

Elmo Hash and The Groovy Summer Of Love

by Jeff Long

Chapter One

Hookers and johns. Preachers and pagans. Capitalists and communists.

Here's the thing about corpses: They all stink the same, no matter what they'd been in life. That's true on the hard streets of San Francisco, or in the soaking rice paddies of the Ia Drang Valley.

My name's Hash. Elmo Hash. I cover the cops for the Frisco Foil. And the Frisco cops usually cover me.

I'd spent a week on the kind of story that always makes me want to crawl inside a bottle and never come out: Slogging through the San Francisco muck on the trail of a one-legged whore's killer.

I found the bad guy, and what was left of the whore's good leg. Page One copy and a byline. It pays the rent, with enough left over to drown the stink.

I told my editor that I quit -- with the usual understanding that I'd be back on the beat after a headfirst dive into the sauce. A three-day bender at the Chinaman's Tooth was my typical comp time for a job like that. I've been bent longer for less.

The whole world outside the Tooth had gone crazy, and I needed time to think. Or not to think.

More than a hundred thousand kids came to the Haight during the Summer of Love, seeking bliss and some kind of pattern in the tapestry of life.

Now one of them was gruesomely dead. The story stung me for reasons I can't really explain.

I didn't have much use for the hippie scene. To be honest, it gave me the creeps. But we foilers have a natural affinity for the fringe. I'd hung with the bohemians a dozen years before, following Keorovac and devouring

Burroughs. I could reach, if I tried.

I'd grown up enough, though, to know that a children's crusade would not save the world from itself.

Neither would a bottle. Or a newspaper. But what the hell. We all got our illusions.

The Tooth's owner, a Chinaman named Woo, is about four years older than Moses. He keeps the lights dim, and makes sure no one rolls me while I'm passed out at the bar. He doesn't mind if I drool, either.

Normally, I'd sleep off my jag, put my scrawl on the tab, and stumble across Ashbury Street to the office.

But when I woke up this time, it wasn't the Tooth that I'd passed out in.

A lava lamp sat at my elbow, undulating in the same fluid motion as my stomach. A velvet kind of glow bathed the whole bar in black light. The lingering smoke of cheap cigars and unfiltered cigarettes had been replaced by the flowery scent of patchouli, which made me gag. A whiff of thai stick drifted from a dark table in the corner, where a point of light burned redly, head-high on a shadow.

Some fool in Powhatan garb dropped a slug into the juke box. It droned on about having too much to dream last night.

"Electric Prunes," said Woo, when he saw me eyeing the juke box.

"Excuse me?" I managed.

A pair of somethings poked inward from my temples, stabbing my brain. I felt a clawing numbness in my forehead, like I'd swallowed ice too quickly.

"Those Prunes have some groove," Woo said. "They croon far-out melodies. You like, Mr. Foiler? Maybe we try some Strawberry Alarm Clock next."

"Woo, I don't have a clue what you're talking about," I said. "And I don't think you do, either. But if you turn on an alarm clock, with the state my head's in, I may have to kill you."

He shrugged, then went back to wiping the bar. Death threats never bothered Woo, which was one of the things I liked about him.

Then I noticed the flowers in his wispy-white hair and the beads around his neck.

"What the hell is going on here, Woo?" I demanded. "Did my prick of an editor put you up to this? What kind of shirt is that?"

"Nehru," Woo said.

Then he slid a plate of brownies in my direction.

"Try, Hash."

When an ancient Chinaman wearing flowers in his hair and talking about prunes offers you goofy brownies in his dive of a bar when you wake up from a three-day drinking jag after dumping a severed leg on a cop's desk -- it's time to get out.

I got.

It was day. Too much day. Sunlight blinded me.

The Foil's office is at the corner of Haight and Ashbury. Been there for years. Almost as long as long as the Chinaman's Tooth, which has been owned by Woo's family for a couple or three generations. Reporters -- foilers -- have been tripping back and forth across Ashbury in the morning bright of San Francisco for more years than seems natural.

My predecessors never had to wade through the chaos that I found myself in, though.

Hippies offered -- or sought -- grass, acid, hash, speed, ankhs, love beads, incense, peace signs, mescaline, peyote buttons, magic mushrooms and more.

A naked woman, covered in finger paint, stared at the sun.

Foil newsies competed with street urchins hawking the Oracle. A San Francisco Register vendor had been strapped to the hood of a Volkswagon

Beatle, his stock wrapping him like a mummy. I patted his belly for luck.

Some long-haired Jesus freak accosted me in front of the office. Stone gargoyles -- wearing fedoras and reading the first "final" edition -- watched us from the eaves of the Foil building.

"Peace," said the long-hair, offering flowers. "Tell your readers to make love, not war."

Another one -- a woman, I guessed, since there were breasts and the faint odor of fish -- pressed a handbill into my hand.

I shuffled through the grimy glass doors of the Foil, leaving a scotch-and-beer belch in my wake.

Inside, the guard nodded his football-shaped head. I grunted hello. He had a chest the size of a Buick. An ex-marine, he'd just finished his second tour in 'Nam.

We'd done our first tours together. He saved my life in a village on the edge of forever, when a twelve-year-old girl had come dancing toward our platoon with a basketful of flowers and gook grenades.

The sarge dived on me. We rolled in the mud as body parts flew overhead.

I returned to the Foil, and Sergeant Karl Graves went back into the jungle. Same difference, sometimes.

Now he was in the world again -- with a wooden block where his left foot should be, and a glassy stare where his mind had been.

I never asked what had happened on that second tour. I could imagine. And, for once, I wasn't interested in the gory details.

"Sarge," I said, "do something about that mob outside, will ya?"

The vacant eyes of Karl Graves flickered briefly with interest as he went through the door toward the long-hairs.

Perhaps I'd given him the wrong idea. A good scattering was all that I meant.

I didn't watch.

Instead, I glanced at the handbill.

"Rally!" it said. "Fight the power! Abby Manhoff speaks! Berkeley Commons! Tuesday at noon!"

Whoever wrote it had a thing for exclamation points.

A freight elevator took me up to the newsroom.

Chapter Two: The Death of Me

Molly Darling was somewhere between 60 and 147-years-old. She stabbed her cigarette out in a bedpan full of butts as I slumped past her desk.

"Morning, Moe," she rasped.

"Is that what it is?" I said, pausing to bum one of her smokes. "I was sure it got to be afternoon somewhere between the Tooth and here."

She sighed. Molly was a tee-totaler. It takes all kinds to put out a newspaper.

"Nice dead-whore story," she said. "But you didn't get the name of the dog that found her leg."

"It was a street mutt, Molly," I said. "It didn't have a name."

"All dogs got names, Moe," she said. "Little old ladies give 'em one as they watch the world from their windows."

"I'll remember that," I said. Then I laid a hand on her shoulder. "You know, Darling, I think Woo is going nuts. He needs a date. I can fix you up."

She glared.

"He's more of a scoundrel than you, my dear," she said.

Molly Darling looked liked somebody's grandmother in her pillbox hat, dimstore dress with lacy trim, thick white stockings, black shoes, and oversized purse.

I swear, she darned socks after deadline.

But Molly was no granny. She carried a .45 pistol in that purse, and a razor the size of a hockey stick. Woo had been in love with her for years. Him and the rest of San Francisco. Including me.

"Say," I said, dragging on the Marlboro. "Why are the runts so riled?"

A flock of copy boys was clustered at one of the windows overlooking Ashbury Street. Money changed hands, accompanied by whistles, yelps and bursts of dismay.

"Oh, I expect Sergeant Graves is bashing heads again," Molly said, with about as much interest as I felt.

I thought about wandering over, just to see what the odds were.

"The boss wants to see you," Molly said.

"That's a surprise."

She tugged at my arm as I turned toward Burn's office.

"Hey, soldier," she said. "You got some kind of medal in the war, didn't you?"

The question stopped me. Molly knew better than to bring up the subject so offhandedly.

"Yeah," I muttered. "Killed lots of babies."

I leaned over her typewriter, which had been clacking furiously since I walked in.

"Whose obit are you writing?" I asked.

She looked at me funny, and sparked another link in her morning chain.

"Yours," Molly said.

It wasn't a joke.

"Burn!" I yelled at the Foil's gnarled editor. "Why is Molly out there writing

my life story? She spelled my name wrong. On purpose."

Bela "Gradual" Burn put down the Berkely Barb and stared at me like I'd just been plucked off the Bikini atoll.

A low laugh drew my attention to the girl on Burn's couch.

Stringy blonde hair. Stringy figure.

Ink on her cheek; a dove. Poor workmanship.

Sandals. Tattered jeans. Hoopy bracelets. Tie-dye shirt, cut with a butter knife at the midriff -- which was flat and tan.

No bra.

Eighteen, tops.

"Meet your summer intern, Hash," said Burn.

"Moe Hash," cooed the blonde whisp. "You'll be pleased to know that the chicks in my dorm chant your name every night."

She was playing.

It was my turn to glare.

"I don't do interns," I told Burn.

"That's not what the last one said at the trial," he shot back.

"I mean I don't do them anymore," I said.

The girl laughed again. Definitely playing.

"Miss Bow, uhm, comes to us from Berkeley," Burn said.

He fumbled the words, which was a jolt. Words never fumbled from the mouth or the pen of Grady Burn. They bit. They bellowed. They bludgeoned. Always.

Until now.

His demeanor toward this girl, young enough to be his granddaughter, was sickening. Okay, she had a look. But it wasn't my kind of look. And I would have bet money that it wasn't Burn's kind of look, either.

The summer of 1967 was a strange time in San Francisco.

And everywhere else. The wire said Milwaukee was burning. That disturbed me because of my fondness for beer.

Muhammad Ali refused to fight. I'd lost a sawbuck on him the last time that happened. The U.S. Army would survive the loss.

I looked at Burn for some news I could use.

"Miss Bow is a journalism major," said the old goat.

"Call me Rain," she said.

"Yes," Burn chimed. "Rain Bow. Isn't that something? She wants to learn the business."

It was something all right.

"Oh, well," I barked. "She's a journalism major from Berkeley named Rainbow. Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

I walked out the door. Burn called security and had me hauled back.

"She's got a story," he said, as if I'd never left. "But you have to be dead to cover it. Too many people know your ugly mug."

That sounded interesting. I felt my head begin to clear.

I sat my ugly mug down and Burn flipped me a Cuban stogie. Castro reads the Foil.

I bit off the end, and Miss Rain Bow from Berkeley, with the dove on her cheek and the naked zooms under her shirt, bent low to light it. She was still playing, but now it was my game.

"What people?" I asked.

Something of the old Grady Burn returned. He had me. He knew it. The

bastard.

"Hoover's people," he said. "The feds must have a file on you bigger than the mayor's safety deposit box. You need to be dead to get close to this one, Moe."

I was back on the job. The hangover had vanished.

I thought, then spoke. A rarity.

"Look, boss. Molly spins a sweet sob-story, and I'm touched that she's writing mine with such gusto. But the FBI needs more than an obit to consider a stiff a stiff. Those boys need a body."

"Oh, that," Burn deadpanned. "Louie from circulation is working on it."

Say what you will about Gradual Burn. I've said plenty in my day.

But the man is a pro.

Chapter Three: Abby Manhoff

A foiler can become anything, with the right motivation. And there's only ever one motivation: the story.

The sun, if you can believe it, felt kind of good as I lay on my back in the grass of Berkeley Commons. Rain tickled my bare feet with a big turkey feather.

Elmo Hash: Flower Child.

Long hair -- a wig.

Beard and mustache -- both fake.

The clothes. The beads. The attitude.

I refused to remove the fedora. My new intern stuck her feather in it, and called it macaroni.

As a crowd slowly gathered for the rally, I read my own obituary. Burn had put it back with the grocery ads.

"Molly, you old sweetheart," I murmured. "You have the touch. And you did spell my name right. I wish you hadn't included the rooster story, though."

Rain Bow crinkled her nose, reaching for the Foil. Lips moving, she scanned Molly's poetry.

"That's human interest," she decided, adding: "And quite acrobatic of you. Oooh. Ice pick in the face."

"More difficult to identify the body," I said. "Louie knows what he's doing."

A hand reached down and ripped the Foil from Rain.

"Hey!" she said.

"Why are you reading that tool of the combine?" said a husky voice. "Establishment tripe."

The Foil has been called many things, but "establishment tripe" was never among them. My jaw dropped as I rose to teach this young pot-head a thing or six.

By the time I reached my feet, Rain and the punk were meshed in a scene out of some porno flick. I waited for them to break the clinch.

"Boyfriend?" I asked.

"Co-worker," Rain Bow said. "Dooley is editor of the Barb."

"If you greet all your editors that way, it would explain a lot," I said.

She quickly spun my cover. Old friend from back east. The Village. We'd met at the Kettle of Fish during an unannounced Dylan gig.

Dooley bought it. But he was tripping, so that was hardly a barometer on the effectiveness of my disguise.

"Manhoff is coming on stage," said Dooley, who was more than tripping. He was strobing.

There must have been some bad acid going around. I dropped the beans someone had given me. Not that I go for that kind of thing. I get plenty of

horrid flashbacks as it is. I'd just been polite to a stranger.

Abby Manhoff wasn't what I expected.

First, she was an old woman.

Second, she might have been Molly Darling's ugly cousin: fluffly black dress -- very fluffy -- with flounces, and lace stockings and high heels; a black feather boa around her neck. An oldtime flapper.

She wore makeup, and false eyelashes. Even from this side of the Commons, I could spot the black curls on her head as a wig.

The round face was familiar, but I couldn't place it. I'd seen it before in our paper. Maybe lots of papers. One of the dolls in the Foil morgue could have come up with a name in no time.

Or maybe not. The similarity to someone I knew was maddening -- but the feeling also told me that wherever I knew the face from, it was in a setting very different from this.

Rain Bow leaned over and blew a whisper in my ear.

"J. Edgar Hoover," she said, soft as a morning shower. "That's him."

I looked.

And looked again.

My intern was right as rain.

"I'll be damned," I said. "It's not every day that you see the director of the FBI in a dress on a stage in front of ten thousand radicals. And less often, still, that a foiler is around when you do."

"Do I get an `A,' professor?" Rain pouted, snuggling an old man. Me. Playing again.

"Fight the power!" Hoover-in-drag bellowed.

The crowd roared.

"Burn the nation to save it!" he-she cried from the stage.

The crowd roared.

"Free minds! Free love! Free Mary Jane!"

Roar. Roar. Big roar.

Rain and I made our way closer to the stage, through a sea of frenzy.

"Okay, Miss Berkeley Journalism Student," I said. "You get an `A' if you can tell me what the hell this is all about."

She pouted again.

"You got me, Mr. Tool of the Combine," she said. "I figure I point you to a story and you explain what it means. Dooley won't listen to me because Abby Manhoff is his hero. I put two and two together when my poly-sci professor whispered a sweaty sweet nothing in my ear."

"And it equaled the most feared man in the country wearing a dress?" I said. "That's one professor I'd like to interview."

Something was happening.

"To the Administration Building!" cried Abby Manhoff.

Dooley led the charge. A tear-gas canister bonked off his head, but it didn't seem to slow him down much. Before you could say "Bay of Pigs," Rain Bow and I were alone on a grassy knoll.

Chapter Four: Occupied

"Mr. Foiler! Mr. Foiler!"

I hate it when that happens. Especially when I'm working undercover on a story that involves J. Edgar Hoover in drag.

Rain and I had straggled toward the Berkeley Administration building. By the time we arrived, the students were tossing administrators out a second floor window. National Guardsmen caught most of them. The ones they missed

didn't bounce too hard.

"Mr. Foiler!" cried the voice again.

I spotted Woo in a fourth-floor window. He was wearing some kind of bathrobe and waving frantically in my direction. I'd have thought my own mother wouldn't recognize me, but Woo obviously did. Those barroom eyes of his could cut through anything. I motioned for him to keep quiet.

Woo seemed to be trapped. The students had occupied the building, and the National Guardsmen were attempting to batter down the doors. But vice-chancellors kept falling on them, so the going was slow. Plus, the troopers were being harassed by students who hadn't made it inside. One took a whiz on a weekend-warrior's boot and was immediately maced.

Smoke billowed from some of the windows. I knew from previous riots that the fire was probably under some semblance of control. Co-eds were likely burning their bras. Or maybe the eds had taken to blazing their jock straps.

"Can we get inside?" I asked Rain.

"Oh, sure," she said. "But it's always a dull scene. Aren't we gonna go look for Hoovey Baby?"

"I need to save my bartender first," I said. "When a man's bartender gets trapped in a building full of tripping radicals, you're supposed to do something."

Blank stare.

"I don't expect you to understand," I said. "But he's your bartender, and you're supposed to do something."

Blank stare.

Well, the "Foiler Code" is kind of hard for an outsider to grasp.

"Besides," I said. "Hoover was with the students the last time we saw him. He's probably inside."

We climbed through a back window that Rain knew would be unlocked, near the chancellor's private study, and went after Woo.

"What in the world are you doing here?" I asked the Tooth's owner.

"I thought this was college library," Woo said. "I return overdue book."

"You picked a hell of a time for it," I said. "How overdue is it?"

"1946," he answered. "I sign out with borrowed card, and just now remember."

Woo handed me the faded library-card, which had belonged to one Picasso Smith. I tossed it on a pile of smouldering draft notices. Woo stuffed the book in his robe.

"I return tomorrow, maybe," he said.

The Guardsmen had redoubled their efforts to get inside, and the students did likewise to keep them out. Desks and cabinets buried the doors. Windows were locked -- including the one we'd come through.

A central committee had been chosen and a tentative list of demands formulated. Many of them involved controlled substances in vending machines. One mentioned drafting LBJ as an Army private and dropping him out of a Huey into a rice paddy. I voted for that one, but the rest were ludicrous. I mean, NBC had already made the decision to cancel Star Trek.

Dooley appeared out of the smoke, wrapping Rain in a bear hug, and patting me -- the old friend from back east -- soundly on the shoulder.

"Isn't it a trip?" he drawled. "Isn't it a trip?"

I found a phone and dictated a graf to Molly for the Foil's "Riot Round-Up" section.

I didn't mention Hoover.

There was no telling, yet, where that trip would lead.

"This is your chancellor," boomed the voice on the bullhorn. "Herbert Hanky."

The students immediately began chanting, "Herbert! Herbert!"

Woo joined them, for lack of anything better to do. I wondered what the hell he'd been so frantic about. He was more at home with this crowd than me. I saw him passing out drink coupons.

After a few hours, I could understand why Rain had called it a dull scene.

Dooley was naked, of course, standing on the roof and addressing a fleet of news choppers. Rumor had it that Walter Cronkite was circling above. The TV wanks couldn't possibly have heard nude Dooley over the whirling rotors. But it must have made great pictures for six o'clock.

I was bored to tears, and anxious to find "Hoovey Baby."

Abby Manhoff wasn't with us in the Administration Building. She'd disappeared after inciting this goofiness. From his perch at a window, Woo pointed her out to me.

At first, I thought the barkeep was gesturing toward a VW microbus, which was full of orange-robed Hare Krishnas. Painted with psychedelic flowers, the vehicle was parked at the curb. The occupants were apparently oblivious to the riot raging all around them. Blue smoke puffed from the windows.

But the object of Woo's attention was beyond the microbus, running across the lawn. It was Abby Manhoff, and she was being chased by black-suited men in dark sunglasses.

"Foot of Tiberius!" I yelled. "CIA guys are after Hoovey Baby."

Rain Bow smashed the window and leaped, landing on a National Guardsman. In a flash, she was off across the lawn, running straight toward Abby Manhoff. My intern crashed into the dress-clad FBI director in a dive that would have made Dick Butkus grin. Hoover's wig flew off his head.

With a shrug, I followed Rain. Woo followed me. The CIA guys followed us both.

Then it got weird.

Chapter Five: Microbus full of Krishnas

Hoover was dazed and confused. Rain's tackle had thrown him for a loop.

The CIA guys were bearing down upon us. I dragged Hoover and my intern to their feet, looking for an escape. The microbus full of Krishnas sat between us and the racing suits.

Woo was already sliding open the door. I pushed Hoover inside, and jumped behind the wheel. A CIA guy grabbed Hoover's wig and smashed into the side of our vehicle as I peeled from the curb.

There were about fifteen bald-headed, robe-clad, pot-smoking Hare Krishnas in the microbus. It was a tight squeeze.

The Krishnas didn't seem to notice when we began racing madly through the police-jammed streets of Berkeley. One handed Woo some literature to read, which he looked at politely for a moment and then tossed out a window. Another tried to sell Hoover a flower. The FBI director -- still out of it -- plucked the petals one by one, put them in his mouth and began chewing.

I barreled the van into a kiosk without slowing down. Magazines, newspapers and novelty condoms showered the block. We took a curve on two wheels. Black sedans with tinted windows were hot on our tail.

"Journalism professors never mention this part of the newspaper business," Rain called from the back of the microbus. She ducked as a burst of automatic gunfire took out the rear window.

"I don't know why," I answered over a shoulder, maneuvering around a flock of nuns. "This sort of thing happens all the time."

"Happens to foilers, not journalists," Woo said. "Foilers all crazy. Good customers, though, if remember to pay tab."

"Pretty baby," Hoover said, patting the head of a Krishna.

The microbus hit a ditch in a residential neighborhood and went airborne. We sailed over a fence, into somebody's backyard, and landed in a goldfish pond. The engine stalled.

The jolt sent the Krishnas rolling out the door like oranges. They scattered, dripping, into the darkness. One must have had a fish in his shorts, the way he galloped.

"This is it," Rain said. "Professor Thigpen's house."

I heard the sedans race by on the street out front. We'd apparently lost them -- for a while, anyway. The feds might be slow, but they're persistent. A neighborhood full of stoned and wet Hare Krishnas might help throw them off our track for a time.

Inside the house, we were greeted by Rain's political science professor, Phineas Thigpen.

Tweed jacket. Jeans. Bushy beard. Round glasses with wire rims. A pipe.

He looked at Rain, smiling. Then me. Then Woo, who had dragged Hoover in by the feet.

"Reporter?" Thigpen asked me.

"Foiler," I said. "Elmo Hash."

He nodded, as if that explained a lot.

"You got an unconscious FBI director in a dress there," he said.

"I noticed," I returned.

"And I thought you were dead," Thigpen said.

"Typo," I answered.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing from Phineas Thigpen.

We sat before a roaring fire in his study. The shades were drawn. We spoke in whispers.

"Look," I said. "I'm as paranoid as the next guy who hacks off the establishment on a regular basis. But that sounds a little too paranoid."

"No matter how paranoid you are, Mr. Hash, it's not paranoid enough."

"The craziness of government always makes good copy," I said. "But the lunatics who run the show are just goofballs, not diabolical masterminds."

Thigpen snorted.

"Those 'goofballs' invented LSD and distribute it on college campuses around the country. Mainstream America sees a naked student shouting gibberish from the roof of the Berkeley Administration building and dismisses him without considering the frustration that drove him there."

I lit a cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling, listening.

"The 'goofballs' invented Malcolm X, to counter the rational message of Martin Luther King. When King's voice becomes too strong to be countered, they may silence it. They've done that before."

Rain was running her fingers through the professor's hair. He continued talking, his hand lightly resting on my intern's knee.

"The 'goofballs' killed Kennedy. His brother is probably next. Those who run the government -- those who really run the government, not the men they allow us to elect -- may be lunatics. But they're not 'goofballs,' sir. And I don't know that I'd call them diabolical, either. Efficient, perhaps. Committed to their skewed vision. And patient. Most assuredly patient."

Thigpen began petting Rain in a manner that disturbed me. She didn't seem to notice either the caress or my discomfort.

The professor looked at me and said:

"I can't prove any of it, of course. And you would be foolish to print any of it unless you yourself can."

I'd developed an intense dislike for the man. I wouldn't trust him as a source any farther than I could toss him. I suspected he was tripping on the drugs that he accused this shadow-cabal of supplying. And yet -- I'd seen enough as a reporter, and during the war, and again as a reporter to know that many things weren't as they seemed. For evidence of that, I had to look no farther than the man in a dress passed out on Thigpen's couch.

"What about him?" I asked, gesturing with my smoke. An ash fluttered onto the Persian rug.

Thigpen chuckled. He sounded a little demented.

"Oh, Hoover's just a goofball. He was useful to those in power for a time, I

suppose. But he developed embarrassing tendencies. Wearing dresses, and makeup, for example. Still, they've tried to make continued use of him. 'Abby Manhoff' is good at inciting the young ones, making them look more foolish than they really are. If Hoover is all that you're after, I imagine you can get him easily enough."

"How?"

"Find Tolson," Thigpen said. "He's probably at LuLu's Love Shack. That's where he and -- "

"Hoovey Baby," Rain said.

"That's where he and Hoovey Baby go when they're in San Francisco."

"Here," Woo said.

The Tooth's owner handed me his overdue library book: "The FBI vs. Ma Barker."

I looked at the page that Woo had pointed out. It had a picture of Hoover's closest aide standing over the corpses of Ma and her favorite son. It had been one hell of a shootout in a Florida swamp.

The aide's name was Clyde Tolson. He looked like a goofball to me.

Maybe it was coincidence, but Ma Barker kind of looked like the unconscious Abby Manhoff lying on Thigpen's couch. Paranoia can do strange things to your head.

It gets worse when tires squeal to a stop in the driveway.

Chapter Six: Love Shack Attack

We escaped through the back door and managed to start up the VW microbus without being stopped by the feds, who were busy shooting up Thigpen's place. I didn't much care for the guy, but I hoped he wouldn't catch one in the neck.

The van lurched through a couple back yards, flattened some bushes, knocked over a garden gnome, and glided onto a street six blocks away.

Clean escape.

I'd picked up a tip or two at LuLu's Love Shack, back when Burn was on his sex kick. Foilers who didn't get the word "tits" in the lede of every story were docked ten bucks in pay. Even if they were covering, say, a meeting of the San Francisco Sewer Authority -- which is a fine place for sniffing out City Hall corruption, but decidedly lacking in sex angles.

Molly Darling was amused at first, but eventually got tired of the tits thing. She marched into Burn's office and yanked his ear until he scrapped the policy. Grady still flinches whenever the old doll is near.

We parked the van in back of the Love Shack, and hustled the groggy Hoover inside. LuLu recognized him immediately, even without the wig.

A bar full of transvestites always makes me queezy. You gotta watch your back in a place like that.

"You're goooood, hun," LuLu said to Rain. "Perky little boobs. Who does them? Is it Rafael? The scamp!"

My intern just giggled and jiggled. But I saw the sly in her eye that said she was playing. I started thinking she might have the stuff to be a foiler. Even if her name was Rain Bow and she was a journalism major from Berkeley.

LuLu eyed me and my fake beard.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Hairy?"

I showed her Woo's book, the picture of Tolson.

"No time for pleasantries, LuLu," I said. "The CIA is after me, and probably the FBI, too. Maybe the NSA and some initials I ain't heard of yet. They shot up the last place I was at, and I'm sure they wouldn't mind dropping an H-bomb on this depraved dive."

"Moe Hash!" she screeched. "I thought you were dead."

"There will be a correction tomorrow," I said. "In a big headline across the top of Page One. Where's Clyde?"

LuLu looked at Hoover, who was beginning to show signs of life.

"Well, if someone was gonna bust Edgar's cherry, I'm glad it was you," she

said. "I always liked your tittie stories. Got one of them taped above the urinal in my Ladies Room. You'd look good in something satin."

I glared.

"I make it a policy never to hit a lady," I growled. "But then, you're no lady, LuLu. You're not even a dame."

She sighed.

"Seersucker," LuLu said. Her voice had dropped a couple octaves. "You were born for seersucker, Hash. Clyde's in back. But he's got guests."

The suits were beating the crap out of Tolson. He was tied to a chair and nearly unconscious. He wore a pink strapless, with a bloodied carnation in the cleavage.

They stopped the pummeling when we entered. One reached for a gun. Woo sliced off his trigger-finger with a throwing star.

"Nice toss," I muttered.

The back door crashed inward. Sergeant Karl Graves entered with a vengeance. It didn't take him long to empty the place.

I waited for Tolson to wake up.

Then I took out my notebook. I think Clyde feared that more than the beating.

Molly Darling's feet were propped on her bedpan full of cigarette butts. A pile of freshly darned socks sat in a basket on the floor. A cloud of smoke hung over Molly as she read the Foil.

"Nice Hoover-in-drag story," she said as I walked by. "But you didn't get the name of the CIA guy who found her wig."

I kept walking, straight for my desk. I had a bottle stashed in a drawer somewhere. Burn would be bellowing for me soon.

Molly called across the newsroom:

"All dogs got names, Moe."

