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# Flowers to the Fair

*Mr. Petty had done a little embezzling, and he'd gotten mixed up with a beautiful girl. So, naturally, he came to John J. Malone . . .*

*A John J. Malone  
Novelette*

**BY CRAIG RICE**



**A** EXACTLY 8:13 A.M. Mr. Petty arrived. He hung his hat in the locker, just as he had hung it every working day of his life for the last thirty years. He went over to the water cooler where he wet his dry, tense throat with a small sip of water. Then he shuffled down the hall to the door marked: George V. Benson, General Manager.

Mr. Petty waited till his wrist watch showed precisely 8:15. Then he opened the door walked in, closing it carefully behind him.

Mr. Benson looked up at the little book-keeper.

"Always prompt, aren't you, Petty?"

Mr. Petty gulped. "Yes, sir. You said 8:15, sir."

"So, here you are. At exactly 8:15. Now, if you weren't the fool you are, Petty, you would have come at 7:15. You would have gone straight to the safe and opened it — you know the combination — and you would have helped yourself, not to a measly three thousand dollars, but to *two hundred thousand* dollars."

The little bookkeeper's eyes opened wide in innocent astonishment. "I couldn't have done a thing like that," he stammered. "Why — that would be stealing."

"That's right," Mr. Benson said. "That would have been stealing. So what do you do instead? You pilfer the petty cash, you make false entries on your books, you kite checks, a few measly bucks at a time — for how many months? And when you're three thousand dollars in the hole and you know the auditors are due in Monday morning, you come to me with a hard luck story. What was it, horses?"

"No, sir," Mr. Petty said. "That would be gambling!" He paused and looked down at the floor. "Women," he said meekly.

"Women!"

"Yes sir," Mr. Petty said. "Women. It's in my horoscope. I'm a Taurus."

"That figures," Benson said. "Now tell me one thing more, Petty. How do you expect to pay this money back?"

Mr. Petty looked puzzled. He squirmed uneasily in his chair. "That's what I was expecting you to tell me. You promised to help me, Mr. Benson."

Benson said, "Of course, I'll help you. Everybody knows George Benson has never failed to help a faithful employee out of a jam." He sat back in his chair and folded his arms silently for a minute while Mr. Petty fidgeted with his hands, as if he had just found he had one too many.

"Tell you what I'll do, Petty," Benson said. "Nobody knows about this, nobody except you — and me. I'll lend you the money, that's what I'll do. Just sign this —" he handed a typewritten sheet of paper across the desk — "and you can pay me back ten dollars every week out of your paycheck." He handed his pen across to the little bookkeeper. "Just a brief statement of the facts. Sort of a confession, you know, just to make it legal."

Mr. Petty took the pen. His hand shook as he started to write, and paused. "The money," he said falteringly. "Shouldn't I — get the money first?"

Mr. Benson's face took on an expression of injured dignity. "I'm surprised at you, Petty," he said. "Do you expect me to go around every day with thousands of dollars in my wallet?" He looked at his watch. "The bank closes at one today. And Monday is a bank holiday. Before I take the plane to Pittsburgh

this afternoon I'll leave three thousand dollars in an envelope for you. You'll find it in the safe, in the petty cash box."

"But I've got things to do first," Mr. Petty said. "I've got to go back over the books. There are things to straighten out before the auditors get here."

"I've thought of that too," Benson replied. "You've got keys to the plant. Tomorrow is Sunday. Come down and let yourself in. Emil, the night watchman, knows you. Tell him you're working overtime on the books. Get the entries straightened out, put the money back where it belongs, and when the auditors arrive on Monday everything'll be okay. I'll take that paper now."

Mr. Petty scrawled his name on the dotted line and handed the paper back to Benson. "Thank you," he said, rising to go. "I'll never forget what you've done for me." He swallowed hard. "You've saved my life. How can I ever repay you?"

"You will," Benson assured the little bookkeeper. "Don't worry, you will."

## 2.

On warm Saturday afternoons it was John J. Malone's custom to take his ease, with suitable refreshments, at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, but on this torrid Saturday afternoon he was still in the office, attending to some urgent business. Maggie, his secretary, was assisting with the technical details.

"I distinctly remember replenishing the Emergency file," Malone was saying. "Right there in back of Bills Payable."

"I looked," Maggie said firmly. "I looked, and it isn't there. Are you sure you didn't drink it up one night this week when you were alone in the office? And speaking of bills payable—"

The door opened in the outer office and Maggie went to attend to it.

"If it's the building agent after the rent tell him the police are dragging the Drainage Canal for my remains," Malone called after her.

A minute later Maggie was back. "It's a Mr. Algernon Petty," she reported. "He says it's important."

"Didn't you tell him I was busy on an important case?" Malone said, in a voice that he knew, by actual test, carried practically out into the hall. Then, under his breath to Maggie, "You'd better call up right away and tell them to send over a quart of the usual."

"Not so fast," Maggie said. "If you ask me, Mr. Petty looks more like a fast touch than a fat retainer," and, opening the door, she showed in the little bookkeeper.

What met the legal eye was a very frightened and nervous Mr. Petty. He patted the chair before sitting down in it, as if he expected it to be wired for an execution.

"You'll have to excuse me," he began haltingly. "You see, Mr. Malone, I've never had anything to do with the law before. Of course I

expect to pay —” He fished a tired ten-dollar bill out of his wallet, stole a speculative glance at Malone out of the corner of his eye, and decided to add another ten. “I know your professional services come high,” he explained, “but mine is a serious case, I’m afraid.”

“What do you expect me to do, Mr. Petty?” Malone asked. “Arrange a settlement for you with Gloria Vanderbilt?”

The little bookkeeper looked puzzled. “But I don’t even know Gloria Vanderbilt. No, it’s Carmelita. Of course I never really promised to marry Carmelita, but, well, you know how women are.”

Malone said, “I see. Something in the nature of a breach of promise.”

“Something like that,” Mr. Petty said. “And I thought you might see her for me and — well, lawyers know how to handle such things.”

“And how much would you be prepared to go to avoid embarrassment, Mr. Petty? Say a cool million or so?”

“Oh no, nothing like that,” Mr. Petty replied quickly. “You see, Carmelita loves me.”

“In that case,” Malone said, “let’s say half a million.”

“No, no, Mr. Malone, you don’t understand. It isn’t money.”

“Not money?”

“No, it’s just that I can’t marry Carmelita. You see, I’m already married. Thirty years this coming Wednesday, and I promised my wife—”

“I see,” Malone said, “and you want me to convey your regrets to the lady.” He was beginning to feel sorry for the little man. “In that case,” he continued, “it would be appropriate to offer something, don’t you think — by way of heart balm.”

“That’s what I wanted to see you about, Mr. Malone. I promised to fly with Carmelita to Monte Carlo — her mother lives in Monte Carlo, you know — but that was before Mr. Benson offered to help me out so I could put the money back in the safe —”

Malone sat up. “*What* money back in *what* safe?”

“Why the three thousand dollars I embezzled, Mr. Malone. Mr. Benson was very nice about it — he’s our general manager. Before he flies to Pittsburgh this afternoon he is leaving the money in the safe for me, and I’ll pay it back to him out of my salary. And tomorrow night I’m going over the books to set everything straight for the auditors on Monday morning. But it’s Carmelita I’m worried about. At first I thought I’d borrow a little more of the company money, just enough for the trip, and send the money back when I got a job. I understand they handle a lot of money in Monte Carlo and they might be able to use a man who’s good at figures.”

“I see,” Malone said. He wasn’t sure just yet what he *could* say.

“But I couldn’t do that now. Not with the auditors coming on Monday. And not after the way Mr.

Benson treated me when I told him about the three thousand dollars. But I still want to do what's right by Carmelita. So I thought, if you could see her for me and — give her this."

Mr. Petty took a large plain envelope from his pocket and handed it across the desk to Malone.

Malone said, "Would you mind telling me what's in it? I just want to be sure I'm not acting as accessory before — or after — a case of grand theft."

"Oh it's nothing like that," Mr. Petty said. "Just something — personal. Carmelita will understand."

And with this Mr. Petty rose and left, with such alacrity that it was not till he was gone that Malone realized he had neglected to leave Carmelita's address or even her full name.

### 3.

The headline in the Monday morning *Examiner* was broad and black, but the story was brief.

*Algernon Petty, bookkeeper for the Pittsburgh Products Company, was found shot to death last night in a spectacular payroll robbery at the company's Chicago plant, 3545 Clybourne avenue. Emil Dockstedter, the nightwatchman on duty, reported the shooting to police who hurried to the scene. They found Petty in a pool of blood in front of the open safe. Officials said cash in the amount of \$200,000 was missing from the safe. According to watchman Dockstedter,*

*the money was delivered to the plant early Saturday to meet this morning's monthly payroll, today being a bank holiday. George V. Benson, general manager, was reported flying back from Pittsburgh today, having left Saturday for a home office conference.*

*Dockstedter said that shortly after 10 P.M. he heard a shot fired and hurrying to the office found Petty dead on the floor. He fired after the fleeing bandit's getaway car from the office window, but was unable to stop it, or make out the license number of the car. Chief of Detectives Daniel Von Flanagan promptly ordered an all-out alarm for the fleeing bandits.*

*The victim had been in the employ of the company for 30 years. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Sophia Petty, 2437 N. Damen Ave. Five years ago last Friday, Mrs. Petty was quoted as saying, Mr. Petty was awarded the company's 25-year medal for honest and faithful service.*

Malone tossed the paper on his desk and sat down glumly, staring out of the window while he slowly removed the cellophane from his cigar and lit it.

Maggie read the story and looked across at Malone. He was still staring out the window, lost in thought.

"I know what you're thinking," Maggie said. "You feel you should have done something about it. But what *could* you have done? Anyway, it's too late now. As for Carmelita, Mrs. Sophia Petty wouldn't thank you for dragging *her* into the case. What was it she told Petty, that her

mother lived in Monte Carlo? *Nobody's* mother ever lived in Monte Carlo. Besides, how do you know she wasn't in cahoots with the bandits? It wouldn't surprise me if she was off to Monte Carlo all right — right now — with her share of the loot tucked away in her little overnight bag."

Malone took out the envelope the little bookkeeper had left with him. "I suppose, as Mr. Petty's lawyer, I have the right to open this now," he said. He tore open the envelope and emptied the contents on the desk. It was an airplane ticket to Monte Carlo. One person. One way. Made out to Carmelita Maquire, 1428 N. Jensen St., Chicago, Illinois.

4.

It was a six-flat tenement in the near north side slum district. A knock on the first door down the hall brought out an old Polish woman who told him in broken English that the Bednarskys in the third floor rear kept a boarder, a girl. Mrs. Bednarsky, after a few minutes of cautious evasion, admitted that her boarder's name was Maquire, that she worked behind the quick-lunch counter on the corner.

Carmelita Maquire, it turned out, was a brown-eyed blonde in her middle twenties, with a face that might have been copied out of a court painting of a Spanish princess, and traces of an Irish brogue in her

speech. There were Maquires on his mother's side back in Ireland, Malone told her, and after that the going was easy. Evidently she hadn't read the morning papers, and Malone bided his time as he chatted with the girl over the ham and eggs she had set before him on the counter.

She did not remember her father, she confided. Her mother once told her she was a Spanish croupier in the games at Monte Carlo. He vanished one day and was never heard from again. "Mother still lives in Monaco," she told Malone. "I've always dreamed of going back some day."

With as much tact as he could manage, Malone broke the news to her and turned over the envelope Mr. Petty had left with him. After the first shock she sobbed quietly for a while, dabbing at her eyes with a corner of her apron. Then, "He was like a father to me," she said. "Yes, I knew he was married. He never deceived me about anything. He was a gentleman, he was. I always called him Mr. Petty. When we went places, weekends, he always took separate rooms, with adjoining bath, like nice people do. I don't know why I'm telling you all this, except that you were his friend. He went to you in his trouble. He didn't do anything wrong, did he, Mr. Malone? The police — they won't be coming to *me*, will they, asking me questions about — well, you know —?"

Malone patted her hand gently. It was a soft, well-groomed hand for a girl who slung hash in a quick lunch joint. He could easily imagine her dressed in the latest Paris fashion, the center of attention as she swept into the Monte Carlo casino.

"Maybe not, if you answer my questions first," Malone told the girl.

From her answers Malone learned that she had met Mr. Petty about a year ago when she waited on him at a lunch room near the plant where she was working at the time. He had given her presents from time to time, inexpensive things, and money from time to time, which she said she had sent to her mother in Monaco. Apparently she knew nothing of his embezzlements. He had never introduced her to his friends. She said she had seen him last about two weeks ago and the account of her movements over the weekend sounded spontaneous and unforced. Unless, he reminded himself, unless it should turn out that this vision of slightly tarnished innocence was serving him up something new in Irish blarney — with Spanish sauce. No, he decided. It was just one of those simple, unbelievable things that could happen only to the Mr. Pettys of this world. And simple young things like Carmelita Maquire, who go along trustingly with anything that comes along, only to be sideswiped by fate, like an unsuspecting pedestrian in the middle of Saturday night traffic.

"It's true, every word of it," Malone told Maggie when he got back to the office. "Even to the mother in Monte Carlo. Just the same I advised her not to leave for Monte Carlo just yet. If the police get wind of this they will want to question her, and it won't look so good if she's left the country in such a hurry."

The telephone rang and Maggie answered it. "It's Von Flanagan," she said.

Malone said, "Tell him I'm in conference."

Maggie relayed the message and handed the phone to Malone saying, "Tell him yourself. This is no fit language for a lady's ears."

Malone took the receiver and held it twelve inches from his ear till the bellowing stopped. "Malone, Malone, are you there?" the voice resumed, in more moderate volume.

"Yes, I'm here," Malone replied. "Where are you, in Indo China? I can't hear you very well."

"You can hear me all right," the Chief of Homicide replied. "What I want to know is, what have you got to do with this payroll robbery and murder? We found your name and address on the victim's body."

Malone said, "Maybe he was planning to give me as a character witness to St. Peter at the pearly gates."

"That must be it," Von Flanagan came back, in a voice that had more edge and less volume to it. "Because right here in his little book — entry made last Saturday — John J.



Malone, retainer, twenty dollars. Are you going in for cut rates now?"

"Got to meet the amateur competition," Malone said. "Anyway, it looks as if my client has met with foul play. I suppose you know by this time who his assailants are."

"Don't give me that, Malone. What I want to know is, what was Algernon Petty doing in your office the day before he was murdered?"

Malone said, "He wasn't consulting me about getting himself murdered, if that's what you're thinking. The man you should be questioning is George V. Benson."

"What's he got to do with it?"

"I don't know," Malone said, "but I've got a hunch."

"Benson was in Pittsburgh when the job was pulled." Von Flanagan said. "He's due back in less than an hour, and if you've got any evidence involving him in the crime bring it to my office and confront him with it. And it better be good, or you'll need that twenty buck retainer to buy yourself cigarettes in the County Jail. Ever hear of false arrest, accessory before the fact, giving misleading information, failure to report —"

Malone hung up the receiver and jumping up reached for his hat.

"What's the hurry?" Maggie called out after him.

"I've got to go see a lawyer," Malone said, and bolted, with surprising celerity, out the door.

5.

"To the Municipal Airport," Malone told the cab driver, "and never mind the red lights. I've got friends at City Hall."

"I've heard that one before," the cabby shot back over his shoulder. "What's the big rush?"

Malone said, "The *accessorius post mortem* has just been caught in *flagrante delicto*."

"Happens all the time," the cabby said, and settled back into moody silence the rest of the way.

At the airport Malone went straight to the ticket window. "I've got to fly to Pittsburgh Saturday afternoon and be back here in time for an important homicide last night," he told the clerk. "Can I make it?"

The clerk blinked, started writing up a ticket, blinked again and, "You mean Saturday night out of of Pittsburgh," he said, "There is an extra plane back to Chicago on Saturday nights, arriving here Sunday morning at —"

"Did you say Sunday morning?"

"Yes sir, Sunday. But that won't leave you much time in Pittsburgh. I wouldn't advise it, sir —"

Malone said, "Thank you, I was only inquiring."

At the information desk he was told that the plane from Pittsburgh was preparing to touch down, and put in a page call for George V. Benson.

Malone waited till Benson had shaken off reporters with a curt "No

comment," and presented his card. "The matter of a loan of three thousand dollars you made my client, Mr. Algernon Petty, last Saturday," he explained.

Benson had stuck the card in his pocket with the air of a man who has other business on his mind and is not to be detained. Now he took it out again and read aloud, "John J. Malone. Not *the* John J. Malone," he said.

"Thank you," Malone said. "I thought you might wish to discuss this little transaction before you talk to the police."

"It was simply a matter of helping out an old employee in a jam," Benson told Malone over a highball in the airport bar a few minutes later. "Besides, it would have been bad publicity for the company. I had no idea it would lead to anything — he seemed like such a harmless sort. Must have been in a lot deeper than he let on, to try anything like this."

"What do you mean?" Malone said.

Benson said, "Surely, Mr. Malone, you don't think Petty could have thought up anything like this by himself. He must have had confederates."

"Then why did he come to you with his story about the embezzlements?"

"Oh, so you know about that too?" For the first time Benson looked disturbed. "What else did he tell you?"

"He said you promised to leave the three thousand for him in the safe Saturday afternoon. Of course you knew the payroll cash was in the safe. Didn't you think it was a bit of a risk to leave a man like Petty alone with two hundred thousand dollars when he had just confessed to embezzling company funds?"

Benson looked down at his glass. "I can see now how that might be misconstrued," he said. "Of course you understand I had no intention of accusing Mr. Petty of anything. It was just that I couldn't understand —" He took out his wallet and handed Malone the confession the little bookkeeper had signed. "Here, you keep this," he said. "Or better yet, destroy it. There is also Mrs. Petty to consider. And the trouble he was having — with women, I mean. I suppose he told you about that too? Imagine, women! A man like Petty. I wouldn't want to have it on my conscience —"

"That's very generous of you, Mr. Benson," Malone said. He put the signed confession in his pocket.

"I would destroy that if I were you," Benson said. "I wouldn't want anything to come out that might be misinterpreted — can I give you a lift, Mr. Malone?"

In the cab on the way to police headquarters Benson was still nervous and disturbed. "I dread all this fuss — reporters, police — I suppose I'll have to testify at the inquest.

It would be a great relief to me if I had a good lawyer —” He looked speculatively at Malone.

The little lawyer nodded. “Come and see me. Any time.” At police headquarters he took leave of Benson, explaining it was only a short walk to his office. “I might begin by giving you one piece of legal advice,” he said on parting. “If Von Flanagan should ask you why you took the midnight plane back from Pittsburgh Saturday and what you were doing in Chicago Sunday night, don’t tell him a thing. Remember nobody is compelled to testify against himself.”

Without turning to look back Malone hurried to the corner and boarded a streetcar to the office. No point in running up cab fares, he told himself. Not on a twenty-buck retainer.

## 6.

Back at the office Malone handed Maggie the signed confession, saying, “Put this in my safe deposit box first thing tomorrow morning when you make the bank deposit. Did I have any phone calls?”

Maggie gave him a straight look. “*What* bank deposit? And whom did you expect a call from?”

“There *might* be a bank deposit, and I’m expecting a call from George Benson. I just left him at police headquarters. He seems to think he’ll be needing my professional services.”

“Don’t tell me it was Benson!”

Malone said, “I’m not ready to say it was anybody — yet. But it *could* have been Benson. Let’s take a trial balance.” He took out a fresh cigar and lighted it carefully before continuing. “All right, motive: Two hundred thousand dollars is enough motive for anybody, anytime. Opportunity: He could have flown to Pittsburgh Saturday afternoon, checked in at a hotel and seen or called somebody from the home office, and caught the night plane back to Chicago with plenty of time to kill Petty and return to Pittsburgh on the night plane, and deposit the payroll money in an airfield locker. Meanwhile the police would be searching for the bandit killers, and — no bandits. Because . . .” Malone watched a funnel of cigar smoke ascend slowly to the ceiling, “because the safest crime to commit is one in which the only obvious suspect is the one everybody is searching for and nobody can find — because he doesn’t exist.”

“Perfect,” Maggie said. “Unless somebody saw him come back. Unless somebody noticed that he hadn’t spent the night in his hotel room, or saw him getting off the plane there in the morning, or returning to his hotel room. And what about the murder weapon? And the night watchman?”

“No crime is that perfect,” Malone said. “Besides, Benson may save everybody a lot of trouble yet by cracking up and coming clean with the whole story. He was

pretty scared when I left him. Yes, I have an idea we'll be seeing Mr. Benson soon."

That evening the papers carried the news that all reports of the fleeing bandits had proved false alarms, that auditors had failed to find any irregularities in the slain bookkeeper's accounts, and that, according to Captain Von Flanagan, the department had undisclosed information on the identity of the payroll mob and was preparing to stage a series of lightning arrests. There was also a statement by George V. Benson to the effect that no effort or expense would be spared by his firm to bring the murderers to justice.

It was nearly midnight when the telephone in Malone's apartment rang. It was George Benson. His voice was low but urgent. "I've got to see you right away. Alone. I'll be right over." In less than fifteen minutes he was at the door, a shaken, almost incoherent, man.

"I need your help, Malone. You'll have to believe me. I had nothing to do with the robbery or the murder. I was only trying to help Petty. But what do you suppose happened tonight? Eric Dockstedter came to my home. He's our night watchman, you know. For the longest time he kept talking, beating around the bush, and then it dawned on me what he was trying to say. He suspects me of having committed the robbery and the murder! Didn't want to make any trouble for me,

he said, loyalty and all that, to the firm, to me personally, but he had a sick wife, a son-in-law that was in some kind of jam, he wasn't in too good health himself and was thinking of retiring anyway, and all that kind of talk. Trying to shake me down. Trying to blackmail me!"

"What did you say?"

"What *could* I say? I denied it, of course. I couldn't fire him. He might go to the police anyway. I stalled. Told him I'd have to think it over. There must be some way to stop him, Malone. But quietly, without any publicity. There'll be expenses, of course. I'm not a rich man, Malone, but a thing like this—will a thousand take care of it? The initial expense, I mean."

Malone tried not to look at the crisp hundred dollar bills on the coffee table. "As your lawyer—and I haven't said I'll take the case yet—I would have to ask you a few questions first, Mr. Benson," Malone said. "Why did you fly back from Pittsburgh Saturday night, and what were you doing in Chicago between Sunday morning and Sunday night when you flew back to Pittsburgh?"

"How did you know—" Benson began, and stopped himself abruptly. "Who says I was here Sunday? Did anybody see me?"

"I was only guessing," Malone admitted. "Just a shot in the dark, but it seems to have rung a bell. Come now, Benson, I'll have to

have the whole story — straight — if I'm going to take your case. You may have to explain it to the police later, anyway."

"I suppose so," Benson replied dejectedly. "Although there's nothing to it, really. Nothing that has any bearing on the case. It — it's something personal."

Malone said, "I see. The blonde alibi. You'll have to think of something more original, Mr. Benson."

"I'd hoped I could keep her out of this," Benson said, shaking his head sadly, "But I suppose you'll have to check on it. I'll need time, though, to sort of prepare her for it."

Malone shook his head. He handed Benson the telephone. "Now," he said. "Just say I've got to see her right away. Alone. And don't try coaching the witness."

Benson did as he was bidden, then drove Malone to the rendezvous. As he pulled up before the apartment hotel he turned to Malone. "This is going to be a delicate business," he said. "I can trust you, of course."

"You can trust a lawyer with anything," Malone said, "and don't mention a word of this to your wife."

## 7.

The blonde alibi proved to be a blonde all right, and everything else a man could wish in the way of an alibi. Serena Gates was neither surprised nor shocked.

"I've been expecting something like this ever since it happened," she told Malone right away. "I'm not the kind of a girl you think I am, Mr. Malone. Things are not really as bad as they look."

Malone looked again and decided things didn't look bad at all. In fact, things were every bit as good as they looked, even in the dim half light that concealed as much as it revealed of the shapely figure.

"You'll have to excuse my informal attire," Serena said, drawing a wisp of the filmy negligee over her shoulder. "You see, I had already gone to bed. It's about yesterday you want to question me, isn't it? Can I fix you something to drink?"

After the fourth highball and what Malone told himself was a very satisfactory investigation of the facts, he came away with the conviction that Benson's alibi was just a trifle short of what he needed to eliminate him as a suspect. According to Serena Gates he had left her apartment shortly after eight o'clock in the evening driving a rented car, as he usually did on his visits. The crime was committed at ten. This would have left him plenty of time to drive to the plant, return the rented car and take a cab to the airport. Serena might have been lying about the time, but if she was it did not promise well for Benson if he had no better alibi than she was willing to give him. Besides, she seemed to be prepared to take an entirely fresh

view of her amatory loyalties. The little lawyer made a mental note to look further into this aspect of the case.

When he got down to the office at noon he told Maggie about the events of the night before. Maggie was unimpressed. "Von Flanagan has been telephoning like mad all morning," she told him. The words were hardly out of her mouth when the phone rang. It was an entirely changed Von Flanagan.

"We're up against a blank wall, Malone. You've got to help me out. We've run down every suspicious car report, and no dice. I've never seen anything like it. No fingerprints, no murder weapon, no suspects."

Malone said, "Have you questioned the night watchman?"

"Yesterday and again this morning. Same thing. He heard a shot, found the body, and fired after the getaway car. Ballistics supports the guy's story. The bullet that killed Petty wasn't from his gun. I know your suspect is Benson but you're crazy. We've checked his alibi. He was in Pittsburgh all right."

Malone said, "Maybe you're barking up the wrong alibi. And maybe there *weren't* any bandits."

"Malone, Malone, you're holding out on me." The tone was something between a plea and a threat. "If Petty told you anything about Benson, it's your duty — besides I'm your friend, and if you make one false move, Malone, so help me —"

"I'll be ready to tell you all I know in a few hours," Malone said. "Meanwhile, put a tail on Benson. We may need him before the night is over." He hung up.

"Malone," Maggie said, "I've seen you stick your neck out before, but this time you've *really* done it. How can you prove Benson killed Petty and stole the money? Motive? Sure. And now, with this blonde in the picture, double sure. Opportunity? Swell. He could have done it in the two hours between eight and ten. He might have done it, he could have done it, but *did* he do it? And where are your witnesses? Where is the murder weapon? And where is the money? I suppose you think Benson is going to make a full confession, produce the gun, and turn over the money, just to get *you* out of a mess."

"Maggie," Malone said, "I think I need a drink."

"No use looking in the Emergency file," Maggie said, "You killed that bottle yesterday."

The telephone rang. It was Benson.

"Dockstedter just called me. Gave me till noon tomorrow. He wants fifty thousand dollars. You've got to do something, Malone." He paused. "I talked to Serena on the phone this morning. She's acting kind of strange. What did she tell you, Malone?"

Malone said, "You haven't got a thing to worry about. A clean conscience is a man's best defense. Sit

tight and don't do a thing till you hear from me. And don't go near Serena again till I give you the all clear. The police might be shadowing you." He hung up. "What was I saying, Maggie?"

"About money," Maggie said. "Why don't you use some of that thousand Benson gave you?"

Malone was indignant. "That money goes right back to Benson the minute I put the finger on him. You forget I've got a client. Algeron Petty."

8.

It was a perplexed and dejected John J. Malone who walked into Joe the Angel's City Hall her early that evening.

"Joe," Malone said, "have I got any credit left around here?"

"Liquor, yes. Money, no," Joe the Angel said. "What's the matter now, Malone? The client he no pay?"

"The client he pay," Malone said. "Twenty bucks. Then he get shot, and two hundred thousand dollars missing. Make it a gin and beer."

"I read about it in paper," Joe the Angel said. "Too bad. Don't worry, Malone, you find the bandits. Yes?"

"I find the bandits no," Malone said. "Joe, I need flowers."

"Ah, for the funeral. Sure, Malone."

"Not for the funeral, Joe. For a lady."

"Ah, for a lady. Same thing. I

mean, I call my brother-in-law, the one owns funeral parlor, and he send over flowers left over from funeral. What's address?"

Malone gave him Serena Gates' address, decided to call her up, and then changed his mind. Better surprise her after the flowers are delivered. "Tell him to put in a card saying 'Flowers to the fair,' and sign my name to it," Malone called over to Joe the Angel who was already on the telephone.

Over a second gin and beer Malone unburdened his heart. "Imagine, Joe. I've got the case as good as solved. The suspect had the motive. He had the opportunity. His alibi is two hours short and the lady in the case is on my side. All I need is the evidence — the murder gun, the money, or at least a witness."

Joe the Angel said, "The lady, maybe she help you?"

"I don't know," Malone said. "She admits he was in her apartment till eight. How would she know what he was doing between eight and ten," he paused, "unless she followed him," he paused again, "unless —" He set the beer down on the bar. "Give me a rye, quick, Joe. Make it a double rye. I've got to think."

He downed the double shot. "I've got it, Joe," he beamed. "I think I've got it. If Benson is two hours short on his alibi, so is Serena Gates. I've got to go and see the lady again. How about a ten-spot, on the cuff?"

"For a lady, that's different," Joe

the Angel said, and handed over the ten.

"Thanks," Malone said, "and can I borrow your gun?"

With a look of utter confusion Joe the Angel handed Malone the gun. "First it is flowers. Now it is a gun," he muttered, shrugging his shoulders. Malone was already on his way out the door.

9.

This time Serena Gates was both surprised *and* shocked at Malone's unexpected visit. It took a foot in the door and an ungentlemanly heave of the shoulder to override the lady's remonstrances. Serena was furious.

"What is the meaning of this? Malone, you must be crazy."

"Call it the impatience of youth," Malone said.

He looked around the living room. It had every appearance of a hastily planned departure, stripped of every personal belonging. He noted that his flowers to the fair had been delivered, and deposited in the waste basket. Three suit cases stood ready near the door. One of them particularly struck his eye. It seemed singularly out of place, large, metal-bound and quite unladylike.

"I was just planning to leave," Serena explained nervously.

"So I see," Malone said. "Can I help you with your baggage? This looks like the heavy one."

With his left hand he reached down for the big metal-bound suit-

case, while his right hand moved to his hip pocket. The lady was faster on the draw but slower on the rebound. With a swift lashing motion of his right arm Malone slapped the gun out of her hand. In the clawing, kicking, catch-as-catch-can wrestling match that followed Malone had no reason to revise his previous appraisal of Serena's physical charms, but he realized how much he had underestimated her muscular development. It took most of what he had once learned from Dr. Butch ("The Killer") Hayakawa about the gentle art of jujitsu to persuade the lady to listen to reason.

"I guess you could have handled that baggage yourself, after all," he said, still breathing hard. Keeping Serena covered with his own gun he picked hers up off the floor and stuck it in his coat pocket. "If it's Benson you're waiting for, you can just take it easy," he told her. "He'll be along in due time — with the police right behind him. But maybe it isn't Benson. If it were, you would have given him a better alibi. Or were you planning to double-cross him and let him take the rap while you made a fast getaway?"

Serena was silent, glaring at him with the pent-up fury of a cat waiting its opportunity to spring again.

Malone said, "No, I guess it wasn't Benson, after all. Between eight and ten Sunday night you had as much



opportunity to commit the crime as he had. You forgot that when you tried to short him on his alibi. All right, who was it? You didn't handle this job alone, did you, or am I underestimating you again?"

"Malone," she said, "there's two hundred thousand dollars in that suit case. Don't be a fool. There's still time if you and I —"

"A generous thought," Malone said, "and a flattering one."

"Make up your mind, Malone. They'll be here any minute —"

"So there *were* others," Malone said. "And now you're ready to double-cross them too, if I'll split with you." He reached for the telephone. "Get me Captain Daniel Von Flanagan at police headquarters," he told the hotel operator.

Serena screamed, "Malone, don't be a fool! Malone —!"

"Get over here right away," Malone told Von Flanagan, after explaining the situation to him briefly. "And bring Benson with you."

Von Flanagan and his squad had barely arrived on the scene and staked out to arrest the bandits when they arrived. Malone heard a knock on the door and then the shooting started. When it was over, two subdued bandits, one of them slightly wounded, were brought in. At sight of Serena Gates one of them shouted "Stool pigeon! Dou-

ble-crosser!" and lunged toward her, but Von Flanagan's cops restrained him.

"There's the payroll haul," Malone said to Von Flanagan, "and here's the lady's gun."

"That makes three guns," Von Flanagan remarked. "One of them should tell us who fired the shot that killed Petty. Nice work, Malone."

"I was just doing my duty to my client, Mr. Algernon Petty," Malone replied. "That's what he retained me for."

When he was finally alone in the apartment with Benson Malone said, "What are you going to do about the night watchman? Fire him, or lend him money to get his son-in-law out of a jam? And, speaking of money, here is your thousand-dollar retainer. I'm sorry, I guess I had you figured wrong all the time."

"You'd better keep it, Benson said, "I'm going to need a lawyer to defend me — in a divorce suit."

"At your service," Malone said. "Remember I never lost a client yet."

He bent down and picked the flowers out of the waste basket. The card was still attached to them: "Flowers to the Fair, From John J. Malone."

"I know a young lady who will appreciate these," Malone said, "Her mother lives in Monte Carlo."



# 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.

