll need to see at least one major credit card and proof of residence."

This sent the two officers scrambling for a few moments to produce the needed documentation before Blake stood up and yelled, "Now cut that out!" Then he said in a more measured tone, "You're under arrest for attempted murder and you're coming with us."

Torvald, grasping at straws, replied, "Where's your proof? You've got nothing on me. It could have been anybody."

At this, Milton gave a sly glance over Torvald's shoulder. "Then you won't mind," he said, "if we have a look in that bag you're carrying. What's in there, anyway?"

Torvald gave them his best shit-eating grin. "Just curtain rods, fellas," he said in a mild tone of voice. "A fella's got to fix up his apartment, you know."

"Then you won't mind if we have a look," returned Milton.

Torvald, the resignation evident in his voice, replied, "No. Go ahead."

Milton got up, went around to Torvald's chair, and opened his duffel bag. Then shooting a quick glance at Blake he cracked, "This guy's telling the truth, Bill. There's a rod in here, and it sure looks like curtains for somebody."

That was enough for Blake. Standing up and moving toward Torvald he said, "That's good enough for me." He then placed Torvald's hands behind his back and cuffed him, saying, "Milton, read him his rights."

Milton did so and then Blake continued, "Take his bag out and put it in the patrol car. This'll be used as evidence against him."

Milton shouldered the bag and winced, "Damnit Bill, this is heavy."

Bill waved him away and said, "Just put it in the car. I'll take care of the suspect."

A few minutes later both Blake and Milton had Torvald and his bag of destruction in the back seat of the patrol car and were driving him to the Central Police Station only a few blocks away.

7.

Oddly enough, when they arrived at the Central Police Station, there was a crowd of newspaper people and photographers clustered on the sidewalk. As Blake and Milton led their suspect toward the station, the gathered media clamored for a statement from the accused.

Turning to them with a defiant glare Torvald, his hands cuffed behind his back, growled, "It's a fair cop. I dunnit. I dun the Res. But I never cold-cocked no woman."

This last statement might not turn out to be as much of a non sequitur as it seems, for in another part of town several miles away from the scene of the assassination attempt, on a street in Hokeville, a quiet residential neighborhood, a call came into the local police precinct, complaining that an officer's patrol car was blocking traffic in the 1100 block of Dreadwood Avenue.

Two policemen, Officers Hill and Renko, were dispatched to the scene to investigate. Upon arrival, they could scarcely believe their eyes. There was a patrol car in the middle of the street, all right, but what they found hard to accept was the body of a fellow police officer lying on her back, spread-eagled on the roof of her squad car. She was apparently unconscious, for her snores were quite audible to the approaching police officers. Upon closer examination, they determined that her left shoe was missing and that her uniform jacket and shirt had been torn partially open, revealing one snowy breast which bore the remains of a large and recently administered hickey. The name tag on her jacket read, "Jane D. Giblets".

"Good lord," remarked Renko with a disapproving curl of his lip. "She oughta be ashamed of herself, taking a nap in public like this."

Hill directed Renko's attention to the open front doors of the squad car. "I don't think she's taking any nap, Renko. Look at this."

And sure enough, scrawled on the driver's side door in red lipstick was this message: "Wuz I heer?—WHT."

While Renko scratched his head in perplexity, Hill said, "I'm gonna take a closer look. Just as I thought," he said a few seconds later. "Look here, Renko."

He grabbed hold of Renko's hand and directed it to a spot just behind Giblets' left ear which still bore the faint impression of a large male penis.

Renko gingerly touched the spot and then quickly withdrew his fingers as if they'd been bitten. "Darn!" he exclaimed. "That liketa froze my finger clean off. Dang it!" he continued. "You're right, Bobby Hill. This woman's done been cold-cocked."

"Right, Renko," replied Hill. "Now go around to the back of the car and do a little crowd control while I call it in."

So while Renko dealt with the curious onlookers who had assembled on both sides of the street, some taking pictures, others talking excitedly to their neighbors, Hill reached into the squad car and called headquarters on the radio. "And get hold of Sergeant Sekulevich," he finished up. "We need an ambulance out here and I need official authorization to move this car."

At about that same time several blocks down the street a man was carelessly strolling down the sidewalk, hands in his pockets, whistling tunelessly to himself. He wore a shapeless gray overcoat of indeterminate material, unbuttoned all the way to reveal a rather grimy once-white t-shirt bearing the imprint "I Heart Minsk." On his head was a Greek fisherman's cap to the front of which was pinned a ceramic red star.

As he walked along, he recalled rather bitterly the incredible drunken spree at that sleazy bar in Minsk's infamous Red Star District called The Weary Cossack. Apparently some altercation had ensued well after midnight, and he had been thrown out of the bar and into the gutter where he lay in a drunken stupor for the next two days. Upon recovering enough of his senses, he went back to the ham radio factory where he was employed, only to find out that he had been fired and deported from the country.

Having no job and no official identity, he aimlessly roamed the streets of Minsk, sleeping on park benches with only old newspapers and rainwater for sustenance. Fortunately, he was soon able to land a job at Minsky's as the straight man in a standup comedy act paired with Minsk's most popular comedian, Knockoff Shmearnoff. Even with a job like this on the fringes of show business, however, it still took him several weeks to save up the twenty rubles necessary to purchase a plane ticket from the cheapest cut-rate fly-by-night airline he could find, Jetsky Redsky.

Upon landing in New York he had felt a strong but unexplainable psychic pull from the Southland, and had spent the last few days hitchhiking his way to Taxes.

He had been in Phallus only a few hours when he had been stopped by a policewoman who had tried to arrest him for something or other, the details of which eluded him. Being a happy-go-lucky sort, he had decided to have a little fun with her after rendering her unconscious with his manly appendage.

Now as it was still early on a Friday afternoon, he was looking for something to occupy his time when, looking up, he spied a large building only about ten yards or so ahead. In large permanent letters it claimed to be the Phallus Classic Grand Cinema Movie Palace Theater Monoplex. Below this sign was a large V-shaped marquee, the left side of which read in moveable letters, "Now Showing: The Zany Antics of the Potemkin Brothers—Sorrow, Snorrow, Zero, and Fred—In 2 of Their Most Hilarious Hits, *Duck Feathers* and *Horse Soup*." The other side of the marquee read, "Coming Wednesday: Donald O'Gunner with Sherman the Talking Tank in the Side-Splittingly Humorous World War Two Film, *Howitzer Cooking*." At the bottom of the marquee in slightly smaller letters: "Coming Soon! More Jocularities from the Potemkin Brothers, *A Day at the Dentist* and *A Night at the Office*." As stated, it was a large marquee.

"That's for me," the man thought to himself, and walked up to the ticket window. "One admission, please," he said to the small teenage girl at the window.

"That'll be twenty-five cents, sir," she replied.

The man favored her with his suavest smile and a wink. "Got change for a quarter, love?" he quipped.

A worried frown suffused the girl's face. "I'm not sure," she said hesitantly. "Let me go check with the manager." With that, she hurried away from the window.

The man drummed his fingers impatiently on the window ledge for about fifteen minutes before he shrugged his shoulders and decided to go in anyway. Once inside, and noticing there was no one else in the lobby, he went over to the concession stand and purchased a jumbo box of popcorn and a large Mr. Pibb for thirty-five cents, and entered the theater, finding a seat near the back.

The Mickey Rat cartoon had just finished and the first feature was starting when the man saw out of the corner of his eye the theater doors open and two uniformed policemen walk in.

Without hesitation they walked over to where the man was sitting and identified themselves in hushed tones. "I'm Officer Sipowicz," said the older beefy one, "and this is Officer Simone." He indicated the younger handsomer one. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come with us."

Once outside the theater, the unfortunate moviegoer was handcuffed and placed in the back seat of a patrol car. When the two officers had settled themselves in the front and shut the car doors the man said, "Look, if this is about not paying for my ticket, I tried to give the girl a quarter but she wouldn't take it."

"We don't know anything about that," said Simone over his shoulder as he started the car and began to drive away.

"Yeah," said Sipowicz in the same manner, "I'm afraid this is far more serious. Are you Wee Hairy Torvald?"

"Why, yes, I am," he said. "How did you know?"

"Your name and description have been all over town for the last couple of hours," returned Sipowicz. "I'm placing you under arrest for the assassination of Resident Shawn F. Threnody."

"Threnody?" said Torvald with disgust. "That pretty boy semaphore? I thought Weisenheimer was still Resident. Besides," he continued, "I've only been in town a few hours."

"Coincidentally," remarked Simone, "that's just when the murder was committed."

"I tell you," Torvald protested, "I don't know anything about any murder."

Sipowicz gave him a hard look. "Well," he said, "you're coming with us anyway. You can tell your story downtown."

Within several minutes they arrived at the Central Police Station and City Jail where they led Torvald, still handcuffed, into the reception area where they were confronted by the desk sergeant, Phil Esterhaus.

Esterhaus took one look at Torvald and then regarded the two officers questioningly. "I thought they already brought this guy in over an hour ago," he said, a puzzled expression on his face.

"We don't know anything about that," said Simone. "We got a call from a theater in Hokeville that this guy that's wanted for Threnody's murder had just walked in."

"Yeah," said Sipowicz. "So we drove over to the theater and found this guy who matches the description and he admits his name is Torvald."

Esterhaus scratched his head. "Well, I guess you better take him to the holding cell where they put the other guy for the time being." He looked at his watch. "Sergeant Sekulevich will be in pretty soon. He'll get this straightened out."

"Okay, Sarge," said Simone, who then grabbed Torvald by an arm. Removing the handcuffs and replacing them on his belt, he said, "You're coming with me."

When they reached the holding cell, Simone beheld an incredible sight. Except for their dress, the two men looked completely identical. "Wee!" said the man in the cell.

"Wee!" said the man outside the cell.

"Toilets in the corner," said Simone in a bored voice. He unlocked and opened the cell door and shoved the second Torvald inside. Once he was inside, Simone beheld an even more incredible sight. The two men in the cell seemed to blur for a few seconds like a double image in a badly-shot movie, then melted into each other until only one Torvald remained.

Simone shook his head several times as if to clear it. "I've got to stop drinking that cheap tequila," he muttered to himself before leaving the area.

Back in the reception area, Sergeant Esterhaus addressed Simone. "Everything okay back there?"

Simone thought quickly. "Uh, I, uh, had to let the guy go, Sarge. Mistaken identity, you know."

"Okay by me," said Esterhaus. "No booking, no problem."

Meanwhile back in the holding cell, Wee Hairy Torvald was ecstatic over having found himself once again, that is, he was ecstatic for about two minutes until he remembered where he was and the events he had set in motion earlier in the day. Noticing a person who he perceived to be a police officer shuffling past his cell, he called out in a bold voice, "Hey! Hey you! I wanna confess!"

This stopped the officer in his tracks. He was old for a regular unpromoted police officer, perhaps sixty or so by the look of his unkempt gray hair and white chin stubble. His uniform, such as it was, was baggy and wrinkled, and his necktie was askew and partially unknotted, revealing his shirt to be open at the neck. This officer was Art Delgado, a former beat cop who had been shot a couple of times and was, admittedly, not mentally or physically fit for regular street duty. To make matters worse, he was considered to be not intelligent or reliable enough for desk work and the city had turned down his disability claim.

His commanding officer, Captain Furpillow, however, had a soft spot in his heart for the old guy and kept him on as a kind of a permanent prison guard until such time as he attained retirement age and would be eligible for full pension. This would be only a few years from now, but Furpillow was taking no chances on his being discovered by the top brass, relegating him to the bowels of the building where the holding cells were located and stashing him in a nearby wall locker whenever there was a uniform inspection.

Now Delgado turned to look at Torvald. "Yeah, bub?" he cracked. "Whatcha want? Hey," he said, the dim light of reognition dawning in his gin-soaked brain. "You're the feller that killed the Resident, aintcha?"

Torvald allowed that this was true and then added, "But I want to confess. I'll tell you guys anything just the way it happened, and I'm prepared to name names. But first, I need to get me a good lawyer. You know, somebody like that like Smelvin Bellicose out in Sam Frandisco or that other guy Johnny Cockroach." He gave Delgado his most winning smile. "Can you do anything for me, Officer?" he said entreatingly.

Delgado scratched his head and thought for a moment before replying. "I'll see what I can do," he said simply, and shuffled off.

Torvald knew that he had pinned his hopes on a rummy but he had no choice. Resigning himself to his fate, he went over to his bunk and stretched out on it, prepared to spend a restless afternoon and a sleepless night.

The next day was Saturday, and by about midday pangs of hunger were gnawing at his vitals, so he was relieved to see upon looking up the shambling figure of Art Delgado advancing towards his cell and carrying a tray that hopefully contained some kind of food.

Stopping at the cell door, Delgado took a heavy ring of keys from his belt and selected one from it. Pausing, he said to Torvald, "Brought ya some lunch. Now stand back over there in the corner while I put the tray in."

Torvald held up his hands in mock surrender. "Don't worry, Officer, I won't try anything."

"Good," said Delgado shortly, then opened the cell door, bent down, placed the tray on the floor, and pushed it towards Torvald with his foot. Then he stepped back and securely locked the cell door again. "Oh, I almost forgot," he said, "got some good news for ya. That feller Bellicose has agreed to take your case—whadda they call it?" He looked up at the ceiling as if hoping to find the proper words there. "Oh yeah, pro bono or somethin' like that. Says he's real interested in your case."

"That's wonderful," exclaimed Torvald, snatching up the tray and stuffing a piece of bread into his mouth. "When will he be here?"

"Well," said Delgado, "if I remember rightly, he said he's busy this weekend but he's gonna fly in Sunday night and says he'll try to see you before your arraignment on Monday."

"Great!" exclaimed Torvald, rubbing his hands together. "Thanks Officer, I owe you one."

"No problem," said Delgado. "You seem like a nice fella. Guess anybody can make a mistake."

And so, sensing a faint ray of hope, Torvald spent that afternoon and night in a slightly better frame of mind than he'd had the previous day.

8.

However, his mood would not have improved if he'd been aware of the scene that was about to unfold early that evening several miles away in Phallus's notorious Green Light District. At a rundown topless bar on a street that was otherwise lined with dive bars and X-rated bookstores, the Clearasil Club was a familiar sight.

Inside, for six shows a day, seven days a week, under the watchful eyes and outstretched palms of Phallus's Finest, skinny scantily-scad teenaged girls listlessly performed pole and lap dances for whichever old men in greasy overcoats and lust in their eyes could afford a small five-dollar glass of warm watered beer on a two-drink minimum.

Upstairs in his private office the club owner, Mr. Mack Scooby, a paunchy, middle-aged, shifty-eyed individual, was sitting behind his desk, an open ledger in front of him. Noting with growing dismay the proportion of red ink to black ink that it contained, he pounded his fist on the desk and began to mutter to no one in particular, for he was alone in the office. "Damn!" he complained, "if business doesn't get any better, I might have to do something drastic, like look for a more respectable job."

Just then there was a knock at the door.

"Whaddaya want?" growled Scooby.

The door opened and the middle-aged expressionless face of one of the bar girls poked through the opening. "Ya got visitors downstairs," she said shortly.

"Yeah, like who?" said Scooby without interest.

"They wouldn't give me their names," she said, "but there's three guys, two great big ones and a smaller one. The smaller one seems to be the head guy. He said you'd wanna see him."

Scooby shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah? Okay, send 'em up."

The woman hesitated for a moment. "I dunno, boss," she said, a note of concern in her voice. "I don't like their looks. If I was you, I'd go down and talk to them in the bar where there's witnesses."

"All right," grumbled Scooby. "Tell 'em I'll be down in a few minutes."

As the woman left, shutting the door behind her, Scooby reluctantly closed the ledger and locked it securely in a desk drawer. Then he got up and went downstairs. At the entrance to the bar, he was met by Joe the bartender who pointed to a booth in a far corner of the bar away from the stage where the girls were dancing and where the pulsating music was distant enough that a conversation could be held.

"They're over there, Mr. Scooby," said Joe.

Wordlessly, Scooby walked over in the direction which Joe had indicated, and soon caught sight of three men sitting in the booth. Although the booth was a spacious semi-circular affair, two of the men, the ones on either side of the smaller one, were so huge that Scooby, not wanting to get too close, remained standing.

The bar girl had been right. Scooby didn't like their looks either. The two huge men wore identical cheap-looking suits and had the bodies of heavyweight boxers with faces to match. Scooby noted with some alarm their bent and twisted noses, chipped and missing teeth, and numerous facial scars.

Immediately upon his arrival, however, the smaller man who sat in the middle spoke in a soft, high-pitched, almost feminine voice. "Mr. Mack Scooby, I presume?" In contrast to the other two, this man was wearing an expensive Italian suit, his body was round, soft, and slightly pudgy, as one totally unused to any sort of physical activity. His face was round and clean-shaven, except for a pencil-thin moustache. Sparsely covering his otherwise shiny scalp were short sparse strands of rather oily black hair.

Scooby, not wanting to seem cowed, growled, "Who wants to know?"

With no change of expression, the man replied, "I will assume that that question with which you answered was an assent." Then, continuing, he pointed a finger at each of the two thugs at his side. "Let me introduce two of my boys. Mr. Scooby, say hello to Nicky Knuckles and Frankie Fist."

The two gorillas nodded pleasantly in return.

"Mr. Scooby here," continued their leader, "is going to perform a small but menial task for us. Why don't you boys go over to the bar and have a couple of drinks. Tell the bartender that Mr. Scooby says they're on the house."

The two thugs again nodded gratefully and without hesitation, but with some difficulty, extricated themselves from the booth and ambled towards the bar.

"Have a seat, Mr. Scooby," said the man amiably, "and let us discuss a few simple but important matters of business."

Scooby sat.

"Do you know who I am?" continued the man, simply.

Scooby looked him up and down. "I don't think I've ever seen you before," replied Scooby. In the same soft voice, the man replied, "Few have. I have a position in which I can enjoy my privacy. I like good food, fine wine, great books, and serious music. Yet tonight at considerable inconvenience to myself, I found it necessary to leave my country estate and travel quite a few miles down here through the wretched Saturday evening traffic just to come to your fine establishment and make your acquaintance."

"I'm flattered," replied Scooby, irony dripping from his words.

The man continued. "This was not, Mr. Scooby, because I wanted to become your bosom buddy, or for that matter, for you to become mine. As I said before, we have some pressing business to discuss." His hands, which had heretofore been concealed in his lap under the table, he now placed on the table's surface. On his left middle finger was a huge, heavy-looking gold ring completely studded with large diamonds. "My name," he said softly, "is Frito Curlyone. The members of my large and ever-growing family call me simply Don Frito. As I believe I mentioned previously, we have a small task we want you to accomplish for us."

Scooby put on his best tough-guy expression. "Why should I?" he demanded.

Again, Don Frito's expression did not change. In reply, he waved his hand toward the main part of the bar. "I will offer to you," he said, "some excellent reasons. This is Saturday evening, is it not?"

Scooby grudgingly allowed that it was.

"And yet," Don Frito continued, "unless my tired old eyes deceive me, you have more girls dancing on stage than you have paying customers at tables."

Scooby shamefacedly nodded his agreement.

"In point of solemn fact," Don Frito continued mildly, "it has come to my attention that you have been rather remiss in your obligations to us these past few months."

Again, Scooby had to agree.

"In going over my accounts a few days ago, I made the casual observation that you are now into us for, what would you say, about twenty large?"

Scooby again was forced to nod his agreement.

“So,” said Don Frito, “I will now offer you a few excellent reasons why you should do us this very small favor. One, if you agree to perform this task and are successful, we will forgive this trifling pecuniary matter, give you a six-month grace period, and then resume with a clean slate. Two, if you do not agree or fail to accomplish your designated task, there is a strong possibility that something extremely untoward could happen to your fine establishment here. Or three, alternatively, Nicky and Frankie,” here he indicated the thugs at the bar, “could take approximately five minutes out of their busy schedule and cause your body to resemble something like approximately two hundred pounds of raw hamburger.”

Scooby blanched visibly. “All right,” he said with disgust, “ya got me. What is this ‘little task’ you want me to do?”

But instead of answering him directly, Don Frito became curiously conversational. “I suppose you heard what happened yesterday afternoon,” he remarked casually.

“Yeah, I heard. I wasn’t there, but I heard. Thanks to the media blitz, I guess everybody in the whole damn country heard.”

“And I suppose you also heard that they arrested the man who did it,” Don Frito continued.

“Yeah, I heard that too. I heard they got him in the Central Police lockup. So what?”

“Well, Mr. Scooby, in light of these developments, what do you think everybody in the ‘whole damn country’ wants?”

“I dunno. Give the scumbag a fair trial, and then execute him, I guess.”

Don Frito looked him squarely in the eye. “And, Mr. Scooby,” he said in the same mild tone, “we think you’re just the man to see that justice is done.”

Scooby gave a little involuntary shudder. “Ya mean, ya want me to kill him?” he said incredulously.

"That is precisely what I want, Mr. Scooby. And I am not the only one. Let us, as they say, get down to business. What you may not have heard is that the prime suspect, one Wee Hairy Torvald, is threatening to, in vulgar terms, sing to the feds. And that, Mr. Scooby, is an aria we don't want him to go into, if you comprehend my meaning."

"Yeah, I get your point, Don Frito," replied Scooby, now more confidently. "But how did you find this out? And what's your angle? And why me?"

"These are very good questions indeed, and I think I owe you the honest answer to each of them." He began to tick off the questions on his pudgy fingers. "Number one, we have fortunately an informant on the Phallus police force, an aging, unappreciated, alcoholic officer named Art Delgado. For the last few years, being apparently unfit for any other duty, he has been assigned the task of guarding the prisoners, and when anything interesting comes his way, he doesn't hesitate to let us know." Here Don Frito gave a slight chuckle. "It is positively extraordinary what a few bottles of cheap whiskey can accomplish. As to your second question, the problem is the trial itself. I will not bore you with the exact details, but suffice it to say that what Mr. Torvald might say in court might be an embarrassment to a lot of people, including myself and my family. So, needless to say, we would greatly appreciate your sparing the people the time and expense of a trial which would have a foregone conclusion anyway. Your third question has a very simple answer. We find that through much experience in these matters that the people whom we can trust the most are the people who are the most indebted to us." Here he pointed a finger at Scooby. "And that would be you."

Scooby had listened to all this with increasing interest. Now he leaned toward Don Frito and, in a low tone, almost conspiratorially, he said, "Okay, but I have one more question. How do I get at the guy?"

Don Frito gave another slight chuckle. "That, Mr. Scooby, is something that fate, or perhaps God if you will, has provided us. Officer Delgado also informs me that Mr. Torvald is to be moved to the permanent holding facility at Statesville Prison. He assured me that the police will be bringing him out tomorrow morning around eleven and driving him there, a distance of only about twenty miles. You have but to slip into the police station at about that time and do the deed." He held up a hand as he saw Scooby starting to object. "Come now, Mr. Scooby, we have done a little research and we know of your friendly relationship with at least half the Phallus Police Department. It will be a simple matter for you to gain entrance. Only one more thing has to be discussed." His soft tone became even softer. "Have you, Mr. Scooby, a suitable implement of destruction?"

At this, it was Scooby's turn to chuckle. "I'm a sleazy club owner in the Green Light District. What do you think?"

Don Frito smiled at this. "Very good, Mr. Scooby," he replied. "But before we proceed any further, I must ask you: Are you proficient in the use of firearms?"

Scooby looked offended. "I'm a veteran," he said proudly. "And also a Taxan. I know how to handle a gun, all right."

"Excellent. I take it, then, that you are willing to proceed?"

"Yeah," said Scooby. "I gotta admit, it's growin' on me. I mean, the idea of taking care of that scumbag myself." Then he frowned. "But this is right in the middle of the police station, for chrissakes. I mean, they'll pounce on me and throw me in a cell the minute I draw my piece."

"No, they will not," Don Frito assured him. "You must trust me, Mr. Scooby. I have had many years of experience in these matters and I have drawn up a plan which I am positive will suffice. But I must warn you, any deviation, even the slightest, from this plan I am about to reveal to you will, in all probability, result in your failure to accomplish your task, or your apprehension, perhaps both. If this occurs, we will, as they say, disavow any knowledge of your existence. If, however, you follow this plan to the letter, you will not only succeed, but I can assure you that my considerable resources will make certain that no harm comes to you, either physical or judicial." He leaned across the table and gave Scooby a hard piercing look. "Do you understand me, Mr. Scooby?"

Scooby was impressed but, not wanting to show it, he merely replied, "I understand."

"Excellent," said Don Frito again. "Now listen carefully. Take notes if you wish. At about ten-thirty tomorrow morning, you will pack a suitcase which you will place in the trunk of your car. You will be wearing the most nondescript and unidentifiable clothing that you own. You will then drive your car to the Central Phallus Police Station. You know it, Mr. Scooby?"

"Of course, I've been there several times. I know a lot of the boys, as you've said."

"All right, then. Park your car at the rear of the building. There is a rear exit door. Park as close to it as possible. On Sunday morning parking should not present a problem. Get out of your car and walk around the building to the front entrance. There you will enter the building. The minute you enter you will see a regular uniformed policeman standing to the immediate right of the entrance. He is another of the men in our employ." Here Don Frito gave a little apologetic cough. "I was not able to give him your name, for I was not completely sure that you would agree to this plan. So, we must resort to the cloak-and-dagger. As you enter, you will say to this policeman, 'Good day for hunting.' He will make some remark of agreement and slip you a rubber mask. You will place this mask over your face."

Scooby held up his hands. "Just a minute," he protested. "Ain't that gonna be a dead giveaway?"

"No," said Don Frito quietly. "What you will do then is to walk over to the group of media representatives who are anxiously awaiting the appearance of Mr. Torvald. No one will be paying any attention to you whatsoever. I must warn you, however, enter the building as close to eleven as possible. This way, you are least likely to be noticed. Now, when the guards bring Mr. Torvald, they will be bringing him from the rear of the building to the front. You will be in the crowd of reporters and photographers. When they begin clamoring for statements and the flashbulbs start popping, draw your pistol and shoot Mr. Torvald once in the head and once in the chest in rapid succession.'

Scooby gave a frown of concentration. "Gotcha so far, Don Frito, but how do I get outta there?"

Don Frito again held up a hand. "Have no fear. When the guards bring Mr. Torvald out into the open area, they will pass by Officer Delgado, who will be nonchalantly standing by the rear exit. The rear exit is an emergency fire exit. It is equipped with a panic bar and an alarm. The minute Officer Delgado hears your gunshot, he will switch off the alarm. The moment you have fired the second shot, do not hesitate, but run toward the back door and go through it. Officer Delgado will then make sure that the door is securely shut and switch the alarm back on. In this way, no one will suspect that you have exited the building because the alarm has not gone off. You will then quickly jump in your car and drive away at a normal speed, breaking no laws and attracting no attention. You will then drive to a place of your choosing, where matters not, as long as it is sufficiently far from the Phallus area. You will then, as they quaintly put it, 'hole up' for a few days, and then return about mid-week. Is everything clear, Mr. Scooby?"

"Yeah," said Scooby, scratching his head, "I got some relatives in Oprahcoma I can stay with for a couple of days."

"Good," said Don Frito. "Tell your employees that you are going out of town tonight and won't be back until Wednesday."

"Yeah, okay, I can do that," said Scooby.

"All right then," said Don Frito, beginning to stand up. "I believe our business is concluded for the moment. Shall we shake hands on the matter?"

Scooby motioned for him to sit back down. "I can do better than that, Don Frito. We Taxans always like to seal the deal with a drink. Will you join me?"

"Certainly, Mr. Scooby. As long as you have something worth drinking, something besides that swill you serve your customers."

"No problem. Name your poison."

Don Frito looked thoughtful. "I'd prefer a good scotch," he said, "as long as it is sufficiently aged and unblended."

"Fair enough," replied Scooby. "Straight up, rocks, or soda?"

"Normally I'd prefer a good mineral water."

"How about a Perrier? Will that do?"

"That will do very nicely, Mr. Scooby."

"All right then." Scooby stood up and turned to the bar. He gave a loud whistle and yelled out, "Joe!"

Immediately Joe the bartender ceased the nothing he was engaged in and hurried around the bar and over to the booth. "Yes, Mr. Scooby?"

"Bring us that bottle of fourteen-year-old single malt Glenfiddich you got on the top shelf, a bottle of Perrier, and two highball glasses with ice."

"Very good, Mr. Scooby," said Joe, and scurried back to the bar, returning a scant few minutes later with a tray which contained the necessary items. These he placed on the table in their proper positions. Then without a word he scurried away again.

Scooby pushed the sealed bottle towards Don Frito. "Care to pour?" he said.

"Don't mind if I do," he said, opening the bottle and pouring about half a glass for each of them. Then he did the same with the Perrier.

They raised their glasses in a toast to what they each fervently hoped would be a successful venture. Don Frito drained his glass delicately but quickly. Upon finishing, he dabbed his puffy lips with a silk handkerchief which he then replaced in the breast pocket of his jacket. He stood up. "Thank you, Mr. Scooby. I hope to hear reports of your success. I will see you again when you return." And with this, he left the booth. Turning, he shook hands with Scooby, who had also finished his drink and stood up.

"I'll be going," said Don Frito. "And don't worry, I'll collect my boys on the way out. They will be somewhat put out by not being able to practice their considerable expertise on your property or yourself. But they'll get over it." And with that, he left the Clearasil Club, his two thugs trailing him like large but obedient puppies.

9.

The next day, Sunday, Mack Scooby awoke at about nine in the morning with a mixture of trepidation and anticipation. After his usual breakfast of bacon, sausage, ham, eggs, pancakes, hash browns, English muffin, and six cups of strong French roast coffee, he left his two-room apartment on the third and top floor of the Clearasil Club building and proceeded downstairs to his office. Making sure that no one had seen him, he surreptitiously unlocked the door to his office and entered. Once inside, and locking the door securely behind him, he unlocked his desk and withdrew from the bottom drawer a 9mm Schnauzer which he stuck in his belt and concealed with his ordinary-looking gray suit jacket. Once prepared, he went over to the window, opened it, and climbed down the fire escape, exiting in that manner so that no one would see him. Going around the corner to the parking garage where he kept his battered '55 Furd, he located his car, and drove out of the garage towards the Central Police Station. He had taken the precaution of packing a suitcase the night before, which was locked securely in his trunk.

Upon reaching the police station he noted with satisfaction that it was now about 10:45. Perfect timing, he thought, and had no trouble pulling into a parking space less than fifty feet from the rear door. As instructed, he got out of his car and walked around to the front entrance of the station.

He entered immediately and was gratified to see a policeman that he did not know standing in the position that had been predicted by Don Frito. Turning to the man he remarked casually, "Good day for hunting."

"Sure is," agreed the cop, handing him a rubber mask that looked very much like the face of Nick Dixon.

Putting it on, he strolled slowly over to the already-assembled group of newsmen, photographers, and other curiosity seekers which, as the time was rapidly approaching 11:00, had grown to more than two dozen. Moving to a vantage point which he hoped would give him a clear line of sight, he settled down to wait. Looking around, he noted with satisfaction that, as Don Frito had predicted, no one was paying him any attention whatsoever.

He didn't have to wait long. Within a few minutes he could hear soft, barely-audible voices coming from the rear of the station. There was a distant clanging of cell doors, and then three figures emerged into his view.

Indeed, the central figure was none other than Wee Hairy Torvald, wearing blue denim prison clothes and flanked on either side by a guard who each had a hand firmly on Torvald's shoulders. His hands were securely cuffed behind his back, but his face bore an oddly defiant look.

As the guards slowly walked Torvald towards the gathered crowd, there was a garbled rush of demands and pleas for statements and a disorienting flash of bulbs from several cameras.

Taking advantage of the distraction, when Torvald had approached to about ten feet from the crowd, Scooby drew his Schnauzer and fired a shot straight at Torvald, hitting him squarely between the eyes. "That's for Resident Threnody!" he said in a loud voice, then fired in quick succession a second shot which struck Torvald in the left side of the chest, piercing his heart. "And that's for Nora!" added Scooby enigmatically.

Bleeding copiously from head and chest, Torvald nonetheless remained upright for a few seconds, swaying as if in a stiff breeze, a bemused expression on his face that was tinged with horror, as if he were an actor suddenly thrust on stage and had forgotten his lines. Then he crumpled to a heap on the floor and expired on the spot.

Even before Torvald had collapsed, Scooby had replaced the Schnauzer in his waistband and was halfway to the rear fire door. He was gratified to see an old dishevelled-looking policeman, who could only be Art Delgado, standing by the door as promised. Scooby had no trouble exiting the building silently, and within another minute he was in his Furd and driving away casually as if nothing had happened.

Scooby passed the next few days quietly visiting his uninteresting but restful relatives in the little town of Smell City, Oprahcoma. By Wednesday morning, however, he knew he had to go back to see whether Don Frito had held up his end of the deal, or whether he, Mack Scooby, was a wanted man.

By mid-morning of that day he had repacked, thrown his suitcase into his trunk, and had pointed the Furd southward towards Phallus. After an uneventful drive of about several hours, he reached the outskirts of North Phallus Forty by early afternoon. Upon entering the city limits, he found that he was growing apprehensive in spite of himself. As he slowly made his way down the narrow twisting streets of the northern suburbs, he found his eyes darting from right to left, as if worried that someone might be following him.

A few minutes later he passed a Phallus police cruiser going the other way. He noted that the two officers in the car were guys he had known for years. The cruiser did not slow down, however, but the cops inside obviously recognized Scooby and gave him a friendly wave, but nothing more. Relieved, Scooby returned the gesture and continued towards the Green Light District with a much lighter heart.

Upon arriving at the parking garage where he kept his car, Scooby locked it securely and walked around the corner to his club.

Upon arriving, his jaw literally dropped and his eyes bugged out. The building that housed the Clearasil Club had been in a dilapidated condition for some years, its stucco exterior was indifferently whitewashed and here and there showed brown stains where water had trickled down its walls from rusty drainpipes. An extremely modest sign had proclaimed it to be merely the Clearasil Club.

But now, as Scooby stood on the sidewalk and gazed at it in disbelief, it had somehow been painted a shocking pink. In place of the heretofore modest sign was a huge flashing neon one that now proclaimed it to be Club Scoobedoo. Below this garish sign was a lighted marquee which read simply, in large letters, "GIRLS! GIRLS!! GIRLS!!!" And below that, in more modest letters, "The Gnat Pack's Favorite Phallus Watering Hole".

Filled with conflicting emotions of awe and misgiving, Scooby stood dumbfounded on the sidewalk, staring at this strange sight in disbelief. Had someone sold the building out from under him while he was away? he wondered. But if so, why was there a sign calling it Club Scoobedoo? And who was this Gnat Pack anyway?

Steeling himself with resolve, Scooby strode towards the building's entrance, which fortunately hadn't changed much except that the door was more highly polished than he had remembered. Upon opening the door and entering, he took no more than two steps before halting and doing a double-take.

Looking around in disbelief, he saw that the formerly grungy walls of the place were now painted in the same shade of shocking pink that graced the building's exterior. On those walls were numerous large Art Deco posters, advertising such things as the Moulin Rouge, the Folies-Bergère, and various other French and European-themed products such as Pernod, Champagne, fast cars, and sleek trains. Interspersed among these commercial Art Deco posters were equally large blow-ups of famous showgirls such as can-can dancers and Radio City Rockettes. Looking up at the ceiling, he noticed that the bright but somewhat grim florescent lighting had been replaced by chandeliers with numerous tulip-shaped bulbs which cast a soft pink and amber glow upon the room.

Advancing towards the performance area, he received another shock. Over the stage was a huge banner which read, "Welcome Back, Mack. From Don Frito and All Your Pals in the Morphea". Below this banner on the stage itself, in place of the former contingent of skinny, pimply adolescents, there were now fully half a dozen mature but beautiful ecdysiasts, beautiful women in their twenties with large, bouncy breasts which seemed to defy the law of gravity as the women gyrated their bumps and grinds. Even Scooby, upon witnessing this scene, felt stirrings in his tired old loins.

But what gratified and excited him more was not the performance on the stage, but the fact that the tables and booths in the audience area were filled to capacity with happy laughing young to middle-aged men, many of whom, to Scooby's surprise, had been joined by female companions. And to cap it all off, at a large number of the tables the audience was gulping down glass after glass of 25-dollar-a-bottle Champagne, while at the rest of the booths and tables the remaining members of the audience seemed to all be enjoying the 10-dollar mixed drink specials.

In his glee Scooby tried to count the house but soon gave up after reaching fifty, as there was a considerable amount of dancing going on as well as much scurrying back and forth between the tables and the bar. In surveying the scene, however, Scooby soon caught sight of a now-familiar figure sitting quietly in an otherwise unoccupied corner booth nursing a small drink. Going over to join him, Scooby cried out in surprise, "Don Frito! What the hell's going on here?"

Don Frito, as ever, greeted Scooby's arrival with aplomb. In reply he waved his hand towards the scene and merely remarked calmly, "Well? What do you think, Mr. Scooby? Do you approve?"

Flabbergasted, Scooby began to stutter, "Approve? Sure! But how? When?"

Don Frito dismissed his questions with an airy, "All in good time, Mr. Scooby." Then he got to his feet. "Right now, I want you to meet some people. Ever hear of the Gnat Pack?"

Scooby, regaining his composure somewhat, replied, "No, can't say as I have."

Don Frito chuckled. "You may be one of the few who hasn't. They are a lightweight but well-known group of Hollywood entertainers who, as they so crudely put it, pal around together. Oddly, however, considering their minor status, they are nonetheless considered to be trendsetters. When they recommend an entertainment venue such as your club here, people apparently waste no time in flocking to it." He leaned toward Scooby conspiratorially. "Besides," he continued in a low tone, "their leader, Sinistro, owes me a favor." He straightened up and began to move out of the booth. "Care to join me?" he said, beckoning Scooby to follow him. "Let's go meet the boys, shall we?"

He led Scooby toward the stage and up to the front row. Waving a hand at the stage, the pulsating disco beat obligingly softened so that a conversation could be held.

"Boys," said Don Frito, "this is Mr. Mack Scooby, the club owner. Why don't you introduce yourselves and get acquainted? I will leave you to it." And with that, he turned and ambled back toward his booth.

The man whom Don Frito had been addressing turned to Scooby with a grin. "You got quite a shack, Mack," he said simply, extending his hand. "Put 'er there, pally. I'm Frankly Sinistro. I'm a singer mainly, but I do a little acting on the side." He jerked his head toward where Don Frito was sitting. "I guess I gotta thank the big guy for that." Then he broke out in a laugh and pointed a finger at Scooby, then started singing, "Scoobee-doo-bee-doo..."

Somewhat perplexed, Scooby turned to the next member of the Gnat Pack, who was dressed in a white tuxedo jacket. In his right hand he held a cocktail glass, which contained an olive on a toothpick but little more. On his face was a glazed but rather pleasant expression. Apparently attempting to focus his eyes on Scooby he remarked, "Hey there, pally." Looking towards the bar he said with admiration, "Your boy over there sure makes a mean martini. Guess I'll go get another, if it's all the same to you."

Even more bewildered, Scooby nodded his assent, and then watched as the man, whom he later found out was named Vino, sauntered unsteadily toward the bar singing, "When a goon stabs your back like a tale from Balzac, that's Honoré..."

As Scooby watched in disbelief, the third member of the Gnat Pack approached him. He was a smaller man, wearing an expensive but rather ill-fitting suit. His hair managed somehow to be both greasy and wiry at the same time. "Gimme some skin, man," he breathed. "The handle's Gooley Fish Slop."

Scooby rather hesitantly extended his palm and Gooley slapped it with great glee. "You ever out west, man," he drawled, "I'm the headliner at Geezers Palace in Lost Wages." He chuckled to himself. "I do a standup that will knock you on your keister."

Somewhat unnerved, Scooby moved to the fourth and final member, an even smaller black man who wore an expensive form-fitting pin-striped double-breasted suit and black patent leather tap shoes. He had greasy slick black hair and a mustache much the same as Don Frito's. Unabashedly, the little man gave Scooby a hug. Then he grinned and said, "I'm Sambo Dervish, Jr." Then he snapped his fingers and proclaimed, "You da man! And dis the place! And I'm a credit to my race!" And he broke into a little laugh and started stamping his feet in rapid succession, like a man attempting to put out a small brush fire. Then he whirled around a couple of times and began to sing in a high but not unpleasing tenor voice, "What kind of coool am I?"

Now completely mystified, Scooby shook his head and quickly strode towards the bar. Finding one of the few vacant stools at the far end, he sat down gratefully and tried to pull himself together. This was all too much and to top it off, it was all happening too fast. His mind raced to re-adjust, process—or whatever the kids are calling it today—the whole scene. Looking up, he saw at the other end of the bar Don Frito's two thugs. They were sitting peacefully, gulping large steins of pale golden beer. They looked up and, apparently recognizing Scooby, grinned and gave him friendly waves. Strange, Scooby thought, they don't look nearly as menacing as they did the other night. In fact, he mused, they look kinda cute in an ugly sort of way. Snapping himself back to reality, the next thing Scooby saw was Joe the bartender frantically making like Tom Cruise in *Cocktail*. "Hey, Joe," he called, "Got a minute?"

Joe looked up. "Not really, Mr. Scooby."

"No, seriously. Come 'ere a minute. I've gotta talk to you."

Reluctantly, Joe put down the cocktail shaker and bottle of Kahlua he'd been holding and called out, "Hey, Sadie! Take over a minute, willya? Mr. Scooby wants me."

Sadie the bargirl, who had informed Scooby of Don Frito's presence on Saturday night, had her own hands full. She was quickly scurrying back and forth between tables and bars with trays alternately loaded with full glasses and empty ones. "Okay, Joe," she called out as she neared the bar, "but don't take more'n five minutes, willya?"

"Sure thing, Sadie," agreed Joe. Then he walked over to where Scooby was sitting. "With all due respect, Mr. Scooby, please make it fast. I'm busier than a one-armed paperhanger here."

Scooby chuckled in spite of himself. "Sure Joe," he said, "I can see you're busy. But what the hell happened here?"

Joe looked surprised. "I thought you knew, Mr. Scooby. That is why you went on your trip, ain't it?"

Uncertainly, Scooby replied, "Tell me more."

"Well," said Joe, "Monday morning that guy over there," he jerked his thumb toward where Don Frito was sitting, "he calls himself Mr. Freeman, he comes in early Monday morning. We was just gettin' ready to open the place, wasn't nobody else here 'cept me n' Sadie. Well, this guy comes in, says he's the contractor you hired Saturday night, says he's got orders to remodel the place. Says don't bother openin', take a couple days off an' I'll make it worth your while. So what could I say? I figured it was on your orders. So I just said, okay. And with that, this guy goes to the door and says, 'Okay, boys.' And this army of workers comes in and they start paintin' and redecoratin' and I don't know what all. Me n' Sadie just left it to 'em, then last night this guy Freeman calls me up, says the job's done, and to come in today as usual. How do you like what they done, Mr. Scooby?" Scooby thought for a moment. "Yeah, Joe," he said, "I'm beginning to get the picture. I've gotta feelin' that this business ain't gonna slow down anytime soon. So here's what I want you to do." He leaned over the bar and said, "Joe, I'm promoting you to manager. I want you to go out and hire some more people. Get another bartender and tell Sadie to get at least a couple more waitresses. Whatever she thinks is right. I'm raisin' your salary and I'm raisin' hers. Tell her she can be head waitress, senior waitress, whatever she wants to call herself."

"Gee thanks, Mr. Scooby," said Joe. Then, looking around and noticing that Sadie was in a bit of a pickle, not to mention olives and lemon slices, he said, "Catch you later, Mr. Scooby. Gotta get back to work."

Scooby nodded his assent and Joe relieved Sadie, who resumed running back and forth between tables and bar.

Now finally at ease with the situation, Scooby yelled to Joe, "Hey Joe, one more thing! What happened to my Clearasil girls?"

"Oh," rejoined Joe, "funny thing about that. Monday morning when the girls came out on stage to do their first show this guy Freeman, I swear, he gave them each a grand in cash and says, 'Go back to school, girls, and make something of yourselves.'"

"Wow," was all Scooby could say. Now filled with determination to do the right thing, Scooby took his ass off the barstool and strode up to the stage where he motioned for the girls to stop dancing and the music to stop playing. When all had quieted down, he took a hand mike and addressed the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, as the sudden silence caused a hush to fall over the crowd as well. "I'm Mack Scooby, I own this joint." There was lusty applause. Scooby waved it away modestly. "I just wanna say that I guess, well, we're here to celebrate a coupla things. First, we're closing the Clearasil Club."

There was a single "Awww" from the back of the room, at which the audience responded with hoots.

"But at the same time," continued Scooby, "we're also celebrating the grand opening of Club Scoobedoo. I thank you all for being here today, and to show my appreciation, tomorrow being Thanksgiving, we're gonna have a free turkey dinner with all the trimmings for anyone who's in the audience here today." This produced whistles, stomps, and shouts of approval. Scooby held out his hands. "And that's not all. From 3pm to 9pm we're also gonna feature an open bar, no minimum." This last piece of news nearly brought down the house. "So," Scooby concluded, "I'm gonna make up some tickets, and when you leave here today, be sure to pick up a ticket that'll get you admission tomorrow. And," he chuckled slyly, "don't rush off on my account." This brought some appreciative murmurs from the audience and Scooby once again waved his hand for the dancing and the music to resume. Then he strolled off the stage and went back to his original seat at the bar.

At almost the same time Don Frito rose, checked his Rolex, and also walked over to the bar, where he tapped his two thugs on the shoulders. They reluctantly pried themselves loose from their barstools and followed Don Frito toward the door.

Passing Scooby on the way out, Don Frito gave him a warm smile and said simply, "See you tomorrow, Mr. Scooby."

Scooby merely nodded in reply, his throat choked with emotion.

Then the two thugs turned to Scooby. "So long, Mr. Scooby," said Nicky pleasantly. "Nice meetin' ya, Mr. Scooby," said Frankie in the same tone. As they plodded towards the entrance, Scooby realized it was the only time he'd heard them speak.

He sat at the bar for long moments, dreamily thinking of this and that. Then he said in an unaccustomedly soft voice, "Hey Joe, how about a scotch and soda?"

"Coming right up, Mr. Scooby."

“Sometimes,” Scooby thought dreamily, as Joe placed his drink in front of him, “Crime does pay, after all.”

10.

Alas, our revels now are ended. But real lives, unlike stories, often continue far longer than their dramatic events. Here’s what happened next:

Quill and Smellerman did get away with it. On the Monday following Scooby’s killing of Torvald, they and their loyal band of blubbers were gathered at Darling One Notional Sentimery. They were even able to brush from their eyes a few manly tears as the burnished mahogany flag-draped casket containing the body of Pomeranian was lowered into its grave, accompanied by a full-dress military honor guard and a 21-gun salute. All in all, it was probably the most lavish and impressive funeral ever given to a forty-year-old ambulance driver. Later, they and other members of the Seacrest Service were called upon to testify, first at the Worn Commission, then later at the Kirk Commission. They were completely exonerated by both committees and the official verdict was that Torvald had acted alone. In fact, the lone knife man theory was so accepted by the general public down through the years that it was only disputed by those few odd individuals who were in the habit of wearing their jackets with lunatic fringe.

That same day at Barkland Veterinary Hospital, a truck was loaded with a comfortable cage containing what appeared to be an average Irish setter. The only clues to his difference from other dogs were his luxurious reddish-brown fur, an unusually intelligent look in his moist brown eyes, and the fact that he seemed to be extremely well-mannered for an untrained dog. Several hours later, the truck arrived in Houndston on the Gulf, where Rusty, as his collar identified him, was soon claimed and given a good home by a loving family. There he romped and played in their spacious back yard with their three young children, eating and sleeping well until the end of his days.

Mandolin Threnody, on the other hand, never very stable mentally, went completely off the rails at the reports of her husband's death. She began to completely neglect their two children, little Adeline and Shawn, Jr., preferring to closet herself at their compound in Hyena's Port, emerging only to take long walks on the beach, muttering dark passages from the Shakespearean tragedies that she had memorized during her days at Been More. The situation grew so bad that, fearing for the children's welfare, their Uncle Blobby and Aunt Methyl decided to adopt them, figuring that with eleven children of their own, a couple more wouldn't make much difference. Mrs. Threnody, now freed from all domestic responsibilities, ran off with and soon married an elderly but wealthy Greek spice and syrup merchant named Anisebottle Molasses. She spent the rest of her days trying to forget by drinking copious quantities of absinthe and smoking cheap Messcan cigars, until finally succumbing to wormwood poisoning at the ripe old age of ten score and three.

Doberman and Poodle, as Doberman had predicted, were quickly promoted to ambulance drivers and given raises. In fact, Doberman proved himself to be such an efficient organizer that, upon the retirement of Tom Manx, he was promoted to Chief of Stuff, a position he retained for many years until his own retirement.

Fisher S. Frampton, on the strength of his experience in Phallus and the publication of his seminal hallucinatory book *Fright and Disgust in Los Wages*, became an international journalistic force, popularizing his particular brand of gonad journalism to the delight of generations of journalism students and the horror of the traditional college journalism departments. As he was wont to remark, "I don't recommend that you take a lot of drugs, but it's always helped me." There is, unfortunately, no record of what became of his imaginary friend, the evil rabbit Frank.

Phallus police chief, Les Furry, received an official commendation by the Blanc House for his role in the prompt capture of the assumed Threnody assassin. This he used as a springboard to more political control of Phallus. It is obvious that the subsequent killing of Torvald was not a problem for Furry, as he was planning to have Torvald killed anyway en route to Statesville Prison, using the pretense of an attempted escape.

Officers Toody and Muldoon for their part soon grew tired of the subcultural nature of Phallus and moved to a large metropolis on the east coast, where they quickly found jobs as patrol policemen, being assigned Car No. 45 and spending most of their time breaking up fights in Brooklyn, sorting out backed-up traffic jams in Harlem, and providing security for visiting foreign dignitaries at Idlewild.

Nor were any embarrassing questions ever asked by any law enforcement officials of the various conspiracy groups that had aided and abetted Torvald. Don Frito Curlyone had gone to great lengths to ensure everyone's silence in the matter.

Sergeant Sekulevich, for the sterling role he played in the events during and after the assassination attempt, later went shopping for a more prestigious and higher-paying law enforcement position, soon landing a job as Lieutenant with the Sam Frandisco Police Department. There he happily spent the rest of his active duty years chasing down criminals on the streets of Sam Frandisco.

And so, the citizens of Phallus slowly resumed their normal lives, turning their attentions back to their cattle ranches, oil wells, shopping sprees at Demon Makeus, and summer excursions to the popular local theme park Sick Fags Owing Taxes. But a cloud remained over Phallus, the events on that gray Friday having cast a permanent shadow over the city—Charnel Penumbra Five, to be exact. And, in fact, during the succeeding years, a new word was added to the general vocabulary, for when anything is said to be a wrongheaded opinion, attitude, or theory, it is said to be a Phallusy.

END

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