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DEATH AT FULL MOON

THE FIRST KILLING occurred in June, on the first of the month, sometime after midnight. A girl, very pretty and young, was strangled in La Brea Park. And the body hidden in the Azalea bushes, midway between the concrete statues of a Brontosaurus and a Saber Toothed Tiger. The death weapon was a scarf, red, left at the scene of the crime, still wrapped tightly around the smooth skinned throat.

The papers played it up big. Particularly the *Daily Express*, Los Angeles cry daily. They put their best sob sister on the case. And she

lost no time digging for gory details, but came up dry. The girl, Mary Estelle, age twenty one, employed at the nearby May Company. Habits, late walks. A simple, clean living girl. No dirt. Not even an unhappy boyfriend.

And she was dead . . . along with the thousands of other mammals who'd come to a sticky end at the tar pits.

The gore wore thin, was filed unsolved by the police and relegated to the rear pages of the *Express*.

And then, on the thirticth of

A Novclette

BY AL JAMES

Old Jake yawned and stretched in the morning sun. He smiled as he saw the girl approach as she did every morning. She passed into the shadow of the tunnel . . . and she never re-appeared.

June, a man decided to take a walk because he couldn't sleep. The spot he picked for the stroll was the quiet campus of Los Angeles City College.

He found the body near the neatly clipped hedge letter, 'C', near the Vermont entrance. Time, ten thirty. The dull, yellow glow of a single streetlight shone down across the pretty, young, tragedy marred face on the ground. Her name, Pamela Watkins, twenty, night walker. A red scarf had been wrapped around her neck.

This time all the papers jumped on the bandwagon. Even some of the cities four million smog sufferers took notice. A few wrote letters, others toasted the dead girls at the nearest gin mill.

The police worked hard. But they fought at shadows. Not one clue could be found. Every lead led up a one way street. Frantic detectives jumped each time the phone rang. Another phony calling in to confess or the boss jabbing for action.

The month moved past and summer heat poured in from the Mojave Desert, accompanied by temperature inversions and eye smarting smog. The papers gradually climbed off the police department's back and went in search of more fertile fields to sell papers. This time the case wasn't filed.

The month finally came to a hot, sticky close, with one day to go, the thirtieth.

The morning was still fresh, only a slight pungent odor in the air foretelling of the smog yet to come. The center of the city sat quietly waiting the beginning of the day's activity. All the freeways were crowded as working humanity streamed in endless processions towards town. Despite the bustle, it was strangely quiet. Not unlike every other morning.

The sun, already three fists above the horizon, held a strange pinkish glow as it filtered through the slight overcast.

In the shadow of the Long Beach Freeway, near eighth street, stood the Francisco Boarding house. An ancient holdout in the snake curving strips of concrete, the building was one of the few left between the speedway and Figueroa, two blocks east.

Now a solitary figure emerged from the screen door, moved towards the railing and yawned lustily. Jake Spinger, boozier of the first water, bum supreme. His morning ritual consisted of leaning on the porch railing, breathing deeply while the air was still more or less pure, trying to work off the effects of the cheap whiskey he'd consumed the night before. This complete, he stretched again, his eyes turning upwards to the steady stream of cars moving along the elevated highway a hundred yards west. Then he shifted his vision up eighth street, to the underpass, a dark impenetrable tunnel.

He smiled slightly when he saw the figure on the opposite side of the blackness, bathed in sunshine as she walked slowly toward him. Jake knew without looking that it was eighty forty-seven. It always was when he saw the girl. Steady as clockwork.

He didn't know her, except to wave cheerfully at her as she passed the porch. It was enough for an old man.

As he watched, she moved into the shadows of the underpass. Jake sat down on a wicker chair, waiting.

Five minutes later he got to his feet again, squinting his eyes in the direction of the tunnel. He could see nothing beyond the stone entrance. He scratched the side of his head, mildly puzzled. It only took a minute or two to walk under the freeway.

In another five minutes the white headed man moved uncertainly off the porch. Maybe she'd gotten sick or something.

Jake found the girl midway in the darkness, sprawled lifeless on the damp concrete walk. A red scarf wrapped around her neck.

Mike Redden stared sullenly at the faces of the three girls spread out on his desk, oblivious to the noise around him. Mentally he clicked off what he knew about each. Mary Estelle, killed in La Brea Park, age twenty. Pamela Wat-

kins, killed on the campus of the city junior college. He picked up the picture of the last one, his stomach turning over. Cynthia Stevens, murdered beneath the Eighth Ave. viaduct. Twenty one. So damned young. It made him sick.

Ever since the case had been assigned to him, Redden had mulled over everything the department had found out about the girls. What about them was similar? Was it coincidence that they were all about the same age. And had they been killed by the same man.

It was a big hunk and Mike found trouble swallowing it. But it was his baby now and he was stuck with it. And in the week he'd been on it he'd come up with a big, fat zero, just as the other boys had.

The man behind the desk leaned back in his chair, clasping ham like hands behind the solidly built head, his intent, black eyes staring at nothing as he scoured his mind for something he might have missed. Who in their right mind would kill three pretty girls? He corrected his thinking. Whoever the man was his mind wasn't stable. That could mean there would be more killings.

Redden got to his feet and moved slowly to the window, staring at the city five stories below. It was scared . . . finally. The first two had left little impression. But the third was the bomb that blew the lid off. Every girl in the city locked her door at night. But from past history it looked like the only

ones who should worry were the pure types. Mike rubbed his protruding chin. It was a switch anyhow. It was usually the others that wound up face down in a vacant lot.

He grunted to himself and returned to his desk, his eye catching the latest edition of the *Express*. 'WHERE WILL THE RED SCARF KILLER STRIKE NEXT?', the headlines roared.

A good question, Redden told himself. He wished the papers would shut up. They were only adding fuel to the storm.

The phone came to life. Redden felt an urge to throw the ringing instrument out the window. Probably another screwball.

It wasn't. Betty's voice came through from the switchboard downstairs. "Mr. Redden, there's a gentleman here to see you."

"What about?" Mike said, suspicious.

"He won't say."

"What's his name?"

"Philip Henderson."

Redden stroked his chin. The name was familiar. He fumbled through the papers on his desk, finally picking one up and studying it for a minute. He turned his attention back to the instrument in his hand. "Send him up."

Philip Henderson was an intent looking man. Black piercing eyes with frowning claw marks tracing across the forehead above the bushy eyebrows. As he sat in the chair

next to Redden's desk the light from the window poured across the face, like the clefts in a jagged rock face.

Mike studied the figure silently for a moment, mentally calculating his age. Probably around forty, he thought. That would make him the same as me.

Redden began the conversation. "You wanted to see me?"

Henderson talked like a man anxious to get to the point. "Yes, I did," he said. "It's about the red scarf murders."

"You want to confess to them?" Redden was sorry he'd made the crack as soon as it came out. The man across from him was no one to be flip with.

Henderson shook his head, the faint edge of humor showing around his lips. "Hardly," he said. "But I do have some information that might help you."

Redden leaned back in the chair, waiting. "What is it?"

"I teach an evening course in astronomy at Los Angeles City College. Mary Estelle, Pamela Watkins and Cynthia Stevens were all in my class."

Redden smiled. "I know, doctor."

"You aren't surprised?" Henderson said.

Mike leaned across his desk, shuffled and found the paper he was after, reading from it. "Doctor Philip Henderson, PHD in astronomy at Harvard, 1940. Specialist in

variable stars. Credited with discovery of several valuable clusters. Presently doing research work under a Rockefeller grant at the Mount Wilson and Palomar Observatories. Teaches a course in fundamental astronomy at the Los Angeles City College on Wednesday and Friday nights." Mike turned the paper over and continued, "Report over a two week period of watching Doctor Henderson is negative. Discontinued for the present."

Doctor Henderson watched Mike toss the paper back on the cluttered desk, then broke into a grin. "You do a very good job, Mr. Redden," he said slowly. "Mind telling me what I had for dinner two weeks ago?"

Mike smiled. "I can, doctor, if you insist."

Doctor Henderson took a cigarette from his pocket and lighted it, wafting the smoke away with his hand. "I take it from that report that you suspected me."

Mike shook his head. "Not past tense," he said. "We still do."

"I suppose I should be insulted. But I imagine that's part of your job. I can't really blame you in light of what's happened." He stirred in the chair, starting to get up.

Redden waved him back with his hand. "Don't go just yet, doctor. As long as you're here I'd like to talk to you."

"Suits me," the doctor said. "But drop the doctor thing. Just call me

Phil. Everybody does. I've always felt only a medical doctor earned the right to use it."

Redden grinned. He liked the man. Most educated people he'd met had been too aware of their talents. Henderson didn't seem that way at all. "Okay, Phil," he said. "If that's the way you want it." He picked up the photographs of the three girls. "We found out about them being in your class. What kind of students were they?"

Henderson shrugged. "Average I'd say. Maybe a little above. Night students are usually more intent . . . or they wouldn't be there in the first place."

"You ever see anything out of the ordinary. Maybe one of the men students trying to pick them up?"

The doctor grinned. "Not if you knew the class. There are twenty that take it. The five men are old bucks, pure astronomy bugs."

Redden tugged at his chin. "Fifteen women?"

Henderson nodded. "That's right. Nothing unusual about it. Night school normally breaks down to that percentage. Women seem to be more intense about learning. The men like their evenings free to prowl."

"Let's get back to the girls," Mike prodded. "You ever have anything to do with them after class?"

"No. I don't believe in fraternizing with the students." He snuffed out the cigarette in the saucer be-

neath Mike's cup of spent coffee. "What's this you said about still suspecting me?"

Redden frowned. He didn't like being thrown off his thought train. "It's true," he admitted. "Three women are dead for no apparent reason. Anybody that had any contact with them are natural suspects."

Doctor Henderson's face clouded over. It was apparent he was struggling to keep his anger beneath the surface. "Now that I've had time to dwell on it I don't believe I like your methods. Shadowing me. I suppose that's the term the police use."

Mike nodded, waiting for the outburst to play itself out.

"Why didn't you just come to my apartment and ask me what I knew about the girls," he said, still hot beneath the collar of his immaculately white shirt. "As far as I know I have the reputation of being above reproach in this community. And to suspect me of killing those girls." He shuddered visibly.

Redden knew it would be useless to continue with the man. Somewhere he'd gotten off the track and it would have to be another day before he stood a chance of getting back on. "If you've told me all you know then we better close this for now," he said, getting to his feet. "I have some work to do."

Henderson didn't need much encouragement. He got to his feet and left the room, still steaming.

Mike pressed the intercom button

as soon as he'd gone. Mable, secretary to the half dozen top detectives in the bureau, came on the wire. "I hope you don't want anything, Mike, she snapped. "Everybody's on my back today. And me with a date tonight. I wanna look pretty, not ragged out."

Despite his troubles, Mike grinned. "Just a few things, my girl. Get me a complete run down on Doctor Philip Henderson, astronomer at Mount Wilson."

"He the guy that just came blazing past here like he was chasing a bus?"

"The same," Redden acknowledged.

"You set fire to his pants?"

"No, just his dignity. I thought he was a regular guy. I was wrong." Mike sat down heavily, wondering why he'd ever gotten into the detecting business.

July led into August. A hot sultry month filled with Santa Ana winds pouring super heated air across the city, mixed generously with the exhausts of half a million cars . . . result smog.

In fifteen days Redden backtracked every inch of ground made by the department. A few scattered possibilities but nothing concrete. Each girl lived alone in an apartment. All three managers were steadfast in defending the reputation of the girls. They dated but were usually home early. No men

in the rooms. If the women had any strange habits it was their curiosity. Books by the shopping bag, night school, anything to further themselves.

It was a tough one. Redden paced his office, made a tenth trip to the water cooler and returned to the desk, pouring over the papers on the surface. It was all there. But what did he have? Nothing to tie them together but the night class with Henderson. Before taking on the case he'd never have believed that three girls could be so pure. But he was ready to accept it now. It *had* to be. There was no evidence to the contrary.

And the red scarfs. How many red scarfs can be sold in a city, he told himself. He had the answer. Two hundred. And all in single lots. But to be certain he'd tracked down every buyer. Every one of them was clean. Another blind alley.

Mable shuffled into the office and tossed another paper on his desk. "Here's the report on Henderson," she said.

"It's about time," Mike growled. "I asked for it two weeks ago."

"My aren't we in a good mood today," the woman smiled. "You wanted it thorough. It is. But I had to wait for some out of town answers."

Redden ran a hand through his sodden hair. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "This thing has me going in circles."

The woman patted him motheringly on the back. "You'll crack it."

Redden grinned, picking up the piece of paper she'd left. "I hope so," he admitted. "Or they better make room for me in the net."

The run down was what he might have expected. A young boy interested in astronomy spends his life going after his goal. One straight bee line for a career on top a mountain. Not a woman in the man's life. The years from 1940 to '44 were blank.

And then Mike got to the last paragraph. The report seemed to come alive in his hands. "I'll be darned," he almost whispered.

At the same instant the phone rang. Redden snatched it up, angry at the intrusion. He barked into the instrument.

A familiar voice answered him. "This is Doctor Henderson," it said smoothly. Would it be possible for me to talk to you today? I have some information that might be of use."

Speak of the devil, Mike thought. Out loud he replied, "Sure, doctor. You come down here. I'll be waiting."

"I'm sorry," Henderson said. "I can't make it. You'll have to come up the mountain. It's my appointment at the one hundred inch."

Redden checked his watch. One. "Okay," he agreed. "I should be there by three."

"Fine," the voice agreed at the other end of the line.

Mike hung up the phone. Now he was getting someplace . . . he hoped.

By the time Redden had fought his way out the Arroyo Seco Freeway and across Pasadena, it was a relief to turn off Foothill and into the mountains. He watched the city drop rapidly below as he fought around the curves leading to the observatory. Even the smog thinned out somewhat and he was able to take the first deep breath in days.

Twenty miles further on he made a right and poked the nose of the car onto the narrow, twisting road leading to Wilson. It had been years since he'd made the trip. But the stretch hadn't changed. Originally carved from solid rock to bring in the big mirror, it had never been made wider.

He didn't see the car until it came around the curve. And then it was almost too late. Mike hit the brakes, skidding against the cliff face as the other machine spun past him, clinging to the edge of the cliff, swerving in desperation as it tried to regain a tire hold. Redden saw only a blur of dust and color. But it was enough to recognize the model. He held his breath until the driver gained control, then vanished around another curve.

"Stupid drivers," Redden murmured to himself, exhaling relief. His hand shook as he eased the car back into gear.

The top of the mountain hadn't

changed much, with the exception of the TV antenna farm. Mike eased into the large parking lot and moved across the concrete onto the trail leading to the hotel. Here and there a deer nibbled at the short grass, or a squirrel chattered after him for not being fed.

It was peaceful. Redden felt it, despite the tensions built up inside of him. Tall pines bent slightly in the wind as cool, clear air flowed across the mountain. In the distance, mingled with the green, and looking out of place in the surroundings, were the silver domes of the observatories. Standing higher than the others was the sun tower, built to photograph the sun every hour of every day in the year.

Redden walked across the porch of the hotel, hesitating before going in. Behind him stood an empty pool, the concrete sides cracked, an expensive experiment in luxurious mountain top living. In the distance was the city. But he couldn't see it. A thick haze of smog covered the six million people like a dirty blanket, spreading over a half dozen counties.

Mike pulled open the screen door and crossed the lobby to the desk. The clerk looked up from behind the souvenirs cluttering the counter.

"Where can I find Doctor Philip Henderson?" Redden asked.

The older man waved a crippled hand in the direction of the domes he'd just seen. "He just had coffee

here, not more than fifteen minutes ago. Said he was going to the hundred inch and get it ready for tonight."

Mike returned to the trail. He was puffing from exertion by the time he reached the big silver building. He circled it, searching for a door. Finding one, Redden pushed through the opening. Inside it was cool, with a faint musty odor, like a long closed closet. And it was dark after the brilliant sunshine of the outdoors. Redden waited. Slowly his eyes began to clear until he could see a shape reaching to the ceiling filling the center of the room. He recognized it for what it was, a telescope. Once, when in college, he'd dabbled in astronomy. This was a reflector type. That meant the eye piece would be near the mouth, high above his head. In the newer types there would be a cage the operator sat in. But this was old, the first hundred inch in the world, built in 1917. There was probably an elevated platform somewhere in the room. Henderson would be on it.

"Doctor Henderson," he called out.

The voice echoed around the quiet of the room, rattling off the metal sides of the building. He repeated himself. Still nothing. Redden moved away from the wall, searching the dark shadows overhead. The control board in the center glowed a dull red. Someone had turned it on.

But where was the doctor? Mike scratched his head, roaming the room. He almost stumbled on the ladder before he saw it. It probably led to the roost and the good doctor was so absorbed in his work he hadn't seen him come in.

Redden climbed the ladder slowly. He was halfway to the ceiling before he saw the doctor. Mike had to clench the sides of the ladder firmly as shock tried to drive him off. Twenty feet above him, just beneath the platform, swinging gently in space, was Henderson. A glimmer of light caught the object he hung from. A red scarf . . .

"Let's get this straight," Redden said, directing his question at the youth sitting across from him. "You are, or were Doctor Henderson's assistant?"

The figure in the chair nodded. His age would have been hard to pin down. Somewhere between twenty five and thirty. An intent, piercing face, topped by an uncontrolled shock of red hair. But the freckles spread across the thin face made the difference. He looked like an eternal kid. "One of them," the figure said.

Mike walked to the window and looked out. Three hours had passed since the discovery of the body. The sun had set behind the smog. As he watched, the dome of the hundred inch began to open slowly.

Work goes on regardless, he thought to himself. The hotel in the distance was a dark shadow from the cabin he'd been given to use during his questioning. The dark haired man lighted a cigarette and turned to the figure in the chair. "How many assistants are there?"

"Two."

"Who's the other?" Mike waited for an answer, studying the young man. He'd been the first on the scene when Redden had left the observatory looking for help.

Steve Adams took a deep breath, wiping the dryness away from his lips. "Norma Lewis."

"A woman?"

The man nodded. "That's right. He hesitated, looking at the pocket Mike had put the pack of cigarettes in. "Do you mind if I borrow one? It's been quite an afternoon."

"Yeah. it has that," Redden agreed, pulling out the pack and handing it to him. "You wouldn't happen to know why the doctor called me to come up here?"

Adams lighted the cigarette and leaned back, more relaxed. He gave Mike his first break. "Yes I would. It was about the murder of those three girls."

Redden suddenly tensed, stopped his pacing. "What about it?" he said, his anxiety showing.

Adams took a piece of paper from his pocket, handing it to Mike. "This is the sheet he used to scribble on while we were talking,"

he said. "I thought I'd better save it."

Mike studied the writing. Just a series of figures that meant nothing to him. "You better explain it," he said. "I'm not much of a scientist."

Steve Adams smiled thinly, pursing his thin lips. "When I got up to the mountain this morning Doctor Henderson called me in his office. He said he wanted to talk. That he'd been thinking of the girls that were murdered. He said he had a theory . . . and a suspect," Adams got to his feet and stood behind Mike, his finger pointing at the first number, 6-1-1255. "That means June first, the date the first girl was murdered. The last is the exact moment there is a full moon."

"Now wait a minute . . ." Mike began.

Adams ignored the interruption, pointing at the second series of numbers, 6-30-1004. "This is June thirtieth, the date of the second murder. Again the time is that of the exact period of a full moon." His finger moved to the last series. And that's July 30th at eight forty seven in the morning. If I remember correctly the girl was murdered at about that time."

"It's crazy," Mike protested.

"Nevertheless it's fate," Adams said smoothly. "If you'll check the time of death I'm willing to bet the times approximate."

Redden pulled out his note book and thumbed to the times he'd

noted down and compared them. "I'll be damned," he swore. "It's close."

The freckle faced figure sat on the edge of a table, smiling. "I thought it would. Doctor Henderson was a mighty clever man. Not many people realize that there is a full moon for only an instant. They look up one night and there it is. To them it lasts for a day or two."

Redden turned the sudden information over in his head, trying to see what it meant. It could be he had a real nut, even worse than he'd feared, on his hands. "It does narrow the field down," he said, thinking out loud. "Someone who knows his astronomy."

Adams drew on the cigarette, shaking his head. "Unfortunately that isn't the case. For a buck and a half . . . or free at the library, a man can consult any almanac. It gives the exact times."

"So why did Doctor Henderson feel it was so urgent that I know?"

The figure sobered, getting up from his chair and looking out the window at the darkness. At length he turned back into the room, his face taking on an older quality, not complimented by the freckles. "That's where the hard part comes in," he said slowly. "If you remember, I told you there were two assistants. Myself and Norma Lewis. Miss Lewis has been with the doctor ten years, two longer than I. She has always been in love with the doctor, hanging onto his every

word. Doing whatever he asked. She is a brilliant astronomer and might have gone far."

"Might have?" Mike questioned.

"That's right. But she's insanely jealous of him."

"That still doesn't add up to anything."

"It will," Adams promised. "Hear me out. I don't know what the doctor told you about the three girls but he did see them after class, many times. The man was a real wolf in professor's clothing."

Redden remembered the last paragraph in the report. 'Doctor Henderson was seen in the company of each of the girls at dinner the evening before they were murdered.' "So far so good," he grunted. "But what about the girl?"

"I hate to tell you this but I feel it's my duty. Norma was a brilliant student. One of the few Harvard ever let study at their institution. Unfortunately, her health broke and so did her mind. She murdered her best friend in a fit of anger and was sent to a mental institution."

"I still don't get any connection," Mike admitted.

Adams leaned forward, in confidence. "That's just it. She killed in the exact phase of the full moon. Some kind of a complex." He shrugged. "Don't ask me what. Maybe an astronomer's disease. Anyhow, they sent her to an institution and she was cured . . . at least until now. When she got out Doctor Henderson gave her a job.

"Next you'll tell me she's a werewolf," Redden said. But he didn't believe his own scepticism. "How come you know all of this?"

"The doctor told me this morning. I thought it was my duty to tell you."

"Yeah," Redden agreed. "You're right. Tell me, what kind of a car does Miss Lewis drive?"

"A fifty seven Chevy."

Redden remembered the car that had almost forced him off the road. It was a Chevy. The same year. Things began to look interesting." He waved at the door. "You can go, Adams. But stay in town."

"You going to arrest Norma?"

"I suppose. It does look bad."

The freckle faced figure left the room, shaking his head slowly.

Redden watched the door close, then sat down heavily. It looked bad for the girl. If she'd done it once she was capable of it again. The motive would be jealousy. A woman. It was an angle he'd never considered. He picked up the phone to call headquarters and have the girl picked up, then hesitated, replacing the instrument in the cradle. So far he didn't have much proof. It would take more than a past mistake to nail this one down. The girl had been clever . . . so far.

The next day Mike got a warrant and searched Doctor Henderson's apartment. It was crammed with the tools of his trade, textbooks bulging over onto every table. One

of the volumes was the Harvard year book. Mike picked out a comfortable chair and sat down, thumbing through the book. He froze on the page announcing the June graduates. There, staring up at him, were two very familiar faces. One was Doctor Henderson. The other Norma Lewis. A much younger picture than he'd seen on her employment card at California Tech. Beneath it the printing was equally interesting. . . . 'Miss Lewis is continuing her studies, but not in astronomy. She has announced her intentions of becoming a nurse.'

The beginnings of a crazy idea nagged Redden. He got up from the chair and went over the apartment a second time. It took him an hour to find what he was after. But it was there, crumpled up in the bottom of a waste basket. A brown wrapper addressed to the doctor from a Chicago mail order house.

He picked up the telephone and called his office. Mable came on the wire. "Where ya been, Mike?" she snapped before he had a chance to open his mouth.

"You trying to become a detective?" Redden grinned. "How about that information on Henderson's hands. Find anything?"

"Sure did. Just like you said. He'd been handling photographic chemicals. But isn't that natural? Most astronomers do their own work."

"Be patient, gal," Redden smiled. "It's only a link. What about Adams?"

"Same thing. He squealed to high heaven when we gave him the test . . . but it's done, and positive."

"The girl?"

"Negative. Not a sign."

"Did you run the scarfs through again for a final check?"

The girl drew her breath in sharply. "There you have something. Peter's almost blew his stack, when I asked for a re-check. Said his department never made a mistake. But he did it and they came out the same."

Redden brushed his hair off his forehead, mulling over the information. "I want you to check all the institutions in the east and mid-west. Find out if they ever had a patient by the name of Norma Lewis. I'll be at the office of the Cal Tech Director if you want me."

"It will take time to get letters out," Mable protested.

"Who said anything about letters. Phone them. Now. I'm in a hurry."

"But, Mike," Mable protested. "It's three in the afternoon. I have other things to do."

"Three women have been murdered," Redden reminded her firmly. "And unless we act, and act damn fast, there could be more." He hung up the phone, glared angrily out the window and left the apartment.

Doctor Cochran motioned Mike to a seat in his spacious office, selecting a cigar and offering the dark haired detective the box. Redden refused, lighting a cigarette. He came right to the point. "There's some information I need, doctor. I hope you can help me."

The white headed figure smiled somberly. "In the light of what's happened I would be negligent in my duty to the university and its faculty if I didn't," he said slowly.

"Good," Mike agreed, leaning forward. "First I want to know about Doctor Henderson . . . or rather how much you knew about him."

Doctor Cochran forgot the unlighted cigar in his hand and studied the papers on his desk. "I had the file sent in when you called. I have it all here. Now let me see, yes. He came to us in 1948, an extremely capable man of thirty with a good reputation behind him."

"You checked on this reputation?"

The doctor smiled again. "Not actually. But we knew of his work in the field of variable stars. It was enough for us."

Mike reached out his hand. "Do you mind if I look at those?"

"Of course not."

Redden studied the report. Finally, he put it down on the desk. "There are four years missing," he said. "He graduated from Harvard in 1940 but there's nothing here until his first paper in '44."

"The doctor shrugged. There's nothing unusually strange about that. Many scientists go off into holes after their college work . . . a type of sorting out process to see what they have learned. We just naturally assumed he'd been in the service or was doing work on the paper he published in 1944." The director's eyes clouded over. "If you don't mind me saying so, Mr. Redden. Isn't it a little unusual to be investigating a man that has been murdered? Shouldn't you be after the guilty culprit?"

"Maybe I am," Mike admitted, adding, "From a back door you might say." He studied the ash gathered at the end of his cigarette. "Now what about Norma Lewis?"

"How does she fit into this?"

"There's a strong possibility that she killed Henderson, and maybe some others."

Doctor Cochron stood up behind his desk. The motion was so fast that it tipped his chair behind him. His eyes blazing, the doctor strode to the center of the room. "That I won't believe. I never will."

"Take it easy, doctor," Mike soothed. "I didn't say she did. I merely stated that she might have."

"That's enough for me to kick you out of this office," Doctor Cochron snapped, forgetting his dignity. "She's a fine girl, almost a genius in the field of astronomy. I expect big things from her."

"What about Steve Adams, the second assistant?"

The doctor had calmed down somewhat. He moved back to his desk and sat on the edge, taking his cigar from the tray and lighting it. "A nice boy," he puffed. "Ambitious. Perhaps too much so. He often strikes me as the type who'd push anyone out of his way to get to his destination. He came here eight years ago."

"And the girl?"

"Ten years."

Mike snuffed out the cigarette. "How come they're both assistants if they've been on the staff that long?"

The director smiled patiently, the last vestiges of his anger gone. "It takes time and experience and luck. They're not really assistants. They have a boss whom they help. In time they take over his job when he leaves. . . ."

"Or is murdered," Redden cut in wryly.

Doctor Cochron paled. "You don't really think that is the case here?" he said slowly.

Mike shrugged and was honest. "I don't know what to think. I expect some answers in a very few days. Just who is slated to take over where Doctor Henderson left off?"

"Miss Lewis, of course. She has the most experience."

Redden got to his feet and shuffled towards the door. "You've been very helpful." He had one hand on the knob, then turned back into the room. "There was one more thing I wanted to know. Just what are variable stars?"

Doctor Cochran showed his pleasure at the question with a broad smile on his smooth jowels. "Perhaps we could interest you in a course in elementary astronomy. But in the meantime a simple explanation will have to suffice." He re-lighted the cigar in his hand, moving to the window and looking out onto the darkened campus. "A variable star," he began, "is one that varies. That is it expands and contracts in brilliance, either due to an internal explosion or some other reason that we know nothing of . . . yet."

"Seems to me it would be simple to spot one," Mike said. "Just keep looking long enough."

The director laughed. "It's not that simple, Mr. Redden. Men have spent their lives looking for them."

"How?"

"By photographing the same portion of the sky night after night and then blinking the results."

"You just left me," Mike admitted.

"In layman's language it's projecting two negatives, taken on different nights, onto the same spot. If both stars appear of equal brilliance, they haven't varied. On the other hand if one is stronger or weaker than the other, they're variables."

"And that's what Henderson was doing? Taking pictures?"

Cochran walked to a cabinet, opened it and pulled out two large manila envelopes. Inside were large

photographic plates with spots on them. He held one to the light so that Redden could see through it. "This is some of the doctor's work. The schedule on Wilson is crowded. So each man has to make appointments to use the hundred inch. To take a picture such as this the operator focuses the telescope on the star cluster he is after, then turns on the clock drive and exposes the plate. It takes a four or five hour exposure to get results such as these."

Mike studied the clarity of the stars showing, each one crystal clear. "If I remember what astronomy I had, the clock drive mechanism moves the telescope with the motion of the earth, so that the stars always stay in exactly the same place."

"Correct," Doctor Cochran said. "With one small addition. The operator has to stay with the telescope, constantly sighting on the stars, because no clock drive can adjust by itself for the slight eccentricity of the earth's orbit. From time to time he presses a button which compensates for this deficiency."

Mike smiled, some of his memory returning. "Do you happen to have the plate Doctor Henderson took on the evening of June first?"

The director fumbled through the envelope and handed him the photograph. Mike studied it, then handed it back. "Suppose a man leaves the telescope while the plate is being exposed," he said.

"It won't be a very good plate. A slight fuzz might appear around the end surfaces of the stars."

Mike nodded his understanding, handing the plate back. "Do you have the one from June thirtieth?"

Doctor Cochran gave it to him. Redden went through the same motions of looking at it.

"I suppose these exposed plates mean that Henderson was on the mountain on those dates," Mike said at last.

The director consulted a sheet of paper on his desk. "As a matter of fact they do. His appointment schedule places him there."

Redden thanked the director and left the office. A little light had begun to glimmer on the horizon.

It was a week before the rest of the information he was after began to dribble in. Redden got to work late and slumped in his chair, staring sullenly at the calendar on the wall. August twenty-eighth. It was almost eleven o'clock before Mable got around to bringing him his coffee. He drank it sullenly, not looking up at the woman standing over him.

Finally, she couldn't stand it any longer, exploding. "Can I help it if I couldn't find the institution. I phoned all I knew of and sent flyers to the others. And that Chicago place will never get any of my business if they take a week to answer a letter."

Redden waved her silent. "It's not that, gal," he said. "I guess I had

a crazy idea and it wasn't right. Everybody's on my neck to nail the gal."

"Why don't you?"

Redden looked up at the homely woman. "You know I haven't the evidence to convict her. I need proof. That's why I have to find the institution." He'd said it . . . but he didn't believe himself. He had another theory. But so far it had netted him a big fat zero.

Mable shrugged and walked off.

The day crawled on as August drew closer to an end. Traffic thinned out as the downtown stores filled, then reached a second peak in the early evening.

Mike watched it glumly, searching his mind for other angles he might have forgotten.

And then he picked up his afternoon mail. The letter from Chicago was in it. Redden scanned the contents. He'd been right.

But he still couldn't take any action. There was none to take. There might never be any.

The sun winked out and a thousand lights flicked on. Mike knew he should go home. But he stayed, haunting the teletype. A cold dinner and six cups of coffee later the machine began to click. The message was from an institution in a small town down south. No wonder it had taken them so long to get the message.

He re-read the tape in his hands. He'd been dead right.

Now there was nothing to do but

wait. Tomorrow he'd drive up to the observatory and have a talk with Adams. That boy needed to be set straight. Mike put on his coat and pushed out into the hall.

Bill Grover spotted him as he headed for the elevator, calling after him to wait. Mike stopped, turning to meet the two hundred-fifty pound man waddling towards him.

"Hey, Mike," he said. "I been wondering about that red scarf case. I hear the chief dropped it in your lap. Anything new?"

Redden grinned. He was tired. But for the first time in days he felt relaxed. "I guess you might say so," he admitted. "I think I have it licked."

"No kidding," the fat figure smiled through triple jowels. I figured no one could crack it."

Redden shrugged, walking slowly towards the elevator. "Just luck."

"The woman do it? You know, the one out of the looney bin."

Redden stopped, a question on his rugged face. "How'd you know about her?"

"Mable's got a big mouth. She said you had this Norma Lewis pinned down but good." The man laughed. A slow, rolling sound reflecting hollow off the marble walls. "Lucky for us men she's off the streets. She might get tired of her own sex and start on us next."

Redden grinned. "I don't think you'll have to worry about that. Anyhow I haven't arrested her yet."

Grover's face sombered like a cloud passing across the sun. "You haven't?" he questioned. He took Mike by the arm and led him down to the end of the hall, pointing towards the city below. "Take a good look out there."

Redden looked. He didn't see anything out of place and said so.

The big detective snorted. "The moon, Mike. It's coming up. And it's full. Doesn't that mean anything to you."

A faint uneasiness stirred within Redden. His mind flashed back to the scene in the observatory. . . . Doctor Henderson hanging there, lifeless. Then to Adams. The young man's intent face as he told Mike about Norma Lewis. And finally to the director. "Norma Lewis will get the job. She's almost a genius."

"Damned," Mike exploded out-loud. A new phrase leaped into his head . . . 'eliminate the competition.' He stared through the window again. Sure enough, a big yellow ball showed hazily above the distant San Bernadino. Anxiety tracing along his spine, Redden spun towards the big detective. "You have an almanac around?"

"Sure. In my office."

Redden grabbed him by the arms, propelling him rapidly down the hall. "Let's have a look, quick."

A trickle of sweat showed on Redden's brow as he read the numbers. Full moon . . . August 28th 9:53 p.m. He glanced at his watch

Nine o'clock. Cursing himself for his own stupidity, he swung on Grover. "We have fifty three minutes to get to Pasadena."

"Is there going to be another killing?"

"Yes," Mike said grimly. "If we don't get there in time."

The big detective was on his way, Redden following in his path.

It was a beautiful night. One in which death seemed to be out of place. Redden glanced out the window of the speeding patrol car at the moon's light reflecting softly off the trees bordering Arroyo Seco Freeway. Inside he was seething with tensions, wondering how he could have been so foolish as to let things get out of control. His hands clenched into a fist in his lap as the grim faced detective next to him spun the car off the freeway. A sign, PASADENA CITY LIMITS, flashed past.

"What's the address?"

"820 Fairview. About six blocks straight ahead and three to the left."

"I know," Grover grunted. He glanced sideways, at the same time hitting the siren and slipping through a crowded intersection. "That the girl's place?"

Mike nodded.

"Why there? If she's on the prowl we should have an alert out in the city." He picked up the microphone to call headquarters.

"No need to," Redden said. "I'll explain later." He glanced at his watch. 9:49. "We've only got four minutes. It may be too late already."

Grover grunted his answer, pulling the car onto a sidestreet and hitting the siren again.

"Kill the noise," Mike cautioned. "We don't want to scare him away."

Surprise reflected off the detective's face. "Him?"

"Yeah," Redden repeated grimly. "Him."

Grover opened his mouth to say more. But it was too late. He pulled the car to the curb several addresses this side of the house and slid to the street, followed by Mike.

"It's the one with the Chevy parked in the drive," Redden explained.

Mike studied the house. It looked peaceful enough. He could see the face of an operating television set through the front window. Another light showed in the rear. He relaxed a fraction. Maybe he'd been wrong. There wasn't another car showing on the block. From the outside it looked as if Norma Lewis was spending a peaceful evening at home.

The illusion was quickly shattered by the scream, a muffled sound that sent every one of Redden's black hairs up on end. "Let's get in there," he snapped.

Grover needed no urging. Despite his bulk, he leaped onto the porch and tried the door. Locked. "Stand back," he warned. "This is

my department." The heavy man took a short run and piled his weight into the panel. It sprang inward.

In one motion, Redden was through the opening, his eyes scanning the empty front room. A scuffling noise from the rear. Mike ran down a short hall and pushed into the bedroom with light streaming yellow from beneath the door. It too was empty.

But the bathroom wasn't. Redden swung towards a gurgling sound, and then stopped dead.

Norma Lewis was there . . . hanging from the shower rod, a red scarf wrapped securely around her neck.

Grover puffed up beside him, his eyes bulging at the bizarre scene. "My lord," he whispered in shock. "She's killed herself for her crimes."

"No she hasn't," Mike snapped, climbing onto the lip of the bathtub. "She's still alive. Help me get her down. Then call an ambulance."

It was three in the morning when Grover and Mike parked the car in the lot at Mount Wilson. For a minute the big detective studied the distant city, alive beneath a million firefly lights. "It sure is pretty up here," he admitted.

"Yeah," Redden agreed. "It is." He swung open his door and got to the pavement. "But we have work to do."

Grover followed him. "You still haven't told me why we're here. The girl tell you something at the hospital?"

Mike nodded agreement. "She did. But no more than I knew already." He moved down the familiar trail until they were at the door to the big observatory.

"It's a little eerie up here," Grover complained.

"I'll go along with that," Redden agreed. "Up until a month ago I thought all they did on mountains was look at stars." He took a deep breath and stepped into the darkened room.

All that showed was the small red light near the center. High overhead, the stars twinkled down through the open shutter. The buzz of the small motor propelling the telescope filled the void.

Redden crossed the darkness to the ladder and called upward. "Doctor Adams, are you there?"

A long pause, then an answer. "Yes. Who is it?"

"Detective Redden. I want to talk to you."

"What about?"

"Just come down. And don't do anything strange. I have a gun on you."

Another long silence. Finally a dark figure materialized from above, slowly moving towards the floor. It landed lightly on its feet a few feet away. "You must be crazy," Adams protested. "Coming up here like this."

Redden put the gun away. He didn't feel he'd need it. "Never mind that." He looked around the dimness. "Is there someplace where it's light so we can talk."

"Sure. In the office. Follow me."

Once in the room, Adams turned on the lamp. The strong glow fell across the figure by the desk dressed in crumpled slacks and heavy sweater. His freckles stood out strong on the haggard face. "Now what's this all about?" he said.

Redden leaned against the wall and lighted a cigarette. From the corner of his eye he saw Grover, anxious, worried . . . and puzzled. "You're a fool, Adams," Redden began. "To believe a dead man."

"You're not making sense," Adams said angrily, he started for the door. "If you'll excuse me I have a plate in the camera I have to check."

Mike put out his arm, stopping the figure. "No, you aren't going anywhere . . . not just yet." He waited until the figure had returned to the desk, then continued. "Have you been on the mountain all night?"

Adams nodded. "That's right. Since three this afternoon."

"Taking pictures of possible variables?"

The young man nodded.

"I suppose you had a plate in the camera at around ten o'clock?"

"Of course. The first one I took was from eight until eleven."

"I'd like to see it."

Grover cut in. "Mike, have you gone crazy? It's after three in the morning. We should be in bed, not looking at photographs . . . at least not stars."

Mike ignored him, holding out his hand. "Can I see the plate," he repeated.

Adams hesitated, then walked to a cabinet along the wall, opening a drawer and pulling out an envelope. He handed it to Redden.

Mike studied the black spots carefully against the light, at last grunting and handing it back.

"If that's all you wanted then I'll leave," Adams snapped, the anger showing as his face began to flush red.

Redden shook his head. "Go ahead," he suggested. "But there's something that will interest you. Norma Lewis isn't dead."

The young man stopped in mid-stride, his face suddenly taking on a pasty complexion, the color of white mud. He returned to the desk and crumpled in the chair, burying his face in his hands. Minutes later he looked up. "She said who tried to kill her?"

Mike nodded silently.

"But I was on the mountain all night."

"It's no good, Adams," Redden said. He motioned at the plate. "I've been prompted by experts. If you were here all night as you claimed then the stars on this negative would be sharp. But they're

not, the edges are fuzzy. Why? Because you weren't around to compensate the telescope."

"But she's a killer," Adams blurted out. "I was doing the state a favor by eliminating her." He waved a hand at the door. "Look outside. It's a full moon. You know what she is. I probably saved someone's life tonight."

Grover cut in, his face ugly. "Don't you worry about the state, sonny. She'll get the gas chamber without your help."

Mike waved him away. "Norma Lewis isn't going to any death house," he snapped.

"What?" Grover spat, astonishment written across the heavy face.

Mike nodded grimly. "That's right. She hasn't murdered anyone."

Adams sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing. "If you think she can get away with killing Doctor Henderson, you're wrong. I'll testify that she was in an institution as a murderer. That should nail it down . . . good."

"It won't work, Adams," Mike said. "It's already hammered down." He took a deep breath, then continued, "You took Henderson's information literally, without checking. On that basis you reasoned you could kill the girl, thus strengthening your position as his substitute. It would look as if she'd committed suicide because of guilt. To make it look good you even picked the precise time of a full

moon, exactly as the method of the other murders." He stared hard at the sullen young man. "Did you ever stop to wonder why she was home when there was a full moon outside . . . if it had the power to make her kill?"

Adams shook his head silently.

"That's your first mistake. Your second was in hiding the suicide note." It was a stab in the dark. But it worked. The young man's eyes widened at its mention. "Where is it," Mike snapped.

Dully, Adams reached into his pocket and tossed a sheet of paper across the desk. Mike scanned it quickly. So far he was on target. He continued, "You're right about the girl being in an institution. She was . . . *but as a nurse, not a patient.*"

"What?" Grover exploded.

"That's right, Bill. But she had a patient. *And his name was Doctor Philip Henderson.*"

"You're out of your mind," Adams growled.

Mike shook his head slowly. "No, I'm afraid not. That's where the good doctor was the four years he was out of circulation. A brilliant man. But like many with high I Q's he had his unstable side. He'd never married. And for some reason women just didn't take to him. It angered him beyond reason."

"You're guessing," Adams snapped.

"A little," Redden admitted. "But I have the facts also."

Grover rubbed his fleshy chin. "Then who killed the girls?"

Mike came straight to the point. "Henderson."

"But who killed Henderson?" the big detective protested.

Mike sighed. He was tired. He'd never been so weary. He pointed at the note Adams had tossed onto the desk. "Henderson."

The young man stared at Redden, his face white as a sheet. "You have proof?"

Mike nodded. "Enough I think. First of all there's the matter of the blurred prints. The doctor was an expert in his field. Not one to do inferior work. And yet on two days, the same two that the girls were murdered, his night's work showed up fuzzy. He wasn't on the mountain every minute of those nights. And there's the matter of the scarfs. First, I found a label addressed to him from a Chicago mail order house. Checking back I found out the order had been for a dozen red scarfs. In his year book I discovered under his habits that it was his trade mark in school, wearing such colored mufflers. In addition to that we found hypo marks on each of the murder weapons. Henderson always did his own dark room work." Mike shrugged, weary. "Why he did it I don't know. Maybe he tried to make faster time than they wanted. I just don't know why a man of his calibre would do such a thing. Wiser men than he have gone mad.

"But it got to be too much for him. It's my guess that he resented Norma Lewis, even though he had hired her to stay close as his assistant and nurse, in case we ever got out of hand." Redden leaned on the desk, his face staring into Adams. "It's there you were duped. He told you that she had been in an institution, letting you make up the rest of the story. He knew how ambitious you were. So what did he do? First, ordered the girl down to the city on a rush order, then wrote a thin suicide note that just said he was tired from overwork. After that he hanged himself, knowing full well she'd be blamed, if not by the police, by you."

Redden paced to the wall. "And he was almost successful. If she had been killed it would have looked as if she'd been the guilty party all along."

Adams looked up from the desk top, his eyes those of an old man. "I've been a fool," he admitted, the voice a whisper.

Redden agreed. "You have that."

Grover broke the silence. "I will be damned," he said, almost reverently, adding, "What now?"

Mike opened the door to the observatory. For a minute he studied the shadowy figure of the telescope aimed at the pinking sky overhead, then turned back to the silent shape of the big detective.

"Take Adams downtown and book him," he said slowly.