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# Crime of Passion

*A Shell Scott Story*

**BY RICHARD S. PRATHER**

THERE must have been twenty cars in the drive when I got to the address in Malibu. I parked my Cad behind a new Lincoln convertible and walked to the front door of

*Shell Scott had been invited to the party. There was no reason for a guy to punch him just because he knocked on the door.*

a two-story, hundred-thousand-dollar house as modern as now. A small fortune in rubber plants, ferns, bananas, hibiscus fronted the house and bordered the drive. From the sea's edge fifty yards or so away I could hear the boom of surf, and the tangy bracing scent of the ocean was exhilarating in my nostrils.

This was a warm Sunday afternoon; Sheldon Scott, Investigations — my downtown L. A. office — was closed, and I was invited to a party. A Hawaiian party at that: luau, roast pig, the works. From behind the house somewhere I heard a happy squeal. A happy feminine squeal. Sounded like a good wild party.

There was a lot of hellish yelling and whooping. At the top of six cement steps I found a buzzer on the right of the massive door, poked it as chimes went off to the tune of *How Dry I Am*.

I could hear somebody running toward the door. Sounded like somebody barefooted. "Oh, Johnny!" a gal yelled, "Here I come, Johnny!" There was the slap-slap of bare feet and then the door swung wide and a beautiful blonde babe holding a highball glass in her hand stood there framed in the doorway beaming at me.

She cried, "Where you been, Johnny?" and then she began staring at me curiously.

Well, that was nothing to what I was doing to her. Very softly, so softly that I am amazed she heard me, I said, "I'm not Johnny, I'm only Shell Scott, but don't let that —"

Wham, the door slammed in my face. Feet went slap-slap back the way they'd come. What the hell, I leaned on the buzzer some more. Christ knew what I'd get next time. I was even thinking maybe I should yell, "Hey, Johnny's here!" and stand back.

There weren't any footsteps this time. The door opened and a guy about five feet, eight inches tall came outside and glared up at me. The guy was about thirty-five, wearing vivid swim trunks and carrying a highball glass. He was six inches shorter than I, but only about ten pounds under my 205. He was built like a .45 automatic, and he was loaded. "Johnny, huh?" he said thickly, then he dropped his highball glass onto the cement with a crash, and socked me on the chin with his right hand.

I was caught completely by surprise — to tell the truth, I'd been trying to peek around him and get another glimpse of that blonde — so I didn't even have time to jerk my chin. He got me solidly and knocked me clear down those six steps onto the driveway. "The hell with you, Johnny," he said.

The door slammed again. Behind him.

I started to get up, then changed my mind. Maybe it was time for a few cool thoughts. Everything was going around and around. That short guy packed a powerful punch, and though he hadn't knocked me out, he'd made the afternoon a couple shades darker. I fumbled in my coat for cigarettes and my lighter, got a weed lit, and propped an elbow under me while I dragged smoke into my lungs.

The numbers above the massive door danced a little as I stared at them, but they were the right numbers. This was the right house. I shook my head and the ringing went away, everything stopped going around, settled down. It had been less than an hour ago that Dolly had phoned me from here and told me to fly out and bring my trunks, that there was one hell of a party going on. She had said, "Come on, Scotty boy, you come on out here ri' now. Bes' li'l ol' party you ever did see. You got my pers'nal invitation." And so on. Naturally I had dropped everything and headed for Malibu. She'd convinced me that I'd be wel-

come. Dolly had said she'd save me a drink and a kiss if I wanted them, and I wanted them. But maybe, I thought, Dolly had been out of her mind. Some welcome.

A girl's voice near me said, "Boy! I thought *I* was drunk. Whoo. You better go home."

"I just got here." I glanced up and was surprised to find that the gal had walked clear up to within a foot of me. She was wearing a brief bathing suit and from this angle she didn't look half bad. I decided that from any angle she wouldn't look half bad. I couldn't tell how tall she was, but she looked wonderful, and had long red hair and blue eyes.

"What are you doing down there on the ground?" she asked me.

"I'm resting, stupid." I felt ugly.

She squatted on her heels and looked bleary-eyed at me. "Hi," she said. "I'm Betty."

"Hi, Betty. Your bikini has slipped."

"Has not. That's the way I wear it."

She was a gorgeous babe, but obviously no great shakes for brains. I had another drag of my cigarette, then got to my feet, went up the steps and rang the bell. Nothing happened. I banged on the door and the babe standing down there in the driveway said, "Why'nt you turn the doorknob?"

"Yeah, sure," I said. Talk about stupid babes. I turned the doorknob. The door opened. I laughed sourly and went inside.

There was a hall, rooms opening off it, a couple of which I examined without getting a glimpse of that daredevil who had clipped me. A long hall led toward the rear of the house and out in back there I could hear the whooping and yelling.

I headed that way. Mainly I wanted to find the guy who had socked me, but I would be less than honest if I didn't admit there was hope that I'd see the blonde babe again. And after the way she'd trotted to the front door, maybe there'd be a whole flock of wonderful and beautiful people gadding about out there in back. I quickened my pace, found a door and went through it.

There weren't any beautiful people, but there were about a dozen guys and gals standing around drinking and yakking. Most of them had highballs and one had a bottle. This seemed to be only a fragment of the crowd apparently here, because I could hear a lot of noise and music coming from somewhere closer to the ocean. A path led through the trees and shrubbery toward the sounds, but I couldn't see very far because the grounds were so lushly planted and overgrown.

In this small group here, however, one of the guys was the short, bad-tempered egg who had made the mistake of clobbering me. His back was to me. I walked up close to him, tapped him on the shoulder with my index finger, and when he turned I tapped him on the chin with my

right fist. He got all loose and his eyes rolled a bit and he fell down.

Everybody stared at me. Several of the people seemed shocked, a few merely interested, but the only rise out of anybody was one guy's remark, to nobody in particular: "Some party, huh?" They were all horribly drunk. Another guy, a tall, gangling fellow with sandy hair and a wire-stiff mustache stepped toward me. "Oh, I say," he said mushily. "That was a *rotten* thing to do!"

He was British, and sounded as if he were gargling Schweppes Quinine Water. "That's not quite the way to treat our host, what?" he said cheerfully.

"What?"

"Yes, what. What indeed."

"Oh, shut up. I mean, what? He's the host?"

"Yes, host, old man. Well, toodle-oo." He wandered off, down the shrub-lined pathway toward all the noise and commotion.

I looked at the guy on the ground. This might ruin the party for me, but I wasn't sorry I'd clobbered him. A big ruby ring on his finger had left a lump on my chin larger than the ruby. Somebody behind me said, "Well, well."

I turned. A gal had just stepped out of the same door I'd come through a few seconds ago. I recognized her. It was the blonde who'd been looking for Johnny. Saying she wore clothes would be, perhaps, an overstatement, since she was bare-

foot and wore a red and black and green sarong that hugged her waist and hips the way I'd have liked to. The blonde hair was shoulder-length, her eyes were huge and brown, and she looked very good to me. Again.

She walked toward me smiling. She took hold of my arm, nodded at the guy on the ground and said, "Did you do that?"

"Yeah."

"He had it coming to him."

"You don't know the half of it."

"You don't know the half of it."

This had gone far enough. I turned her around, held both her arms gently and marched her back into the house. "Lady," I said, "since I rang the bell here things have occurred with revolting rapidity. What's going on here?"

It took her only about a minute to bring sanity into what had seemed madness. This was just one of the rather wild parties that L. Franklin Brevoort — now unconscious — held every weekend here at his Malibu home. He'd been tossing the parties for about a year, and this was a big one — authentic Hawaiian luau, complete with whole roast pig, poi, dancing girls, Hawaiian music.

She interrupted me, "I can't stand him, though. Who can? Oh, you can't blame L. Franklin — everybody calls him L. Franklin — considering that old mace he's got for a wife."

"That old what?"

"Mace. A kind of battle-ax. That's

what everybody calls her. She's pretty gruesome. Anyway, L. Franklin's about the loneliest man in Malibu —"

"Ha. You forget, *I* am in Malibu. And you forget, too, that I saw you in that doorway —"

"Anyway, when the bell rang I figured that was a good excuse to get away from L. Franklin. And I *did* think it was Johnny. My, I was surprised. Wonder where Johnny is?"

She went on to tell me that you had to be very careful not to let L. Franklin get you alone, because he was a regular old rip. "I'm surprised somebody hasn't shot him," she said, "the way he's always going around reaching for everybody's women. He's sure a rip. Boy, was he mad when the bell rang and I took off."

"I know. He came outside and knocked me down."

She laughed. "Well, I'm going back to the party. You coming?"

I thought about it while she walked to the door. This seemed like a dandy party, and I hadn't even seen Dolly yet, but I wasn't sure I'd be welcome here after what had happened. Then Elaine turned and said, "You're kind of nice, you know? I like you a lot already. Guess I surprised you when I opened the door."

"Frankly, you hit me harder than L. Franklin did."

She laughed. "I looked pretty good, huh?"

"Well . . . why, yes."

Elaine grinned. "I'll save you a dance," she said, turned and left the house.

Well, if everybody here was crazy, this was no time for me to be sane. I was staying at this here party. If L. Franklin didn't like it, I'd sock him again. I started after Elaine. Outside, somebody was pouring water on L. Franklin. Among other things Elaine had told me that the crux of the party was closer to the beach, about twenty or thirty yards back of the house. She was out of sight, so I headed toward the ocean, following the path. All you had to do was follow the noise. Mixed in with the whooping was music, Hawaiian music. In a minute I came out into a big clearing filled with plenty of movement.

About fifty people were flitting in and out among the trees and shrubs, many of them dancing. Four brown-skinned guys in sarongs were playing on stringed things and drums, and the place was a mass of color. A fifth brown-skinned guy was swinging a wicked-looking sword around and jumping over it while the other men played pulsating Hawaiian music that sounded as if it had a little mambo in it.

This place of Brevoort's was practically a jungle, with all kinds of trees, including palms and eucalyptus, a dozen different kinds of shrubs and tropical plants surrounding the clearing. There were bananas, philodendron, elephant ears,

more hibiscus and lilies and orchids, and plenty of ferns. There were a lot of potted plants standing around, and practically all of the guests were potted, too. Almost everybody here was wearing trunks or swimsuits, most of the gals in bikinis or similarly abbreviated jobs, and a man simply couldn't have asked for a more interesting get-together.

On my right was a 200-pound block of ice, its middle hollowed out and filled with a red punch, two white gardenias and a purple orchid floated on the liquor's surface. Several halves of coconut shells rested on the ice and as I watched a red-headed tomato filled one of the coconut cups, drank the punch, and then let out a yip, shaking her head. It was Betty, the redheaded tomato I'd met in front of the house.

I walked up beside her, had a cup of the punch and almost let out a yip myself. It was so strong they probably had to change the flowers every fifteen minutes. Then I said, "Hi."

She didn't say anything, just smiled and wrapped her arms around me and we started dancing. Then she stopped. "You scratch," she said, looking up at me. "Haven't you got a suit?"

"Sure. In the car."

"Get it. And hurry. We'll have a dance, and a swim. I'm Betty."

I went flying off down the path, changed in the car, and was back in two minutes. Betty, I was pleased to see, was waiting for me. We had

a couple dances, and it was really much better without scratching. Then she said, "Come on," and ran toward the beach. I followed her down the path and caught up with her at the sand's edge.

On our right flames leaped from a pit dug in the sand. "What's the bonfire for?" I asked Betty.

"That's where they'll cook the pig pretty quick," she said. "Big luau. Really doing it right, huh? The pig's for the big dinner later — along with poi and raw fish and I don't know what all. Come on." She raced into the water.

When we got back to the clearing, the music and dancing was getting even wilder. It was almost dark, and somebody grabbed Betty and whirled her away. I didn't try to stop her; there were dozens more around, including the blonde Elaine, who was dancing at the moment. This was marvelous. Nothing was going to get me to leave *this* party. I went over to the punch bowl and had another drink as a woman older than most here, a gal about forty, came up beside me and dipped half a coconut into the punch, gulped the drink down, and then had another immediately after it. I shuddered. She weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds, was maybe five-eight, and had a flat, rather unpleasant face.

She looked at me and said, "Dance with me. I'm Mrs. Brevoort. I'm the hostess, so you have to dance with me."

She was soused to the eardrums. I said, "Sure," and latched onto her. We took about four steps and she stopped. "I don't want to dance," she said. "Go wiggle with those naked women."

I swung around eagerly, looking for the naked women, then realized she'd referred to the gals in bikinis. Mrs. Brevoort was dressed in skirt and blouse, and I guessed she'd been trying to have a good time, but not succeeding. It suddenly occurred to me, as I looked at all those lovely, startlingly shaped dolls gyrating near us, that this might well be the first dance Mrs. Brevoort had had — and she'd asked me for it.

I started to make small talk, so small it was almost invisible, but she waved her hand at me and said, "Go away. Go wiggle wi' nake' w'mn." Her eyes were getting glassy. Those two fast punches must have been suddenly catching up with her. I left her at the hollowed-out cake of ice.

It was dark now, and the glow from the fire down on the beach was warm and red; a few Japanese lanterns had been lighted here in the clearing, and a half dozen Hawaiian torches were lighted. I wondered where L. Franklin, the host, was. But then I forgot about him; I was having too much fun to wonder about the host or hostess — it was a typical party. I never did see Dolly.

A couple hours, maybe more, passed in a kind of delightfully Ha-

waiian delirium. And it seemed that the music got more sensual, the dances wilder, the women lovelier. From somewhere came three gals in hula skirts and the music took on a headier beat and the three gals started shaking like maracas. Right in front of me I saw a beautiful blonde gal doing a hula, especially for me it appeared, and it was *my* blonde; it was Elaine.

"Well, hello," I said.

She kept doing her unique hula, unique because it must have been the kind popular before the missionaries came, and she said, "Like?"

"Lovely, lovely." The three gals in hula skirts were stirring up a storm, and somebody yelled that we were all to join in when the spirit moved us. One guy grabbed a little doll and they leaped into the middle of the clearing with the other three gals and started improvising. The music got wilder, more frantic and pulse-stirring. Another guy and gal started jumping around, and soon this seemed less like Malibu than a strip of Hawaiian beach of a hundred years ago.

More guys and gals got up and leaped around, and it seemed there were more bouncing, quiver, jigging and jangling bodies than I'd ever before seen quivering practically in unison. There were squeals and yips and howls among the hulas, and with half the people here already gyrating — the spirit moved me.

I let out a whoop with a lot of



vowels in it so it would sound Hawaiian, and I jumped into the middle of the people letting out *oofs* and *uuffs* and *huuhs* and similar Hawaiian-like sounds, while shaking all over like a plucked banjo string. Elaine came toward me at what seemed a hundred miles an hour, but making little forward progress. The drums kept thudding, throbbing, and suddenly there was nobody at all standing on the sidelines. The last guy, a tall Texan I'd met earlier, let out a "Yahoo" and came twirling around the edge of the crowd hanging onto the hand of a black-haired tomato who was throwing everything at him but the palm trees, while he continued to let out yips like he was calling all the little dogies in Texas. Elaine sort of rammed herself up against me so close that she might have grown there, and in a few moments we were on the edge of the crowd, next to the path leading to the beach.

She spun around and raced down the path away from me. I ran after her.

At the sand's edge she stumbled and I almost caught her, but she regained her balance and ran toward the booming breakers. I followed her past the pit where huge hot coals now glowed, and I saw something from the corner of my eyes that jarred me oddly, but I kept on running. I ran clear past the pit where the pig was now being roasted for the luau dinner later, then I slowed and stopped.

I went back and looked down into the pit dug in the sand, heat bouncing against my face. It did look like a pig at first, not much like a man. It was a man, though. I heard Elaine laughing.

I got down on my hands and knees, moved as close as I could. The guy was face down, but even face up he'd have been unrecognizable, so horribly was he burned. Still sticking out of his throat was the sharp metal spit that would have been used for holding the pig. One arm was outflung, the hand in a somewhat more protected spot than the rest of him, and I could see the big ruby ring on his finger. Mine host.

"Come on! What's the matter with you?" It was Elaine calling me. I could barely see the dim white blur of her body outlined against the darkness of the sea. Behind her a comber broke and frothed in toward us. I stood up and walked toward Elaine.

Five minutes later we were both in the house; I hadn't told Elaine a thing and she was a little angry with me. She pointed out the phone and I told her to wait in the next room, then phoned local Homicide. After that I found Elaine. "Where's the kitchen?" I asked her.

"The what? Don't tell me you brought me here because you're hungry!"

I shuddered. "No, but I've got to sober up. I'll explain all of this

later." She led me to the kitchen where I drank half a quart of milk while water boiled for some instant coffee. Elaine stared at me as if I were crazy while I found meat in the icebox, some roast beef, and made a thick, sloppy sandwich with an inch of meat between two slices of french bread. I gulped coffee, grabbed a frying pan and big spoon, then took Elaine's arm and led her back to the clearing where people were still squealing and dancing. "Are you crazy?" Elaine asked me in exasperation.

"Maybe. Hold the frying pan for me, will you?" She shook her head, grabbed the pan. I hit it vigorously with the spoon and yelled, "Chow time, everybody. Chow's on." Not many people paid attention to me; I hadn't expected many to. I walked around the clearing, munching on my sloppy sandwich and saying "Chow, anybody?" to everybody. It didn't happen till I was almost at the punch bowl. Mrs. Brevoort's unpleasant face loomed beside me.

I said, "Hi. Wanna dance?" I blinked drunkenly at her, and nibbled at the beef. She eyed the sandwich, fascinated.

I said, "I'm sorry, but I got so starved I couldn't wait for everybody else. Hope you don't mind, but I carved a little meat off that pig down there in the pit."

"You . . . what?" she said, and her face was already starting to get green.

I said, "I was hungry. There's

plenty more, though. You hungry, Mrs. Brevoort?"

Her mouth dropped open, her lips twitched, and her eyes rolled up in her head. Then she fainted. People around us kept dancing and going, "Uuh!" and making Hawaiian chants.

Half an hour later the police had come and gone. I'd told them on the phone to arrive without sirens, and in the meantime to check on me with the Los Angeles and Hollywood police. As a result, they handled everything quietly and took Mrs. Brevoort away with almost no commotion at all — and let me stay. She spilled everything in the first five minutes: that she knew her husband had just married her for her money and that it was *her* money he used for these weekly parties at which he ignored her, and everybody else ignored her, and she'd caught him on the beach tonight with a babe, waited until the girl went back alone to the clearing, then swatted L. Franklin over the head with the spit and stuck it through his throat. She'd dragged him ten feet through the sand and rolled him in onto the coals.

Elaine said to me, "I still don't know why she fainted when you stuck that ghastly sandwich in her face."

"She thought I was eating her hubby. She'd tossed him into the pig pit."

"I don't get it. Why into the pit?"

“She was all excited. People get excited when they kill people. She thought she could hide him there until she figured out what to do. And she wasn’t acting very logically anyway, it was a crime of passion. She hated parties.”

We were standing beside the melting punch bowl. Both of us had a small drink. A lot of people were still dancing — not around the pit, though. Right after Mrs. Brevoort had fainted I’d sent Elaine scooting down to the beach to make sure nobody *did* reach the pit; nobody had. I said, “I didn’t have the faintest idea who, of these fifty people, might have run the buzzard through. Only the person who’d killed him, though,

would have known what was cooking. Well, at least it was better than having the cops haul everybody down to the station — I was damned if anybody was going to break up this fine party.”

Elaine said, “I still don’t get it all. You mean both the host and hostess are gone?”

“Yeah. They took L. Franklin away, too. So there’s nobody to call off the party. You know, this thing may last for weeks.”

“How long will you last?”

I grinned at her. She laughed softly, whirled and ran toward the beach. I waited about one second, and then turned.

I ran after her.



# MUGGED AND PRINTED

MICKEY SPILLANE isn't satisfied with being the creator of Mike Hammer and the top-selling writer in the world today. He's been



branching out, as moviegoers throughout the world know. Not only have two pictures based on his famous novels *I, The Jury* and *The Long Wait* been released nationally, but he's also made his acting debut in the new *Ring Of Fear*. His

latest story for *Manhunt*, *The Pickpocket*, is something of a departure, too. Instead of featuring Mike Hammer, this story stars a new character Spillane has developed: Willie, the reformed pickpocket. We think you'll like him as much as any other Spillane character.

HENRY KANE, whose new complete novel, *Precise Moment*, is featured in this issue, is the famous creator of Peter Chambers. As an ex-



lawyer, Kane's had to do a lot of work with the police and with private eyes, and it's rumored that Chambers may be a composite portrait of several private detectives now operating. In addition to his many appearances in *Manhunt*, Chambers has been fea-

tured in the widely popular novels including *Armchair In Hell*, *Report For A Corpse*, *Halo For Nobody* and others.

HAL ELLSON, author of the best-selling *Duke*, returns this month with the tough and surprising *Six Fingers*. ♦ EVAN HUNTER's novel, *The Blackboard Jungle*, which is being made into an M-G-M movie, will soon be on sale in bookstores. While waiting for the book, take a look at Hunter's *The Scarlet King*. ♦ RICHARD S. PRATHER's newest Shell Scott novel is called *Always Leave 'Em Dying*. His newest Shell Scott short story is called *Crime Of Passion*, in this issue. ♦ RICHARD DEMING's Manville Moon appears in the new Rinehart book, *Whistle Past The Graveyard*. You can also meet Moon in *Death Sentence*, a startling new short story in this issue. ♦ JONATHAN CRAIG is back with another fine and authentic documentary this month. Craig's latest is called *The Purple Collar*. ♦ HAROLD Q. MASUR returns to *Manhunt* with a surprising new story, *Dead Issue*.

CRAIG RICE, the only woman to appear in this all-star issue of *Manhunt*, is also the only detective-story writer ever to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine*,



an honor usually reserved for Presidents, world-famous scientists, and the like. She's the creator of John J. Malone, the lawyer-detective who's appeared in *Having Wonderful Crime*, *Eight Faces At Three*, *The Wrong Murder* (followed, logically enough, by *The Right Murder*), *The Fourth Postman* and other books. Malone's also been featured on radio, TV and the movies and, of course, in many issues of *Manhunt* — though possibly never to such good effect as in the current *Flowers To The Fair*.

FRANK KANE, a familiar figure to *Manhunt* readers, is the author of many novels featuring his tough and knowledgeable private eye, Johnny Liddell. The books in which Liddell's appeared include *Green Light For Death*, *Slay Ride*, *Poisons Unknown* and his latest, *Grave Danger*. Kane's authentic local color, his grasp of police technique and all the important details of homicide investigation, have combined with his writing ability to make such stories as *Big Steal* favorites with readers and critics.

