

slashed at his neck and back and arms. But he continued on, up the stairs. At the top of the stairs, at roof level, he fired his remaining shot back down the stairs, filling the well with rebounding pellets, enough to stop anyone, unless the person was willing to risk blindness, and then he dragged himself and his injured foot to his prowler car.

Beside the car, not inside it, he found Lotta Hermes; she looked up into his face speechlessly and he opened the car door for her and got her inside. "Lock your door," he said, and limped to the driver's side, also getting in, also locking his door. Now a group of Erads had come out onto the roof, but they milled in confusion, some evidently wanting to try one good, planned shot at the prowler car, some wanting to follow in their own cars, some possibly willing to give up.

He took off, gained altitude, accelerated as rapidly as the beefed-up engine which the police department used could manage, and then lifted his microphone and said to the dispatching officer at his substation, "I'm on my way to Peralta General and I'd like another car waiting for me in the parking lot, just in case."

"Okay, 403," the dispatcher acknowledged. "301," he instructed, "join 403 at Peralta General." To Tinbane he said, "Aren't you off duty, 403?"

Tinbane said, "I ran into some trouble on my way home." His foot throbbed and he felt fatigue, general and all-embracing. I'll be laid up for a week, he said to himself as he reached gingerly down to unlace the shoe on his injured foot. Well, there goes the assignment regarding being a bodyguard for Ray Roberts.

Seeing him fussing with his shoe, Lotta said, "Are you hurt?"

"We're lucky," he said. "They were armed after all. But they're not used to a showdown." Handing her the vidphone receiver, he said, "Dial your husband at the vitarium; I told him I'd let him know when I had you out of there."

"No," Lotta said.

"Why not?"

Lotta said, "He sent me there."

Shrugging, Tinbane said, "I guess that's true enough." He felt too foolish from his injury to argue; anyhow it was so. "But I could have given you the info," he said. "That's what's rotten about me, about what I did. You might as well blame me as him."

"But you got me out," Lotta said.