



Don let him get halfway up before he threw the rock

THEY LOOKED UPON DEATH

By FRANK JOHNSON

Attorney Don Murdoch didn't expect the nightmare of evil that enveloped him when he rescued a girl from her doom!

DON MURDOCH reached the entrance to the bridge and didn't know it until he was well along the public walk. It was ten o'clock and foggy. Don thought it was one of the foggiest Manhattan nights he had ever seen. Yet he liked to walk through the swirling gray mist. It was about the only time he really felt alone in this vast City. Everything was muted and gray. There were no bright neon lights and no constant

rumbling noise of traffic. The city seemed to have gone to bed in this fleecy cloud of fog.

Halfway across the bridge he saw a red light streaming through the mist. He guessed almost at once that this was the tail light of a car parked there. A distinct violation of rules. No cars were permitted to park on these great bridges.

Then he saw the girl, though at first it was hard to realize it was a human being

perched up there on the parapet. He could see the flutter of her skirt as the breeze caught it but the rest of her figure was muffled in the fog.

Don began running. People didn't climb upon bridge parapets to get a better view, especially on a night like this. His hard heels made clicking sounds as he gained speed.

Suddenly there was a clash of gears and the car, parked directly opposite the spot where the girl stood, started away and fast. Don paid little heed to it. All his attention was on the girl.

He reached the parapet below her, raised both arms. She was leaning forward as he seized her slim legs. She screamed. Just once and not very loud. He tugged hard. She lost her balance and fell backward. He was ready for that and she landed in his arms, with her head resting against his shoulder and both her feet dangling. She didn't seem to be very tall. In fact, when he set her down, she only came up to his chin and Don Murdoch wasn't exactly a giant.

"Hey—you two. What's going on!" The voice came out of the fog. "I heard somebody yell."

A patrolman came into view, out of the swirling fog. He had a tight grip on his nightstick. Don held the girl closely. There wasn't any use denying what had happened, but perhaps he might be able to talk the cop out of taking her in.

"It's my—my girl," Don explained. E "She was looking over the bridge. She—got dizzy."

"Easy now," the cop said. "I'm ready for retirement, but I still got good eyes. That girl was standing on the parapet. She was going to jump, wasn't she?"

"Okay, officer, you win," Don said. "But look here, everything is straightened out now. We'd hate to have any publicity about this. She's—well, a bit nervous and

if there were any recriminations, she might— Oh, just give us a break, will you?"

"Let's see some kind of identification," the cop ordered. "Maybe I understand. I got a nervous wife too."

He snapped on a flashlight and studied the cards and papers.

"Well," he said, "if it isn't Attorney Don Murdoch. I guess I'll give you a break all right. You used to be on the city council and you battled like blazes for us old cops. Yes, sir, I'm glad to do you the favor, Mr. Murdoch. Personally, I just been patrolling my beat and I didn't see a thing. How can a man be expected to see anything in a fog like this anyhow? Take good care of the girl. She's a pretty little thing."

Don held the girl closer. "With that I fully agree," he whispered. "Much too pretty a little thing to throw her life away in that dirty water down there. What's wrong? Down on your luck?"

"No. No, not exactly." She shivered against him. "I-I'm afraid, that's all. I-I'm hungry too. Oh, please let me go. I won't do anything rash. I promise. I-I don't have to kill myself. That matter is going to be taken care of for me."

Don began wondering if he shouldn't yell for the cop to get a Bellevue ambulance. He put an arm around her waist and led her off the bridge.

"If you're hungry, we can fix that up right away. I'm starved myself. Come on. And let's talk about cheerful things. Who are you? Or is that question one you don't want to answer or will compel you to lie?"

"I have no reason to lie, Mr. Murdoch. Are you really an attorney? An important man?"

He laughed. "I'm an attorney all right, but not so important. I served a couple of terms on the city council and I've aspirations in the direction of the District

Attorney's office. I'm thirty, not married, never been arrested, never—"

SHE laughed then. He'd have sworn it was the first time she'd laughed in weeks. Her grasp on his arm tightened. He began to realize she was frightened and looked to him for support and guidance. He wondered what he was letting himself in for.

They located a small, cheerful cafe. Don looked across the booth table at her and didn't try to hide his surprise. That gray suit she wore must have cost twice as much as he paid for his clothes. The blouse was soft and silky. He'd seen them like that in store windows with very fancy price tags.

"I'm Phyllis Baker," she said. "I live in Connecticut. And please, Mr. Murdoch, let me pay for my food. I have more money than I know what to do with."

Murdoch waited until they'd been served two potent cocktails. He thought she needed one. Then he leaned across the table.

"Phyllis, can you tell me why you tried to jump off the bridge? Remember, I'm an attorney. Consider yourself my client. I have to keep your secret then. Perhaps I can help."

She looked straight into his eyes with embarrassing frankness. Don looked back and saw a girl of about twenty-three with perfect features, lovely brown hair and sparkling blue eyes. Or they would have been sparkling if it wasn't for the terror which filled them. And the earnestness.

"Mr. Murdoch, you probably could help me though I'd never ask you to. It would mean—your death as well as mine."

Don choked on the cocktail. She put hers down after a small sip.

"You don't believe me, do you? But see if you can remember the car parked on the bridge just opposite the spot where I

was standing. There were three men in that car. If I didn't jump, they'd have pushed me. I had a choice between suicide and being murdered. It's been like that since Mother died. He killed her too."

Don drank his cocktail in two huge gulps. This was worse than he'd bargained for. The girl was stark, raving mad. And yet—there had been a car on the bridge. It had raced away at his approach. Why hadn't the people in it tried to save her? Why did they disappear with such urgent speed?

"Suppose you tell me from the beginning," he suggested. "And, Phyllis, I'll be a sympathetic listener. I'll promise to do everything in my power to help you."

She smiled a little, as if she wasn't used to it.

"In that car was my stepfather. His name is Hugh Thorne. With him were Dr. Stewart and a male nurse named Max Leister. My stepfather married my mother two years ago. I suppose she must have loved him. I don't know what she saw in the man to love. From the very first he was after nothing but her money. Only three months ago she realized it and—secretly changed her will so I was the sole beneficiary. You don't believe all this, do you?"

"I most certainly do," Don assured her, although inwardly he knew he was only coddling her a bit.

"I'll go on anyway. Mother became very ill. Hugh called in his own doctor. This Stewart. Everything Dr. Stewart did for Mother made her worse. I think she was being slowly poisoned to death. I believe she realized this too and tried to escape. So they said she'd lost her mind and this big man, Max, was brought in. A male nurse for a female patient. Does it sound reasonable? They got away with it though. Mother—died."

“But you could have gone to the police with your suspicions,” Don pointed out. “That’s what they are in business for. An examination would have proved whether you were right or wrong.”

“Wait until I explain,” she urged. “After Mother died, I had a complete breakdown. I was kept under sedatives for days on end. They were trying to weaken my mind. Then I attempted to escape from them. From my own home. Every time I did, they made me look like more of a maniac than before. The whole village thinks I’m mad and they feel so terribly sorry for my stepfather. Max stayed on. To protect me, Hugh told everyone. Dr. Stewart treated me. With barbiturates.”

“Because if you die, then your stepfather automatically comes into your estate?” Don asked. He found himself half believing her.

“Yes. That’s the only reason. Hugh was insanely mad when he discovered Mother didn’t leave him a thing. I did go to the police once. The sheriff in the little town where I live—he—brought me home.”

Don frowned. “If what you say is true, Phyllis, we have a difficult problem. If I act as your attorney, what can I do? They’ll have you declared incompetent and if your reputation for being insane has already circulated around, I’ll get nowhere. The difference between sanity and insanity, except in pronounced cases, is very slim. Dr. Stewart perhaps has a reputation as good as any expert I could furnish.”

SHE reached across the table and her hand trembled against his arm.

“Don, the only way to stop them is by removing the motive. Three weeks ago I escaped—yes, that’s the proper word—and went to a nearby town before they found me. I had time to steal a marriage

license blank. Don, would you marry me? Just in pretense? Would you fill out the blank so they’ll believe you and I are married?”

Don whistled. “That’s a tough risk for an attorney to take, Phyllis. Tell you what. I’ll fill out the blank. I’ll go home with you. If things are as you tell me, I’ll go through with it. I’ll get you out of there and start proceedings against your stepfather. We’ll exhume your mother’s body.”

“She was—cremated. He thought of everything, Don. I—don’t know how to thank you. I’ve been trying so hard to find someone who would help. Perhaps the scheme is silly.”

“It’s anything but that,” Don said. “I’d be your sole heir. If I died, my people would presumably get your money. Now finish your dinner. We’ll go to my garage, get the car and drive back.”

“You don’t think I’m crazy then?” she asked anxiously.

“I don’t know—yet. The story is fantastic. Even you have to admit it, but such things have been done in the past. I’ll know soon after I meet those folks of yours.”

“Look out for Max,” she warned. “He’s very big and I think he’d like to kill someone.”

Don mustered a weak grin. Twenty minutes later they were rolling toward the coastal Connecticut town where she lived. It was still dark when they arrived, but Don could see that part of her story was true, at least. She owned a veritable estate, with a high fence around it and ornamental gates which were closed and locked.

“I’m afraid, Don.” Phyllis shuddered. “Maybe we shouldn’t go in at all.”

“We must, Phyllis. There’s no other way to handle this. And don’t be afraid. Nothing will happen to you. That’s a promise.”

There was a bell beside the gate. Don rang it and then returned to the car. Pretty soon the gates swung back and a man approached, one of the biggest men Don had ever seen. Against him, a normal person wouldn't have a chance. He was more than six feet tall with enormous shoulders and a tapering, almost graceful waist. He had long arms and big hands. His face was lined and cruel-looking, his eyes small, avaricious and piggish.

"So you decided to come back," he growled at Phyllis through the car window. "Okay, come on in. Thanks, mister, for bringing her home. We been awful worried."

"I'm coming in," Don stated. "Phyllis and I were married, though I can't see how that is any of your business."

The giant was thunderstruck and looked it. He swung onto the running board of the car. Don realized the uselessness of trying to knock him off. And yet, Don was far from satisfied with things. Phyllis might be mad as a hatter. He had to know. Her story was so preposterous as to border on the realm of fairy-tale. Things like this just didn't happen. Not in a civilized community.

Don stopped in front of the very large house. Two men were on the steps waiting. Don identified them without the need of an introduction. Dr. Stewart wore a Vandyke, was pompous and not too pleasant-appearing. Hugh Thorne, Phyllis' stepfather, was a tall, slim individual of about fifty, with graying hair, an easy manner, and certainly not a villain type.

Don helped Phyllis out of the car. Neither man on the porch moved. Then Thorne spoke and his voice was bitter.

"Phyllis, I thought we agreed you were not to run away again. I'm losing confidence in you."

Phyllis' grip on Don's arm was so tight it actually hurt him. He patted her hand.

"Mr. Thorne," he declared, "I'm Phyllis' husband. I've known her a long time. I was away during the war, but we met in town three weeks ago. She told me she needed me. I've always been in love with her. We were—married. I had the usual waiting period waived."

"I don't believe it," Thorne snapped. "Not one word."

Don shrugged, reached into his pocket and brought out the license. It was endorsed to the effect that they had been married. Don hoped he'd altered his writing enough to make the clergyman's signature and the town clerk's sufficiently different to get away with it.

Thorne crumpled the license into a ball and thrust it into the pocket of his jacket.

"Come inside," he said sourly, and Don was beginning to believe in Phyllis.

She left him in the hallway and went upstairs. Max stood at the bottom of the steps watching her slim legs pound along the stairway. He stayed there after Don followed Thorne and the doctor into the lavish sitting room. Don sat down and so did the other two men. Thorne cleared his throat.

"Now see here, Mr. Murdoch—that's the name I read on the license, isn't it?"

DON inclined his head and found himself hating this smooth, well-mannered man.

"You may not know it, but at the time my wife—Phyllis' mother died—a few weeks ago, something happened to Phyllis. She suffered a breakdown first and when Dr. Stewart here brought her out of it with his usual skill, Phyllis seemed to have become deranged. I'm being blunt. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind—and I don't believe you," Don said curtly. "Not a single word."

Thorne sighed. "She's filled you full of

the bunk she has told everyone else. That we murdered her mother. It's absurd. I was head over heels in love with my wife. Dr. Stewart is a successful and noted specialist."

"Why didn't you try to stop Phyllis from jumping off that bridge tonight?" Don demanded. "I know you were there. I took the number of your car. Phyllis and I had a date there. You terrorized her. It's lucky I came along. For both Phyllis and yourself, because a cop showed up as you drove away. I had to use all the blarney I could muster to get him to let Phyllis go."

"Max!" Thorne yelled, and the huge male nurse walked in. "Who was out of this house tonight?"

"Only the girl, sir," Max replied. "This ain't no night to go traveling around. Too foggy and wet."

Thorne shrugged. "There is your answer, Mr. Murdoch. Now I shall continue to be frank. If you actually are married to Phyllis, I shall have it annulled. Because she is not in her right mind and couldn't legally enter into marriage. My advice to you is to get out of here and forget the whole thing. If you expended any money, I shall gladly reimburse you."

Don grinned. "Try and put me out," he challenged. And rued the words an instant later.

Thorne just raised his hand. Suddenly Don was lifted off the chair and hurled bodily into the hallway. Before he could get up, Max was at his side. An enormous shoe kicked out. Don rolled back. The point hit him high on the head, created a few million stars, but he retained consciousness.

He started to get up. Max simply reached down, delivered a rabbit punch and Don hit the floor with his face. This time he didn't stir a muscle when Max picked him up. The big man opened the front door, walked to the edge of the porch

with his burden and flung Don into one of the bushes eight feet away. Max dusted his hands, scowled and went back inside.

Don pried a branch away that was pressing against his neck hard enough to make the blood flow. He got up, grasped at the stray ends of his consciousness and tried to recover his composure.

He was sore. Good and sore. Even if Phyllis happened to be loony as a pseudo-Napoleon they had no right to throw him out this way. He walked over and sat on the bottom step.

The door opened and Max came out. Don got to his feet quickly. Max threw out his chest, held his arms away from his sides stiffly and advanced toward the end of the porch. Don backed away somewhat hastily. It wasn't that this big goon scared him. He simply realized the absurdity of trying to fight him by any fair means. Despite all his power, Max hadn't been very fair to resort to that kick and the rabbit punch.

The big man howled with laughter and went back into the house. Don poked around for a moment, looking at the driveway lined with calcimined stones. Nice round and heavy rocks. He picked one up, hefted it and smiled thoughtfully. Then he went back and sat on the porch.

By this time he realized that the only way to handle this situation was to go to the police. Just as he decided to act on this conclusion, Max came out onto the porch again. This time he wasn't laughing. He ran down the steps and straight at Don. Apparently, Max was too sure of himself. When Don's right hand came out of the darkness in an upward sweep, Max laughed off this puny attempt to attack him. His glee was cut short when Don cracked the stone in his fist against Max's jaw and sent him careening backward.

Yet even that blow didn't knock the big man cold. He was stunned, dazed and

unable to get up, but he was already trying to as Don raced for the front door, flung it open, and ran into the house.

He still clutched the rock, for a weapon like that was worth holding onto. Phyllis was at the head of the stairs, as Dr. Stewart and Thorne came hurrying into the hallway. Max staggered inside and bellowed wild threats. Don reached Phyllis' side and stood there, at the head of the stairway. Max was coming up.

Don let him get halfway, prayed that the high school coach had been right in insisting that a good accurate eye never failed, even later in life. Then Don let go with the rock. It bounced off Max's skull. He fell backward, rolled down the steps and this time he didn't move. Dr. Stewart went scurrying for his medical kit while Thorne slowly drew an automatic from his hip pocket and started up the stairs.

Don drew Phyllis back quickly.

"My room," she whispered. "I can bar the door. They can't get in. Hurry, Don."

DON slammed the door in place and turned the heavy key. The lock mechanism was massive. Not apt to stand up under the attacks of a Max Leister, but Stewart and Thorne wouldn't get through without an ax. Don began breathing more calmly.

"Don," Phyllis gasped, "do you believe me now? Oh, Don, I shouldn't have brought you into this. What are we going to do?"

"Fight," Don thundered. "That's the only thing left. We're trapped. They mean to kill you, that's obvious. Now, probably, my death is just as essential. We're looking upon death, Phyllis, and while I'm scared stiff, I won't stand here and let them take us. Not by a long shot."

"But, Don, we can't get out. Come to the window and look."

It had been night when they arrived at

this house. Don didn't possess much knowledge of the layout of the estate. There was a moon outside to help him stare in awe-stricken wonder at the scene from the window: The house was built on the edge of a cliff. Straight down, about two hundred feet or more, were craggy rocks and a quiet surf rolled onto the beach beyond.

"Okay." He looked down at Phyllis. "So we're trapped. But we have brains. There still must be a way out. All we have to do is find it or clear the path to the front door. I don't think you're crazy, Phyllis, but I wouldn't give much for the sanity of those three devils hatching up schemes to get at us right now."

There was a tap on the door. Thorne spoke in a voice that was as calm as if he were suggesting going downstairs for a sociable cocktail.

"Mr. Murdoch, I have already found, the opportunity to check on that marriage license. The clerk has no record of ever having issued one. The clergyman emphatically states that he did not officiate at the ceremony. Therefore, I know it is a fake. The mad plotting of Phyllis. Somehow she managed to convince you she is sane. Frankly, I tell you she is out of her mind. Her mother died in madness, though I have kept this from her."

"What do you want me to do?" Don winked at Phyllis and reassured her with a squeeze that he didn't mean to abandon the ship.

"Come out of there. Leave Phyllis to Dr. Stewart. He'll administer a sedative. Tomorrow, if you like, you may come back with any psychiatrist you choose to select. And be convinced what we are doing is solely for Phyllis' benefit."

"I'll tell you what." Don chuckled. "I'm afraid of your hired gorilla. So, if you want me to abide by your terms, take Max to the edge of the cliff below our window."

Push him over the edge and then I'll come out. Otherwise, you come and get me."

Thorne cursed. "I thought you'd say that. Well, there is no especial hurry. Max doesn't feel up to smashing down the door right now, thanks to that stone you hit him with. Very well, you may keep Phyllis company for a little while. But not for long, my friend. You just committed suicide."

"Ha!" Don called back, without too much enthusiasm. "You've bitten off a mouthful with me. I'm well known in New York. I'll be missed and somebody knows where I went. When they come looking for me, you'd better have a good story. I happen to be an attorney. I'm up for the District Attorney's office and—well, use your own judgment. My advice to you is call the police and give yourself up."

Thorne laughed at that one. "Murdoch," he said, "we aren't fools. We know quite a bit about you. True, you are a well known and important young man. We wish you were a nonentity. Still, there is a good way to get rid of you."

"Think hard," Don said caustically. "It will have to be very good."

"You will find out, in due time," Thorne threatened. "I'll be back."

Don led Phyllis over to the window. He leaned far out and shuddered.

"We're like a couple of rats in a corner. Phyllis, that stepfather of yours has the mental ability to cook up something diabolical. I've got to know what it is. I'm going to slip out of this room Right now is the only time, before Max snaps out of it. You are to stay inside with the door almost shut tight. Be ready to let me in, slam the door and lock it all in about one-tenth of a second."

Phyllis clung to his arm. "Don, if they catch you—"

"They'll have to move awful fast," Don said reassuringly.

He picked up a low boudoir stool, crept into the corridor and moved toward the steps. Nobody was downstairs in the hall. He could hear voices from the sitting room. Don balanced the boudoir stool on the top step and then stole down the stairs.

Almost at the bottom, he stopped, for he could hear everything, and could see Max leaning against the sitting-room door. If he turned his head, he'd see Don and any attempt to reach the door would be cut off in an instant. Don knew he could not afford to take any such chance.

Thorne was talking. "That idiot told us a patrolman saw Phyllis standing on the bridge parapet. I don't believe he saw our car. So—we shall report Phyllis missing and say she was afflicted with a desire to do away with herself."

"How does that explain this Murdoch fellow's death then?" Dr. Stewart wanted to know.

"Simple, doctor. The patrolman may or may not have reported what he encountered on the bridge. but be assured that he remembers it. So, if Phyllis and Murdoch are found in the river, the police will immediately make a neat assumption. That Phyllis broke away from Murdoch, jumped and he followed in a vain attempt to save her."

Stewart made noises of approval. "Not bad. Thank heavens, they were not really married though. That would have tangled the situation and made all our former work valueless."

"Max, you'd better go see about getting that young man," Thorne ordered.

Don turned and ran up the stairs. But he was too late. Max had caught sight of him, gave a shout and started in pursuit. At the top of the staircase, Don tipped the boudoir stool and sent it hurtling down the steps. Max couldn't duck it. He was coming too fast. His legs tangled with the stool and both went catapulting to the

bottom.

“Sucker!” Don yelled.

A GUN cracked, and Don ducked and streaked for the questionable security of Phyllis’ room. She had the door open and locked it an instant after he passed through.

Mopping his face, Don leaned against the wall.

“Whew, that was close. Phyllis, they’ve got a scheme rigged up that is bound to work. That’s what they were doing down there—brewing trouble. So we have to do some planning ourselves. Max maybe broke a leg—I hope. But he’ll be at this door pretty soon. How about a nice idea for getting out of here?”

She smiled wanly. “I’ve thought of nothing else. It’s impossible, Don. There is only the window.”

“Only the window,” he repeated thoughtfully. “Phyllis, are there any guns in the house? Besides the automatic your charming stepfather carries?”

“Only a couple of rifles in the downstairs study. You couldn’t reach them, Don.”

“How about other exits? I only saw the front door.”

“There is another on the south side of the house. That’s all. None in back. What are you getting at, Don?”

“I’m not sure yet. There must be something. We can fight men like that only with a cunning greater than their own. There isn’t a moment to lose, either, because Max must be practically frothing at the mouth right now. Besides, if they want to complete their plans, they must do so before dawn. You simply don’t throw people off bridges in broad daylight.”

Don sat down at a desk in the corner. He found some blank business paper in his pocket, and began writing. When he finished, he folded the note and handed it

to Phyllis.

“I’m going to try and get you out of here,” he said. “If you do get away, my car is at the front of the house. Take it and turn right at the highway. Drive like a fool to the State Police Barracks. They are seven miles up that road. Show the note to the man in charge. Or telephone if you can. They’ll know me. Every state cop does. I defended some prominent members of the department against a crazy civil action once and they took it as a favor. Got that?”

“Yes. But, Don, how can we get out?”

He didn’t answer. He walked over to a door, opened it and gazed thoughtfully at the array of sheets, blankets and pillow cases in the linen closet.

“I saw this before and it gave me an idea. There is enough stuff here to fashion a makeshift rope. It will hold you okay, but probably not me. Anyway, I’ll be in the room to lower you after I’ve tied the rope around your waist. This will work, with a little luck and some good acting on your part. Want to take the chance?”

“Any chance is better than just standing here until they come, Don.”

“Good,” he said, and put his lips to her ear. He talked for about three minutes and while he talked, he was busy twisting bedsheets into ropes and tying them together.

In less than ten minutes, he had a fair rope ready.

“It looks like the flag signals on the mast of a ship, but if it holds, we should worry. Ready now?”

She tested the sheet tied to her middle, gulped and nodded. Don picked her up. At the window he kissed her lightly.

“For luck,” he whispered. “And don’t fail me.”

She closed her eyes, clung to the rope and Don began to lower her gently. She was a third of the way down when Max

attacked the door. He was doing it the hard way, with his shoulder, and his roars of rage filled the house. Between the shouts, Don heard Thorne call out calmly that Don was a fool not to let them in.

Don continued to lower Phyllis as fast as he dared. The door was beginning to give and he had to work very fast. Suddenly he let out a wild shout of horror. An instant later the door came crashing down.

Thorne burst in first, gun leveled, but Don didn't even notice him. He was peering out of the window, straining to see.

"Do something," he yelled. "She went down this rope made of sheets." Don held up a ripped and torn end far short of reaching the crags below. "It broke. She's down there—on the rocks!"

Thorne brushed Don aside and rushed to the window.

"It's true," he shouted. "Stewart—take a look. Do you think the fall has killed her?"

His back against the wall, Don's muscles tightened and he wished he had that nice round rock in his hand. Max was watching him like a cat.

"Off-hand, I'll state she must be dead," Dr. Stewart said. "but you never can tell. I— No, she moved. Her arm moved."

"Let's get down there and finish her," Thorne clipped. "We'll take care of this fool afterward. Watch him, Max. Watch him good, but don't lay a hand on him unless he tries to get away."

Max spread his arms and moved to block the door. Don kept both his hands behind his back. He still held the end of the makeshift rope, and a big doorknob off the linen closet which a fingernail file had unscrewed successfully. He was tying the knob into the end of the sheet. This done, he carefully pulled up the length of the rope until he had about two yards of it. His

fingers encountered a knot and he untied this.

"Wait," Max said darkly. "Just wait until they give me the word. I'll twist that head off your shoulders and love doing it. All I hope is they decide you ought to go out of the window too. Then I can muss you up plenty before I heave you out."

"Cheerful soul, aren't you?" Don said. "Why, I'll bet you'll wise crack when they strap you in the chair. Imagine it though. You're so big they'll probably have to build a special chair. And juice? It will cost the state a fortune to shock you to Hades where you belong. And where you are most certainly going."

"Shut up," Max snarled. "I was told not to push you around until they got back, but don't tempt me too much."

"How did the rock feel?" Don taunted. "Or is your head as hard as your heart? And why didn't you break your neck falling down the stairs? Frankly, Max, I think you're a lot of bluff. Just a big chunk of blubber."

AND Max came. Like an express train, his arms spread wide open. Don lunged to one side. He was already swinging the doorknob wrapped in the length of sheet. Max didn't pay the slightest attention to it. His hand made a swipe at Don, missed and Max almost lost his balance.

When he straightened up to renew the attack, the doorknob was whizzing in steady circles. Max took a forward step, and the knob hit him across the temple. He screamed, dove forward and collided with the knob again. This time he went down on his knees.

Don shortened the rope quickly, stepped up to Max and swung the knob with all the strength he had. It connected beautifully. Swiftly, he dropped the weapon and sprinted for the door. Down

the stairs three at a time, he skidded around the bottom of them and looked for the study. There he found two neat rifles and a box of ammunition, and sweeping them up he headed for the door.

Thorne and Dr. Stewart returned in a big rush, and darted into the house like madmen. Don retreated to take up a post at the corner of the house from where he could watch the only two exits. Three minutes later Dr. Stewart came out of the front door. Don carefully shot him through the shoulder.

Max appeared next, only to duck back as a rifle bullet whistled past his head. Then the side door was opening, and Thorne stepped out, shooting. Don pulled back around the corner of the house, waited a moment, and then stepped into view. His first bullet hit Thorne high. He let out an agonized scream, and darted back into the house very fast.

"You idiot," Thorne shouted through the door. "Phyllis is down there on the rocks. She'll die if she doesn't get any help."

"Ah-ah," Don called back in a chiding voice. "Right now, little Phyllis is burning up the roads to the State Police Barracks. In about fifteen minutes she'll come back, accompanied by a small army of troopers. They'll believe her. I wrote them a note on my own stationery. Tell Max to step out. I'd like to put a bullet through him."

Max didn't step out. Thorne smashed a front window though, but when he leaned out to take a shot, Don made him pull in his neck fast with two quick bullets.

"Phyllis is mad," Thorne called again, compromisingly. "Murdoch, you're making a fool, as well as a criminal of yourself. Shooting us this way."

"It's a rotten way," Don shouted. "Why don't you come out like a man so I can do a good job of it?"

Thorne cursed, but didn't accept the

invitation. Don knew they would bolt at any moment now. They simply couldn't stay there and wait. They were now in the exact position they'd placed Don and Phyllis. An unnatural quiet descended over the area. There were no neighbors, none to come in answer to the shooting. Don's life depended on how fast Phyllis could make it.

Dr. Stewart came out first, followed by Max and then by Thorne who was burning up the night with his automatic. But Don didn't retreat. He shot over Dr. Stewart's shoulder at Max, for he was the most deadly. He missed by so close a margin that Max must have heard the song of the bullet for it turned him into a raging maniac.

Don fired again. Max stopped, hesitated, and then swept Dr. Stewart out of the way. Thorne was leveling his automatic. Don had to take care of him first. He drew a fine bead, pulled the trigger and Thorne's right hand flopped limply, and the gun fell from it.

Max was now almost within reaching distance. The rifle had to be pumped and another bullet thrown into the cartridge chamber. It was too late for that. Max let out a wild yell, his arms rose, started to descend, and he began whimpering. One big hand clawed at his chest. He dropped to one knee. Don backed away from him, the rifle ready for business again. Dr. Stewart raised both arms high. Thorne raised the only one he could lift. Somewhere in the distance, a siren was screeching. Don began smiling with satisfaction.

"Dr. Stewart," he said, "you'd better begin thinking of a way out now. Otherwise, they'll take you with them to a death cell. You have brains. You can get away with it by talking. It's too late for anything else."

"They made me do it," Stewart

shrieked. "I couldn't help myself!"

"Think up a good story," Don advised. "Thorne, you're too smart for your own breeches. You have the idea nobody can outthink you. Phyllis got down safely, but pretended to crash on the rocks. She moved her arm to draw you down there, but by the time you reached the crags, she was in my car and rolling away."

Police cars were turning toward the gate. Someone shot the lock away. Phyllis was the first to come running across the lawn. Don took her in his arms.

"It's okay," he said. "Everything is fine and so am I. But, Phyllis, we must do something about you."

"About me?" she gasped. "But I thought you were convinced I'm not crazy?"

"Just the same you ought to have someone to protect you. Like me. I ought to have a head start. I've proved I can do a little something."

Phyllis seemed to think so too.