

## OPERATION OPPOSTION

By Hal Glatzer

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Cast:

Mark Markheim - Manfred Manning

Tommy Todd - Virginia Valentine  
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1

MARK

Mark Markheim's my moniker. I'm a shamus with a shingle in LalaLand. And like almost all Angelenos, I'm an arrival, from far afield. I happened to hop into Hollywood from New York – New York, New York – and I keep in contact with clients with connections all around the country: You never know when or where someone, somewhere will hail for help.

*SFX [phone] ring ring*

2

MARK

“Markheim.”

3

MANNING

“Mister Markheim, it's Manfred Manning.”

4

MARK

“Mister Manning!”

5

MANNING

“morning, Mark.”

6

MARK

Manfred Manning is a major media mogul from Montana: the mastermind behind a bundle of nonstop nationwide news networks carried on cable. Many moons ago, a week's worth of work made him happy and made me money.

“Hey! How are you?”

7 MANNING  
“Got a gig for you, young man.”

8 MARK  
“Manhunting? Sleuthing?”

9 MANNING  
“Sleuthing, sort of. Swear to secrecy.”

10 MARK  
“Certainly! It’s in the contract: Clients’ cases are completely confidential. Secure. Safe.”

11 MANNING  
“Swear!”

12 MARK  
“I swear, I swear.”  
Something sufficiently serious to support such swearing seemed certain to increase my income, and the man had many millions.  
“Could cost you, Mister Manning.”

13 MANNING  
“Name a number.”

14 MARK  
(Name a number?!) “Thirty thousand. Denominated in dollars.”

15 MANNING  
“No one’s to know.”

16 MARK  
“No one’ll know! Deal?”

17 MANNING  
“Done.”

*SFX Phone hangs up. Phone/voice effect OFF*

18

MARK

Did I mention? Manfred Manning moves fast. Fact is: he'd hailed me from his private plane, parked at Burbank. A long limousine was waiting outside my office, and drove me directly to the gent's jet.

19

MANNING

"Welcome, welcome. Buckle your belt!"

*SFX Jet aircraft taking off, heard from inside the plane*

20

MARK

As I settled in my seat, an attractive and attentive attendant made me a martini. I sipped and said "What's worth thirty thou of secret sleuthing ... something serious I assume."

21

MANNING

"All about the approaching election. Picked a preference? President Paul Potus, perhaps?"

22

MARK

"Frankly, I favor the competing candidate, David Day."

23

MANNING

"David Day? Simpering senator from a second-rate state."

24

MARK

"Mister Manning politics is politics, but business is business. I swore to swallow your secret, Sir. So, spin your yarn."

25

MANNING

"Yes, yes. David Day, eh? Good, good."

26

MARK

"Good?"

27

MANNING

“Mark – maintaining my media machinery is a minor matter. Two hundred twenty Tinseltown hired hands handle the day-to-day duties at HQ. My main mission’s in Missoula, Montana, promoting President Potus re-election. A resounding result’ll result in personal political power in a potent post-election position.”

28

MARK

“Cabinet?”

29

MANNING

“Conceivably. But believe me, Mark, the man’s campaign committee’s completely cockeyed.”

30

MARK

“Come on, his campaign’s cookin’! Your news networks’ political pundits continually congratulate him.”

31

MANNING

“Blah, blah, blah. Pabulum for the public. Our pollsters are pointing to potential problems. Apparently Potus peaked in the primaries, while the senator started strong, and is still on a streak.”

32

MARK

“Sorry.”

33

MANNING

“‘Sorry’s for suckers. I see a solution: it’s ‘Operation Opposition’. OPOP, for short.”

34

MARK

“Op-op?”

35

MANNING

“A clandestine committee of dirt-diggers, who’ve dug up something, so they say.

36

MARK

“What did these dirt diggers supposedly say they dug up?

37

MANNING

A scandal – a seamy, smarmy, slimy, and salacious scandal that’ll put ‘paid’ to the pretender’s presidential push. I’m inviting you in, into Operation Opposition, saying you’re another source of sordid stories. Your true task, though, is to tell me if the tale-teller’s telling the truth. Before I notify my news networks and break this bombshell I have to have complete confidence in the veracity of any vermin I vouchsafe.”

38

MARK

“Very smart. So either I provide proof that this person’s perspective is perfectly promotable, or I expose an opportunistic operative, operating in opposition to Operation Opposition’s objective.”

39

MANNING

“On the mark, Mark, as always.”

*SFX Jet landing ,heard from outside*

40

MARK

After three hours at thirty-thousand feet, we were in Missoula, Montana, where Manfred Manning maintained a mansion in the mountains.

41

MANNING

“Mark Markheim, meet my top OPOP operative: Tommy Todd.

42

MARK

Tommy Todd – America’s advocate of abstinence, who’d turned a tolerable talent for TV talk time into prime-time political pontificating. He was pudgy, in person, and peered at people with pinpoint pupils. I’d been turned off, too often, tuning in to him on TV, to take his smirk for sincerity. Still, I’m a perspicacious and personable P.I. I simply smiled.

43

MANNING

“My man Markheim, here, is a sleuth who slings slime single-handed. I’ve hired him to help you dump Day.”

44

TODD

“Delightful. Mister Markheim, happy to have your help promoting patriotic purity in politics. Perhaps you know that prior to pursuing political positions David Day was a prominent and popular professor at New York University – NYU. And in nineteen ninety-nine, Doctor David Day fondled a freshman.”

45

MANNING

“Fabulous! And timely, too.”

46

TODD

“A tearful tale! Troubled teen talks to tender teacher; trusts him, till he touches her tushy.”

47

MANNING

“Touché! That’s a suitable smoking gun. Now we give it to Mister Markheim and he’ll point the pistol.”

48

TODD

“What? Why?”

49

MANNING

“I demand ‘deniability’. Don’t you?”

50

MARK

“You can’t be connected to the confusion coming from the kid’s confession of canoodling with the candidate. I can. Where is the waif, anyway? I want a word with her.”

51

TODD

“Here in the house. Hey Honey! Come in, come in! Men – met Virginia Valentine, the virtuous victim of David Day’s despicable, deplorable, depraved and drunken desire.”

52

VALENTINE

“Hi. Hi.”

53

MARK

If Virginia Valentine wanted to win support for her sob-story, she shouldn’t have shown up in a short, shimmery chemise that showed a lot of leg and a bountiful bust.

54

TODD

“Tell them what you told me, Miss.”

55

VALENTINE

“It was right after services on Sunday, September Seventh – my seventeenth birthday, by the way.”

56

TODD

“Wonderful! Underage! And—”

57

MARK

“Let the lady talk, Tommy.”

58

VALENTINE

“I saw Doctor Day sitting at a sidewalk café close to campus. He had helped me study for my Freshman finals, so I thought I ought to thank him. We talked until ‘two, when Doctor Day said I should see some study-guides for the Sophomore semesters. He said he had them uptown, in his town house.”

59

TODD

“Where he wooed her with whiskey!”

60

MARK

“Tommy — I told you. Take it easy.”

61

VALENTINE

“We walked into a large liquor store and he bought a big bottle of booze, then brought it home where he . . . he made me drink doubles. Then he ... he ...

62

MARK

“He ... ?”

63

VALENTINE

He took off my tank-top and tickled my—”

64

MARK

“Tell me – did his help help you to get a degree?”

65

VALENTINE

“A degree? No, no. I quit college, and went to work.”

66

MARK

“Where’re you working now?”

67

VALENTINE

“Now? At an automotive supply store in Saratoga Springs.”

68

MARK

“D’you drink and drive?”

69

VALENTINE

“I don’t drink alcohol anymore! Strongest I swallow is soda, I swear. ”

70

TODD

“She makes her mother’s mixture of lemon-and-lime-ade, out of lemons, limes, sweet syrup and a splash of soda.”

71

VIRGINIA

“Tommy tried it today.”

72

TODD

“Settled my stomach.”

73

VALENTINE

“He has a sour stomach from all the pills he pops—”

74

TODD

“Prescription pills, Mister Manning!”

75

VIRGINIA

“I’m figuring on forming a franchise for my lemon-and-lime-ade and Tommy tells me he’ll tout it on TV.”

76

MARK

“Mister Manning. A moment . . . .”

I took the tycoon to a cozy corner, while the winsome woman walked with Tommy Todd to the wet-bar beside the balcony, and busied herself with some bottles.

[whispers] “Tommy Todd has pinpoint pupils. And he pops pills, probably painkillers, posing a potential problem—

77

MANNING

[whispers] Later, later! How about her lurid liaison? I like it. It could cause considerable consternation and confusion in the coming campaign. No?”

78

MARK

“No. Her story’s spurious. ‘Specially the blather about the boozing.”

79

VALENTINE

“Mister Markheim! Mister Manning! Whatever you’re whispering can wait. Try my lemon-lime. I just mixed up a brand new batch, with a super-special syrup.”

80

MARK

She picked up a pitcher and poured. Manfred Manning hoisted his glass and gulped.

81

VALENTINE

Mister Markheim?"

82

MARK

"Not now."

83

MANNING

"Sweet. Somewhat syrupy. The lime lingers. . . . Guhh . . .guh!!!"

84

MARK

He seemed to go ghastly green, gasping, and grabbing at his gullet. I hopped over and hauled him up, hitched a Heimlich hug around his massive midsection, and forced my finger down his throat and thorax until he gave up the green goo. Tommy Todd took the glass and gave it to the girl. But I grabbed her hand, heaved her onto an ottoman, and got the glass into my pocket, promptly.

85

MANNING

"What was that?"

86

MARK

"It's evident it's evidence of poison in the pitcher. I have a hunch it's anti-freeze, from her automotive supply store in Saratoga Springs. I think they wanted to waste us, so she could continue spouting that far-fetched fondling fable without worrying that she'd be found out fibbing."  
Virginia Valentine held her head in her hands.

87

VALENTINE

So help me, Mister Markheim, Tommy told me no one'd suss out his scheme. He persuaded me to put the poison in the pitcher."

88

MARK

The pundit pulled a pistol from his pants.

89

TODD

“No one knows what happened here, Honey. You’ll say you saw this disgraced detective sabotage the sweetener in the swill, and when confronted, he became vicious and violent, forcing me to fire. Hands high!

90

MARK

“You may master the moment, and this murderous miss may move into the mainstream media with the mantle of a modest maiden menaced by a mendacious man. But remember: when reporters start sniffing, your story of self-defense’ll be suspect. And when word slips, saying a prominent pontificator for purity is popping painkillers . . .”

91

TODD

“Keep quiet!”

92

MARK

“Take a time-out, Todd. Think it through! Pills pose a predicament for you. And add a dead detective? You can’t continue to count on cable carrying your commentaries if circumstances call your character into question and stymies some serious sponsors.”

93

MARK

He turned to talk to the big boss – which is when I made my move: A right cross across his chubby chin and – as my neighbors in my old New York neighborhood used to say, speaking of the ‘sweet science’ – a left in’a lobonza. I grabbed the gun, held him hard in a half-nelson, and kept the cutie covered, while Manfred Manning buzzed a button to summon his security service. A team of tough guys tagged Tommy Todd with a taser, and hauled him away.

94

VALENTINE

“Wait, wait! What about my lemons and limes? I’ve got a gazillion!”

SFX *Jet noise – interior*

95

MARK

Back aboard that private plane, heading home, my host handed me my check for a chunk o’ change.  
“Thirty-thousand. Thank you.”

96

MANNING

“This confirms your contract’s quote ‘client confidentiality’ unquote clause.”

97

MARK

“Of course.”

98

MANNING

“And you’ll continue to keep quiet about Virginia Valentine and Tommy Todd, who I’m tucking away in my Montana mansion, till the ninth of November.”

99

MARK

“Naturally. But my advice is: Alert the authorities to arrest the addict for armed assault—punishable in prison.”

100

MANNING

“No, no. Calling the cops means making the media, bringing bad publicity for President Potus and possible suspicion of sabotaging a candidate’s campaign! Means David Day, doubtless, drawing delight from discovering his angriest antagonist’s a doped-up druggie, and his former freshman’s a felon. But Mark – mark my words – I’ll wind up with the win, and when I do, it’ll be due my eight extra OPOP operatives all around America, doing double-duty and moving mountains to make more messes for David Day. Oh, but Virginia Valentine! I do wish we’d thrown that fondling fiasco into the public’s perception. She’d of pummeled his public persona and put the kibosh on his campaign.”

101

MARK

“What? What she said was utterly and unutterably useless. Your news networks would’ve looked a laughing-stock.”

102

MANNING

“Huh? How?”

103

MARK

“You’re a corporate kingpin, Mister Manning, but you know nothing of life lived in the nexus of New York, New York. The day she said David Day got her dead drunk – Sunday the Seventh of September - no professor, no politician, no nobody ever bought that baby a bottle of booze.”

104

MANNING

“Please provide proof. And can’t you can all that alliteration, already?”

105

MARK

“Sure. New York may be thought a sinful place by blue noses, but most folks don’t realize old-fashioned blue laws remain in force. On Sundays in New York City, every liquor store is closed.”