

CONTENTS

NOVELETTES

COOL CAT <i>by Hal Ellson</i>	63
SAUCE FOR THE GANDER, A Clancy Ross Novelette <i>by Richard Deming</i>	13
BLOCK PARTY <i>by Sam Merwin, Jr.</i>	1

SHORT STORIES

SLEEP WITHOUT DREAMS, A Johnny Liddell Story <i>by Frank Kane</i>	127
TERROR IN THE NIGHT <i>by Robert Bloch</i>	85
FOG <i>by Gil Brewer</i>	50
HANDY MAN <i>by Fletcher Flora</i>	90
THEY'RE CHASING US <i>by Herbert D. Kastle</i>	98
KILLER <i>by William Logan</i>	115
SHOT <i>by Roy Carroll</i>	140
DEAD SOLDIER <i>by Jack Sword</i>	40
JOB WITH A FUTURE <i>by Richard Welles</i>	122
THE WATCHERS <i>by Wally Hunter</i>	110
MARTY <i>by Robert S. Swensen</i>	58

FEATURE

CONTEST WINNER: YOU, DETECTIVE No. 6	97
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MANHUNT VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2, February, 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of the St. John Publishing Co.), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1955 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

Sleep Without Dreams

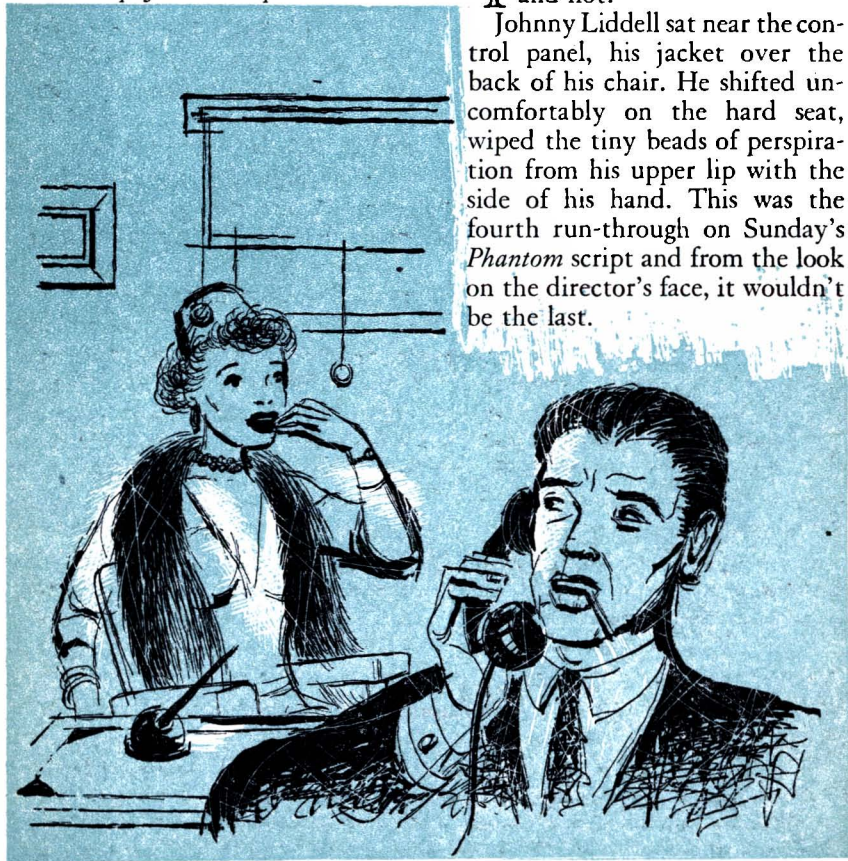
A Johnny Liddell Story

BY FRANK KANE

*It wasn't Liddell's kind of job, at first.
Then the cops found a corpse . . .*

THE CONTROL room was close and hot.

Johnny Liddell sat near the control panel, his jacket over the back of his chair. He shifted uncomfortably on the hard seat, wiped the tiny beads of perspiration from his upper lip with the side of his hand. This was the fourth run-through on Sunday's *Phantom* script and from the look on the director's face, it wouldn't be the last.



Hal Lewis looked up from his marked script, checked the time notations in the margin, shook his head. He glared through the plate glass window at the small group of actors spaced around the two mikes in the studio beyond.

"Pretty sad for a gang that's been doing the same show for over six years," he growled to no one in particular. He jabbed at a button on the panel in front of him. "It's still no good, fellows."

The groans and growls in the studio came through the amplifier into the control room.

Lewis waved for quiet. "Let's take it again from the top." He slipped his script to page one, ran his eye down the pencilled notations. "Manny, it's all right to lisp playing the mobster. But when you're supposed to be fingering the Phantom for the cops, you're supposed to say 'He's one of them,' not 'He's one of us!'" He barked a few other criticisms into the mike. "Let's take it."

"He's one of us, not one of them."

It was Lewis's voice but Liddell, watching, felt like a runner caught off first base by the old hidden-ball trick.

Lewis cut their laughter dead. He was sore. "All right, comedians. Want to get home tonight? I said let's take it!"

He glanced sidewise at Liddell. "Lousy mimics I have on my hands as well as lousy actors. Be glad you work mostly with corpses." He frowned. "Though it's a live one I

asked you to come see me about tonight."

The fifth rehearsal went according to the director's liking; he signalled an okay to the cast touching the tip of his forefinger and the tip of his thumb. He waited until the small knot of men around the mike broke up and headed for the exits for a fast smoke.

"Sorry to make you sit through all that, Liddell." He reached for a pack of cigarettes on the control panel, held it out to the private detective. "They're not usually that sloppy." He waited until Liddell had lit his cigarette. "Kurt Davis is beginning to get a little stale, I'm afraid. Playing the same part for six years can do that to the best of them."

"He the fellow that played the lead?"

Lewis grinned. "Let's say he has the lead. Confidentially, most of those guys in there with him could play rings around him." He turned to the engineer. "We won't be doing a dress before the show, Lou. They're as ready as they're ever going to be. Want to grab a cup of coffee?"

The engineer was a tall, thin man with unruly black hair and the dark stubble of a beard along the line of his jaw. He consulted his watch. "It's only four. We've got two hours to air time. The cast know we're skipping the dress?"

Lewis shrugged. "I'll tell them when they come back in." He waited until the engineer had turned off the

panel, pulled himself to his feet. "Better get back by 5:30. Some of those levels need checking."

The thin man scowled at him, stamped through the iron, sound-proof door.

The director sighed. "Everybody's a prima donna in this business, Liddell. You can't tell the cast they're reading a line wrong and you can't tell the engineer he's got to check his levels without hurting their feelings. You know what that makes me? A fourteen-carat bastard."

Liddell grinned his sympathy. "Everybody has troubles." He studied the rumpled hair, the tired droop to the man's lips, the reddened eyes. "You look like you could stand a rest, Hal."

Lewis nodded absently. "That's what the doc said. After tonight's show, I'm taking off for a three-week trip. Maybe by the time I get back my understudy will have figured out something to do with that ham Davis. He's taking years off my life."

"If he's that bad, why don't you replace him?"

The director screwed his face up into a grimace. "And have every damn brat in the country boycott the program? Haven't you ever heard the little so-and-sos imitating him every place you go? You take that tag line 'Justice Must Prevail' off the show and you'd have no show. It would be just as if the Lone Ranger stopped saying 'Hi-Ho Silver.' Our headache is that Davis'

voice is so damn distinctive, we'd never get away with a substitution. They'd spot it in a minute."

Liddell considered it, nodded. "I never thought about it, but I guess you're right. I'm certainly no fan of the Phantom's, but I'd know that bellow of his any place."

The director nodded sadly, chain-lit a cigarette from the half consumed one he held in his hand. "But I didn't get you down here to discuss my lead." He licked at his lips, seemed to be fumbling for words. "Libby won't be making the trip with me, Liddell."

Liddell raised his eyebrows, said nothing.

The other man raked at his hair with clenched fingers. "She can't get away. She does the lead in that soap on Columbia and she's written in every day for the next six weeks." He sucked at the cigarette with short, nervous puffs. "That's part of the racket, and —" He looked at Liddell, then dropped his eyes. "Who the hell am I kidding? She didn't want to go with me. She could have taped the next twenty sequences if she wanted to." He wiped the dampness along his jowls with the back of his hand. "I think we've had it, Johnny. I think I'm getting dealt out."

Liddell looked uncomfortable, muttered a few words of sympathy. "Another guy?"

The director nodded. "It figures. But I don't know who." He got up, paced the narrow confines of the

booth. "I found out about it pretty much by accident." He stopped near Liddell's chair, crushed out his cigarette in a metal ashtray. "Like I said, she does the lead in an across-the-board soap. It's on from three-thirty to four every weekday. From force of habit, I tune it in. No reason — just to see how she's doing. You understand?"

Liddell nodded.

Lewis scratched at his head again. "Two weeks ago, I happened to catch a sequence and Libby fluffed twice in one of her long speeches. I figured I'd have a little fun with her, tease her about the fluffs. When the show went off the air, I called over to Columbia and asked for her studio. They seemed surprised that I didn't know the show had been on tape for the past few weeks."

He sat down, stared at Liddell. "She never mentioned it to me, Liddell. She never mentioned that for two weeks, every afternoon she was spending a couple of hours away from the house. Where? Who with?" He jabbed another cigarette into his mouth, lit it with a shaking hand. "It's been driving me crazy, Liddell. I've got to know."

"Where do I come in?"

The director leaned over, put his hand on the detective's arm. "You're going to find out for me. I'll be away for weeks. She won't have to hide."

Liddell shook his head. "That's not my field, Hal. You know that. That takes a special kind of talent, a kind I don't have."

Lewis licked at his lips. A pleading note came into his voice. "You're my friend, Liddell. I don't know where else to turn."

Liddell massaged his brow with the tips of his fingers. "Anything else I can do for you, I'd do in a minute. But I won't do you any good and I wouldn't do myself any good if I started peeking through keyholes or over transoms, Hal." He stared at the sweat-shiny face of the other man. "I know a good reliable man in that field, though. I'll have him drop by and see you."

"You won't change your mind, Liddell? Price is no object and —"

Liddell got up, clapped the other man on the shoulder. "Price doesn't come into it, chum. I'm just not the man for the job. But I'll see to it that you do get the man who is." He took his jacket off the back of the chair, shrugged into it. "Don't look so gloomy. Maybe it isn't what you think."

"How do you think she's been spending her afternoons? Learning to crochet?" Lewis pulled the half-smoked butt from between his lips, added it to the pile on the ashtray in front of him. "I've got to know who it is, Liddell. I've got to know!"

Johnny Liddell had almost forgotten Hal Lewis's problems two weeks later when he walked into his office. The pert little redhead behind the reception desk grinned as he pushed through the glass door.

"Anything new?" was his stock greeting.

She tossed her head in the direction of the private office. "Company." She rolled her eyes lasciviously. "Real lush."

"How come you put her in there?"

Pinky grinned at him. "She said she was a friend of yours. I wouldn't dare have a friend of yours sit on the dirty old customer's bench in the dingy old reception room."

Liddell growled at her under his breath, walked over to the door to the private office, pushed it open.

Libby Lewis was a natural ash blonde. She wore her hair clipped close until it looked almost like a halo around her face. Her eyes were slanted, green. Her mouth was a vivid slash of color in the cocoa brown of her face. She wore no hat, and a pale green sweater did an indifferent job of disguising outstanding assets in her profession. Her lips parted, showing a perfect set of gleaming teeth. She got up, walked toward him with outstretched hand.

"Johnny. I'm so glad to see you." Her hand was cool, soft. She brought with her a clean, fresh smell. Standing, she was tall for a girl. Her waist was small, the fullness of her skirt hinted at rounded hips, long shapely legs. "I hope you didn't mind my coming here?"

"It's the nicest thing that's happened to me all week." He led her back to the customer's chair, walked around the desk, dropped into his armchair. "I'd like to think it was

my fatal fascination that brought you, but something tells me it wasn't."

A momentary frown marred the placidity of her forehead. "I wish it were just a social visit. It isn't." She chewed on her full lower lip for a moment. "I'm in a jam, Johnny. I need advice."

"I wish you had talked to me before you got into the jam," Liddell told her. He reached down into his bottom drawer, brought up a half filled bottle of bourbon. "Better late than never, though."

"You knew Hal was away, of course?" The detective walked across the room to where a water cooler stood humming to itself against the wall. He drew two paper cups, spilled some water into them and returned to the desk. "He's been touring the country visiting old friends along the net, holding a few auditions, taking it easy." She laced her fingers in her lap, stared at them. "I'm dreading the day he comes back."

Liddell spilled some bourbon into the cups on top of the water. He handed one to the girl. "The bloom off the romance?"

Her eyes were wide, clear, made no attempt to evade his. "It has been for a long, long time, Johnny. I never did anything about it because I had my work to keep me occupied. Hal had his, and we just didn't get into each other's way." She sipped at the drink, coughed. "It's different now."

Liddell perched on the corner of the desk. "How?"

"I've found a man I really love, Johnny. The man I thought Hal was when I married him."

"You made a mistake once. How do you know you're not making another one?"

"I know. Kurt's not as good an actor as Hal was." She chuckled. "We don't fool ourselves. Kurt's strictly a one-part man. When the Phantom goes off the air, so does Kurt. And we don't mind, Johnny. Both of us have had it with radio. It doesn't leave you much time to live."

"Kurt?" Liddell set his drink down. "Kurt Davis?"

"The fellow who plays the name role in the Phantom every Sunday. Hal directs him."

Liddell nodded, picked up his drink, emptied the cup in one swallow. "I'll bet Hal will love that."

The blonde sipped at her drink. "They hate each other. Kurt has been wanting to go to Hal and tell him he's got to give me my freedom. I wanted to wait. I know Hal's pride." She shrugged helplessly. "Now I guess it's too late. He's been having me followed. Now that he knows, he'll never let me go."

Liddell crushed the paper cup into a ball, threw it at the waste basket. "When does Hal get back?"

"Sometime this week. He's scheduled to do the Phantom on Sunday."

Liddell walked around the desk, dropped into his chair. He picked a silver pencil from the desk, rolled it between his thumb and forefinger. "You've been pretty stupid about

the whole mess," he told her bluntly. "You should have gone to Hal right at the beginning."

"I couldn't. He wouldn't understand."

"I suppose he'll understand better when he gets it in a report from a private detective agency?" He slammed the pencil on the top of the desk. "You should have known you couldn't get away with it."

The blonde's full lips drooped. "It never occurred to me he'd call the station. I knew he checked up on me every day by tuning into the show, but —"

The telephone jangled on the desk at Liddell's elbow. He scooped it from its cradle, held it to his ear. "Yeah?" His lower lip sagged. "When?" The instrument chattered at him again. "Call the police. I'll be right over." He dropped the instrument back on its hook, stared at the girl. "Hal's home."

"He is?" Some of the color had drained from her face. "You said something about the police. What's happened?"

"Kurt Davis is dead. He tried to kill Hal, but Hal killed him first. In self defense."

The blonde shrank back into the chair, tried to squeeze her little fist into her mouth.

Sergeant Eddie Neal of Homicide opened the door in response to Johnny Liddell's knock. He was a tired-looking, middle-aged man in a

rumpled blue suit and a battered grey fedora stuck on the back of his head. He seemed surprised to see Liddell.

"What's the gimmick? You following the meat wagon these days?" Neal shifted his bulk from one foot to the other.

"Hal Lewis called me after it happened. He wanted me to come over."

Neal shrugged, stepped aside. "He's inside. The study."

The director sat on an oversized couch at the far end of the room. He seemed incapable of pulling his eyes away from a blanket-draped bulge in the center of the room. As he watched, two white-coated attendants from the coroner's office transferred the body to a stretcher and strapped it on. While they were obtaining an initialled release from one of the Homicide team, Liddell walked over to Lewis.

The director's face was damp and gleamed wetly in the half light. His eyes moved from the corpse to Liddell's face, he licked at his lips. "He's dead, Liddell," he muttered unnecessarily.

The homicide man turned back from the form he was initialling, grinned humorlessly. "It's a cinch he ain't wearing that hole in the head for a decoration." He eyed Liddell coldly. "You're the private eye, Liddell, eh?" He said it as though it left a bad taste in his mouth.

Liddell nodded.

The homicide man put his hand out. "You got the report?"

"What report?"

The homicide man nodded to Lewis. "Man here says he's had you watching his wife for the past couple weeks. Don't he get a report?"

"Not from me. I don't peep keyholes. He had another agency on that job." He watched while Neal ambled over.

"What's your job here, then?"

Liddell dug his cigarettes from his pocket, stuck one in his mouth. "Being a friend. It looks like he might need one."

"Lay off the guy, Mike," Neal told the other Homicide man. "He's okay. He works pretty close with the Inspector's office." He turned to Liddell. "This is Mike Herrnan, Johnny. He's just been transferred over to us from Central Office. He's teamed with me."

Liddell nodded. "Glad to know you. Mind filling me in?"

Herrnan looked to his partner, drew a nod. "Your friend here calls us. We pick up the squeal. Says he's killed his wife's lover. Guy pulled a gun on him first, he says, so it's self defense."

Hal Lewis swabbed at his face with a balled-up handkerchief. "That's right, Johnny. The guy called me, cussed me out for having a tail on Libby. He dared me to come over, said we'd settle it once and for all." He swabbed at his face again. "I picked up an old .38 I had around." He nodded in the direction of a table on which lay two guns. "As soon as I walk in Davis' door, he pulls a gun

and aims it at me." Lewis shook his head, "I don't know what happened then. All I know is that I started shooting and when it was all over he was lying there."

Neal squinted at the man in the chair. "You weren't taking much of a chance, were you?" He looked up at Liddell. "The other guy's gun was loaded with blanks." The eyes rolled back to Lewis. "Two of them were fired. He had four holes in him — one in the head. That's the big one."

Lewis dry-washed his hands. "I didn't know his gun was loaded with blanks. All I know is he started aiming at me. So I —" He looked from face to face, didn't find what he was looking for. "I got a right to defend myself against a guy who was breaking up my home."

Herrnan pulled a dog-eared leather notebook from his pocket, wet the tip of his index finger, flipped through the pages. "You say you got a call from the dead man today, daring you to come over. Right?"

Hal Lewis nodded, watched the homicide man warily.

"This private eye you had watching your wife. What was his name?"

Lewis looked at Liddell, got no encouragement. "Ted Derbers. He has an agency at —"

Neal grunted. "We know all about Derbers." He looked sideways at Liddell. "The kind of guy that's giving the racket a bad name. Wire tapping and all the dirty tricks. Right, Liddell?"

Liddell shrugged. "He's not my kind of op."

Herrnan chewed on the cuticle of his thumb. "If Derbers was doing a good job, he probably had a tap on the phone here." He looked thoughtfully at Lewis. "In that case, he could verify what you just said."

Lewis nodded eagerly. "Call him and see."

"We'll do better than that, mister. We'll invite him to drop down to headquarters and play us all the stuff he's picked up. You wouldn't object to that, would you?"

"Does he have a choice?" Liddell said.

"No."

"In that case, what are we waiting for?"

Neal grinned. "You weren't figuring on joining the party, were you, Liddell? It's strictly by invitation — and you're not invited."

The blonde was still in his office when Liddell got back. Her eyes were puffy, showed signs of crying. She jumped out of the chair when he opened the door, her eyes searching his face.

"It's pretty bad, baby," he shook his head. "Hal went over to Kurt's place, killed him." He walked around the desk, dropped wearily into his chair. "He told the police Kurt had called him and threatened him, dared him to come over for a show-down."

"But if it was self defense —"

"Kurt never called him." He opened the desk drawer, brought out an opened pack of cigarettes, dumped one on the desk, held the pack out to the girl, drew a shake of the head. "Hal had a private eye watching you. You know that." He lit the cigarette, blew a feathery stream of smoke ceilingward. "The guy he hired is a wire tap artist. He put a bug on Kurt's wire. Kurt never called all day, and he didn't leave the house."

Libby sat down hard, her eyes wide, staring. "Then — then, it was murder?"

Liddell speared a flake of tobacco from the tip of his tongue. "It looks that way. You see, Derbers — that's the wire tap guy — told me he didn't have a single call from Kurt's place. But there was one to Kurt. From Hal."

The blonde chewed on her finger. "What about?"

"Hal told Kurt he was on his way over to kill him. That he had all the evidence he needed to claim the Unwritten Law and that's what he'd been waiting for all these years."

"He hated him. He always hated him. But I never knew —"

Liddell leaned back, raked his hair with clenched fingers. "As soon as Homicide gets those records, Hal will be charged, Libby. My guess is they'll try to make a Murder One charge stick."

"Can they?"

Liddell shrugged. "They can try. They have all the elements — pre-

meditation, motive, opportunity. They can make a real college try at it."

The blonde got up from her chair. "I've got to go to him, Johnny."

Liddell looked at her.

She shook her head. "I'm his wife. And I guess I'm as much to blame as he is. Thanks for everything."

Liddell sat at his desk for minutes after the girl had left, staring at the door. Finally, he crushed out his cigarette, picked up his hat from the corner of the desk and left.

Frank Cole, producer of the *Phantom* for Seasweet Tuna, looked like a stroke on its way to happen. Thick veins stood out on his neck, his cheeks had assumed a purple hue, his eyeballs threatened to pop from their sockets as he tried to speak into three phones at once.

Johnny Liddell stood by the window, listened sympathetically while the producer tried to assure the cast that the show would go on as scheduled, calm the sponsor with a promise of an adequate replacement and browbeat an assistant into stepping up auditions for a new *Phantom*.

When he finally got off the phone, he leaned back, wiped at his forehead. He jabbed at a button on the base of the phone. When his secretary's voice came through the intercom, he told her he'd take no more calls.

"What the hell is going on, Liddell?" he started. "All I know is the

police called the agency told us Kurt was dead and Hal under arrest. What happened?"

Liddell shrugged. "Hal claims Kurt was playing house with Libby. He defended the honor of his household."

Cole looked thoughtful. "I suppose there's no accounting for tastes, but I wouldn't figure Kurt Davis to be Libby's dream boy." He picked up a pencil, doodled on a desk pad. "He wasn't in her league. Not that Hal was either; but he got her before she blossomed out." He looked up. "Picking Kurt to follow Hal would be like stepping out of the frying pan into the fire."

"How so?"

Cole shrugged, resumed shading his doodle. "Libby could write her own ticket in Hollywood. Neither Hal or Kurt could get into a movie studio on a pass. The only thing that's ever held her back was Hal."

"What was wrong with Kurt? I thought he was a good enough actor."

"Typed, I guess. He's been booming that 'Justice Must Prevail' tag for so long, the minute his name is announced everybody yells 'Justice Must Prevail' and it breaks up the show. Hell, we can't even use him on our other programs because he's so identified with that character."

"Could he do a job on another show? Like imitations maybe?"

"How'd you know? The guy's a good mimic. Could keep the whole cast in stitches. Hal complained

more than once about Kurt delaying rehearsals by doing take-offs of the other players."

"You think Hal disliked Kurt enough to kill him? Aside from his messing around with Libby, I mean."

Cole shrugged. "Who knows? Guys like Hal take this business pretty seriously. He always thought Kurt was smelling up the Phantom, that with another lead he could do real things with it." He smiled wryly. "Maybe it was half for the honor of his household and half for the good of the show."

The clock on the night table said four o'clock. Liddell got up on his elbow, glared at the telephone, but it continued to shrill at him. He reached over, yanked it from its cradle.

"Johnny? This is Libby. I'm downstairs. Can I come up?"

Liddell pushed back the covers, picked up the clock, held it to his ear. It was ticking. "You know what time it is?"

"I know." There was a pause. "I just left Police Headquarters. Johnny, Hal is dead."

"He's what?"

"He's dead. They notified me about an hour ago, and sent a car for me. He must have had some pills with him. When the keeper went past his cell, he —"

"I'm in 4B."

He stuffed his legs into his pants,

pulled a bathrobe over his pajama tops. In less than ten minutes the girl was knocking at his door. The cocoa color of her face was a yellowish tint in the half light, she wore no make-up but lipstick. She closed the door behind her, leaned against it. Her full breasts rose and fell spasmodically. "He's dead, Johnny. He killed himself."

Liddell caught her by the arm, led her to a chair. "I've got some coffee working." He disappeared in the direction of the kitchenette, reappeared with a steaming cup of coffee. A bottle of cognac was tucked under his arm. He laced the coffee with the cognac, pushed it into the girl's hand. "Drink that. But be careful. It's hot."

He dropped into a chair facing her, waited until she had taken a few long sips from the cup. Then he lit two cigarettes, passed one to her.

She took a deep drag, leaned her head against the back of the chair, blew a feathery stream of smoke ceilingward. Her round breasts strained against the flimsy blouse.

"I had a little talk with Frank Cole this evening after you left, Libby."

"Poor Frank. He must be nearly crazy. Losing his lead and director the same day."

Liddell smoked glumly. "He is. He had a lot of respect for Kurt's ability, apparently."

Libby shrugged. "As the Phantom, sure. But as anything else, Kurt was in left field."

"That's not what Cole thinks. He thought Kurt would have done well if he hadn't been typed. He was a good mimic, could make the cast laugh at his take-offs."

"That was one of the things that made Hal furious. Kurt would break up rehearsals with his silly imitations, and —"

"Was he any good doing a take-off of Hal?"

The slanted green eyes studied his face soberly. A puzzled frown wrinkled her forehead. "Why?"

"The telephone conversation Derbers picked up between Hal and Kurt. When Hal threatened to kill him."

"You're not getting to me, Johnny. What are you trying to say?"

Liddell grinned at her bleakly. "Hal never made that call to Kurt. He knew Kurt's phone was tapped. He'd have to be insane to put it on record that he was going to kill Kurt."

"But he did make the call. Derbers recorded it."

"That's what he was supposed to do." Liddell leaned back, sighed. "Here's the way I figure it. When Kurt found out that Hal had his phone tapped, he saw a chance to set up a self-defense plea if he were to kill Hal. He did a take-off of Hal threatening his life and put it on tape. Then, all he had to do was wait until Hal came home and play the record from some other phone and answer from his own. So, it wasn't Hal. It was Kurt playing

both roles — one on tape and one live.”

The girl chewed on her full lower lip. “Go on.”

“Once the threat was on the record, Kurt went to another phone, probably one in the lobby of his building and called Hal, daring him to come over and settle the whole mess.”

“Then his plan miscarried. Kurt’s the one who got killed. Remember?”

Liddell stared at her for a moment. “Did it miscarry?” He chain-lit a fresh cigarette, took his time about crushing out the butt. “I just said the recording was played from one phone and Kurt answered from his.” His eyes moved from the ash-tray, met hers. “That means he had an accomplice.”

Libby started to get up from her chair.

“You may as well hear the way I figure the rest of it.” He waited until she had sunk back. “Kurt needed Hal into coming over to shoot it out with him because the accomplice had one other little job to do. She was supposed to fill Hal’s gun with blanks. Then, after Hal was dead, Kurt would replace the blanks with shells.”

The blonde stared at him, made no attempt to interrupt.

“But instead, his accomplice put the blanks into Kurt’s gun so that he was a sitting duck for Hal. With Hal’s threat on the record, she knew he wouldn’t stand a chance. With all the evidence stacked against him the

chance of acquittal was almost nothing, wasn’t it, Libby?”

The blonde continued to stare at him for a moment, then her lips parted in a taunting smile. “You ought to be writing the *Phantom* script, Johnny. You’re real good. But you’d never get anybody to swallow that wild yarn.”

Liddell shook his head. “Never in a million years,” he conceded. “But you couldn’t let well enough alone, could you? You had to kick over the whole apple cart.”

“How?”

“What did you slip Hal when you went to see him? What did you tell him it was, sleeping pills?”

Some of the taunting quality drained from the smile. “I didn’t slip him anything. He had them with him.”

Liddell shook his head. “Not a chance. Before they bedded him down, he was searched to the skin, his shoelaces and his tie were taken away along with his belt. It’s routine.” He exhaled twin streams of smoke from his nostrils. “You got rid of the two men who were complicating your life, all right, but where do you go from here, Baby?”

The blonde studied his face from under lowered lids. “You couldn’t prove a thing. But you don’t have to try, do you?”

Liddell shook his head. “I don’t intend to.”

A self-satisfied smile wiped the worry from her face. “I’ll make it up to you, Johnny.”

Liddell consulted his watch. "You won't have the time, Baby. I figure you have twelve hours at most. By now, the medical examiner knows what was in those pills you slipped to Hal and both Herrnan and Neal are out checking to find out where you got it." His eyes ran over the girl's lush figure. "No drug clerk's going to forget a customer like you, Baby." He looked at her sympa-

thetically. "Twelve hours at the outside and they'll be coming for you. Just twelve hours — how are you going to spend it, Baby?"

Her glance met his levelly. "I guess I'll sleep. I have a few pills left. I guess I didn't realize how tired I was."

She got up, walked to the door. Standing in the doorway, she touched her fingers to her lips, blew him a kiss. Then she walked out.

