ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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VOLUME ONE

FALL 1941

TOO MANY HAVE LIVED *by Dashiell Hammett*

THE QUESTION MARK *by Margery Allingham*

THE CABLEGRAM *by T. S. Stribling*

ABOUT THE PERFECT CRIME OF MR. DIGBERRY *by Anthony Abbott*

DIME A DANCE *by Cornell Woolrich*

WILD ONIONS *by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan*

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TREASURE HUNT *by Ellery Queen*

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED BY

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

EDITED BY

ELLERY QUEEN

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EDITOR ELLERY QUEEN EXPLAINS

WHY — WHO — HOW — WHEN

WHY

As writers, readers, and collectors of detective-crime stories, we have for many years shouted the need for — and deplored the lack of — a quality publication devoted exclusively to the printing of the best in detective-crime short-story literature.

To this end we have for a long time been building an exhaustive and unique library. So we have at our fingertips a store of the very choicest detective-crime short stories, culled from every conceivable source — books, slick-paper magazines, and "pulp" magazines.

Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak, publisher of *The American Mercury*, believes as we do that mystery enthusiasts are eagerly awaiting a publication devoted to all types of detective-crime stories in which consistently good writing would be as important as original ideas, excitement, and craftsmanship.

And so, Ellery Queen is editing and Lawrence E. Spivak is publishing this volume, which is planned as the first of *a periodic anthology of detective-crime short stories*, in which the sole editorial criterion will be quality.

WHO

A "big name" does not always guarantee a good story — the big-name writers themselves are the first to admit this.

On the other hand, some of the finest stories have been and are now being written by lesser-known writers or, in many cases, writers not known to the general public at all.

We propose to give you stories by big-name writers, by lesser-known writers, and by unknown writers. But no matter what their source, they will be superior stories.

Some will be bought from manuscript. Others will be reprinted from published books, old and new, selected from the Ellery Queen library of short detective fiction, which is the largest in America. Still others will be reprinted from magazines, old, recent, and new, "slicks" and "pulps," making our volume in effect a readers' digest in anthological form of detective-crime stories.

In this first volume, you will find a wide variety of detective-story types, each one rating a high editorial mark for excellence and quality and readability in the

measured opinion of an Editor who has made a life study of this form of entertainment-fiction, each one a genuine adventure-in-reading.

For example: two realistic stories of the hard-boiled school — "Too Many Have Lived," by *Dashiell Hammett;* and "Dime a Dance," by *Cornell Woolrich* — exciting, fast, two-fisted, modern, and superb examples of this kind of purely American writing.

An excellent story of the modern English school — "The Question Mark," by *Margery Allingham* — suave, expert, and completely charming.

The straightforward modern American school — "About the Perfect Crime of Mr. Digberry," by *Anthony Abbot;* "Treasure Hunt," by *Ellery Queen;* and "The Cablegram," by *T. S. Stribling* (much better-known as the Pulitzer Prize winner!) — in which the detectives rely more on their brains than on their brawn, and ingenuity of story is the main thing.

And, for sheerest contrast, *Frederick Hazlitt Brennan's* hillbilly yarn, "Wild Onions," which fuses elements rarely amalgamated in a mystery story — humor, native dialect, and murder; the whole making a hilarious tale and a unique item in any enthusiast's collection.

HOW

We are publishing a book rather than a magazine, but since it is to be distributed through a magazine outlet at a magazine price, and since the name rolls easily off the tongue, we have for the present decided to call it *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.* It uses not pulp paper nor slick paper, but book paper, which takes printer's ink better, makes for greater legibility, and has a more lasting quality of permanence. Its cover has a modern book-jacket illustration. Unlike a novel, however, it is not bulky: it is compact and in the convenient pocket size.

It is deliberately designed so that he may read who runs as well as he who likes to curl up in bed; and it has the important further consideration of visual attractiveness, so that you will want to preserve your copies of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in the library of your home as you preserve your books.

WHEN

This first issue is frankly experimental. Our belief that a large public exists which impatiently awaits such publication can only be confirmed by that public.

For the present therefore we plan to publish *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* quarterly: Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. Our ultimate purpose is to publish a new volume each month. That, however, depends upon the reception accorded this and future volumes. The more whole-hearted and widespread your response, the more quickly regular monthly publication will be scheduled.

ELLERY QUEEN

Sam Spade *in a hard-boiled fast moving story, by the author of "The Maltese Falcon" and "The Thin Man."*

TOO MANY HAVE LIVED

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

THE MAN'S TIE was as orange as a sunset. He was a large man, tall and meaty, without softness. The dark hair parted in the middle, flattened to his scalp, his firm, full cheeks, the clothes that fit him with noticeable snugness, even the small, pink ears flat against the sides of his head — each of these seemed but a differently colored part of one same, smooth surface. His age could have been thirty-five or forty-five.

He sat beside Samuel Spade's desk, leaning forward a little over his Malacca stick, and said, "No. I want you to find out what happened to him. I hope you never find him." His protuberant green eyes stared solemnly at Spade.

Spade rocked back in his chair. His face — given a not unpleasantly satanic cast by the v's of his bony chin, mouth, nostrils, and thickish brows — was as politely interested as his voice. "Why?"

The green-eyed man spoke quietly, with assurance: "I can talk to you, Spade. You've the sort of reputation I want in a private detective. That's why I'm here."

Spade's nod committed him to nothing.

The green-eyed man said, "And any fair price is all right with me."

Spade nodded as before. "And with me," he said, "but I've got to know what you want to buy. You want to find out what's happened to this — uh — Eli Haven, but you don't care what it is?"

The green-eyed man lowered his voice, but there was no other change in his mien: "In a way I do. For instance, if you found him and fixed it so he stayed away for good, it might be worth more money to me."

"You mean even if he didn't want to stay away?"

The green-eyed man said, "Especially."

Spade smiled and shook his head. "Probably not enough more money — the way you mean it." He took his long, thick-fingered hands from the arms of his chair and turned their palms up. "Well, what's it all about, Colyer?"

Colyer's face reddened a little, but his eyes maintained their unblinking cold stare. "This man's got a wife. I like her. They had a row last week and he blew. If I can convince her he's gone for good, there's a chance she'll divorce him."

"I'd want to talk to her," Spade said. "Who is this Eli Haven? What does he do?"

"He's a bad egg. He doesn't do anything. Writes poetry or something."

"What can you tell me about him that'll help?"

"Nothing Julia, his wife, can't tell you. You're going to talk to her." Colyer stood up. "I've got connections. Maybe I can get something for you through them later." . . .

A small-boned woman of twenty-five or -six opened the apartment door. Her powder-blue dress was trimmed with silver buttons. She was full-bosomed but slim, with straight shoulders and narrow hips, and she carried herself with a pride that would have been cockiness in one less graceful.

Spade said, "Mrs. Haven?"

She hesitated before saying "Yes."

"Gene Colyer sent me to see you. My name's Spade. I'm a private detective. He wants me to find your husband."

"And have you found him?"

"I told him I'd have to talk to you first."

Her smile went away. She studied his face gravely, feature by feature, then she said, "Certainly," and stepped back, drawing the door back with her.

When they were seated in facing chairs in a cheaply furnished room overlooking a playground where children were noisy, she asked, "Did Gene tell you why he wanted Eli found?"

"He said if you knew he was gone for good maybe you'd listen to reason."

She said nothing.

"Has he ever gone off like this before?"

"Often."

"What's he like?"

"He's a swell man," she said dispassionately, "when he's sober; and when he's drinking he's all right except with women and money."

"That leaves him a lot of room to be all right in. What does he do for a living?"

"He's a poet," she replied, "but nobody makes a living at that."

"Well?"

"Oh, he pops in with a little money now and then. Poker, races, he says. I don't know."

"How long've you been married?"

"Four years, almost" — she smiled mockingly.

"San Francisco all the time?"

"No, we lived in Seattle the first year and then came here."

"He from Seattle?"

She shook her head. "Some place in Delaware."

"What place?"

"I don't know."

Spade drew his thickish brows together a little. "Where are you from?"

She said sweetly, "You're not hunting for me."

"You act like it," he grumbled. "Well, who are his friends?"

"Don't ask me!"

He made an impatient grimace. "You know some of them," he insisted.

"Sure. There's a fellow named Minera and a Louis James and somebody he calls Conny."

"Who are they?"

"Men," she replied blandly. "I don't know anything about them. They phone or drop by to pick him up, or I see him around town with them. That's all I know."

"What do they do for a living? They can't all write poetry."

She laughed. "They could try. One of them, Louis James, is a — a member of Gene's staff, I think. I honestly don't know any more about them than I've told you."

"Think they'd know where your husband is?"

She shrugged. "They're kidding me if they do. They still call up once in a while to see if he's turned up."

"And these women you mentioned?"

"They're not people I know."

Spade scowled thoughtfully at the floor, asked, "What'd he do before he started not making a living writing poetry?"

"Anything — sold vacuum cleaners, hoboed, went to sea, dealt blackjack, railroaded, canning houses, lumber camps, carnivals, worked on a newspaper — anything."

"Have any money when he left?"

"Three dollars he borrowed from me."

"What'd he say?"

She laughed. "Said if I used whatever influence I had with God while he was gone he'd be back at dinnertime with a surprise for me."

Spade raised his eyebrows. "You were on good terms?"

"Oh, yes. Our last fight had been patched up a couple of days before."

"When did he leave?"

"Thursday afternoon; three o'clock, I guess."

"Got any photographs of him?"

"Yes." She went to a table by one of the windows, pulled a drawer out, and turned towards Spade again with a photograph in her hand.

Spade looked at the picture of a thin face with deep-set eyes, a sensual mouth, and a heavily lined forehead topped by a disorderly mop of coarse blond hair.

He put Haven's photograph in his pocket and picked up his hat. He turned towards the door, halted. "What kind of poet is he? Pretty good?"

She shrugged. "That depends on who you ask."

"Any of it around here?"

"No." She smiled. "Think he's hiding between pages?"

"You never can tell what'll lead to what. I'll be back some time. Think things over and see if you can't find some way of loosening up a little more. 'By."

He walked down Post Street to Mulford's book store and asked for a volume of Haven's poetry.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "I sold my last copy last week" — she smiled — "to Mr. Haven himself. I can order it for you."

"You know him?"

"Only through selling him books."

Spade pursed his lips, asked, "What day was it?" He gave her one of his business cards. "Please. It's important."

She went to a desk, turned the pages of a red-bound sales-book, and came back to him with the book open in her hand. "It was last Wednesday," she said, "and we delivered it to a Mr. Roger Ferris, 1981 Pacific Avenue."

"Thanks a lot," he said.

Outside, he hailed a taxicab and gave the driver Mr. Roger Ferris's address. . . .

The Pacific Avenue house was a four-story, graystone one set behind a

narrow strip of lawn. The room into which a plump-faced maid ushered Spade was large and high-ceiled.

Spade sat down, but when the maid had gone away he rose and began to walk around the room. He halted at a table where there were three books. One of them had a salmon-colored jacket on which was printed in red an outline drawing of a bolt of lightning striking the ground between a man and a woman, and in black the words *Colored Light, by Eli Haven.*

Spade picked up the book and went back to his chair.

There was an inscription on the flyleaf — heavy, irregular characters written with blue ink:

To good old Buck, who knew his colored lights, in memory of them there days.
Eli

Spade turned pages at random and idly read a verse:

STATEMENT

Too many have lived
As we live
For our lives to be
Proof of our living.
Too many have died
As we die
For their deaths to be
Proof of our dying.

He looked up from the book as a man in dinner clothes came into the room. He was not a tall man, but his erectness made him seem tall even when Spade's six feet and a fraction of an inch were standing before him. He had bright blue eyes undimmed by his fifty-some years, a sunburned face in which no muscle sagged, a smooth, broad forehead, and thick, short, nearly white hair. There was dignity in his countenance, and amiability.

He nodded at the book Spade still held. "How do you like it?"

Spade grinned, said, "I guess I'm just a mug," and put the book down. "That's what I came to see you about, though, Mr. Ferris. You know Haven?"

"Yes, certainly. Sit down, Mr. Spade." He sat in a chair not far from Spade's. "I knew him as a kid. He's not in trouble, is he?"

Spade said, "I don't know. I'm trying to find him."

Ferris spoke hesitantly: "Can I ask why?"

"You know Gene Colyer?"

"Yes." Ferris hesitated again, then said, "This is in confidence. I've a chain of picture houses through northern California, you know, and a couple of years ago when I had some labor trouble I was told that Colyer was the man to get in touch with to have it straightened out. That's how I happened to meet him."

"Yes," Spade said dryly. "A lot of people happen to meet Gene that way."

"But what's he got to do with Eli?"

"Wants him found. How long since you've seen him?"

"Last Thursday he was here."

"What time did he leave?"

"Midnight — a little after. He came over in the afternoon around half past three. We hadn't seen each other for years. I persuaded him to stay for dinner — he looked pretty seedy — and lent him some money."

"How much?"

"A hundred and fifty — all I had in the house."

"Say where he was going when he left?"

Ferris shook his head. "He said he'd phone me the next day."

"Did he phone you the next day?"

"No."

"And you've known him all his life?"

"Not exactly, but he worked for me fifteen or sixteen years ago when I had a carnival company — Great Eastern and Western Combined Shows — with a partner for a while and then by myself, and I always liked the kid."

"How long before Thursday since you'd seen him?"

"Lord knows," Ferris replied. "I'd lost track of him for years. Then, Wednesday, out of a clear sky, that book came, with no address or anything, just that stuff written in the front, and the next morning he called me up. I was tickled to death to know he was still alive and doing something with himself. So he came over that afternoon and we put in about nine hours straight talking about old times."

"Tell you much about what he'd been doing since then?"

"Just that he'd been knocking around, doing one thing and another, taking the breaks as they came. He didn't complain much; I had to make him take the hundred and fifty."

Spade stood up. "Thanks ever so much, Mr. Ferris. I —"

Ferris interrupted him: "Not at all, and if there's anything I can do, call on me."

Spade looked at his watch. "Can I phone my office to see if anything's turned up?"

"Certainly; there's a phone in the next room, to the right."

Spade said "Thanks," and went out. When he returned he was rolling a cigarette. His face was wooden.

"Any news?" Ferris asked.

"Yes. Colyer's called the job off. He says Haven's body's been found in some bushes on the other side of San Jose, with three bullets in it." He smiled, adding mildly, "He *told* me he might be able to find out something through his connections." . . .

Morning sunshine, coming through the curtains that screened Spade's office windows, put two fat, yellow rectangles on the floor and gave everything in the room a yellow tint.

He sat at his desk, staring meditatively at a newspaper. He did not look up when Effie Perine came in from the outer office.

She said, "Mrs. Haven is here."

He raised his head then and said, "That's better. Push her in."

Mrs. Haven came in quickly. Her face was white and she was shivering in spite of her fur coat and the warmth of the day. She came straight to Spade and asked, "Did Gene kill him?"

Spade said, "I don't know."

"I've got to know," she cried.

Spade took her hands. "Here, sit down." He led her to a chair. He asked, "Colyer tell you he'd called the job off?"

She stared at him in amazement. "He what?"

"He left word here last night that your husband had been found and he wouldn't need me any more."

She hung her head and her words were barely audible. "Then he did."

Spade shrugged. "Maybe only an innocent man could've afforded to call it off then, or maybe he was guilty, but had brains enough and nerve enough to —"

She was not listening to him. She was leaning towards him, speaking earnestly: "But, Mr. Spade, you're not going to drop it like that? You're not going to let him stop you?"

While she was speaking his telephone bell rang. He said, "Excuse me,"

and picked up the receiver. "Yes? . . . Uh-huh. . . . So?" He pursed his lips. "I'll let you know." He pushed the telephone aside slowly and faced Mrs. Haven again. "Colyer's outside."

"Does he know I'm here?" she asked quickly.

"Couldn't say." He stood up, pretending he was not watching her closely. "Do you care?"

She pinched her lower lip between her teeth, said "No" hesitantly.

"Fine. I'll have him in."

She raised a hand as if in protest, then let it drop, and her white face was composed. "Whatever you want," she said.

Spade opened the door, said, "Hello, Colyer. Come on in. We were just talking about you."

Colyer nodded and came into the office holding his stick in one hand, his hat in the other. "How are you this morning, Julia? You ought to've phoned me. I'd've driven you back to town."

"I — I didn't know what I was doing."

Colyer looked at her for a moment longer, then shifted the focus of his expressionless green eyes to Spade's face. "Well, have you been able to convince her I didn't do it?"

"We hadn't got around to that," Spade said. "I was just trying to find out how much reason there was for suspecting you. Sit down."

Colyer sat down somewhat carefully, asked, "And?"

"And then you arrived."

Colyer nodded gravely. "All right, Spade," he said; "you're hired again to prove to Mrs. Haven that I didn't have anything to do with it."

"Gene!" she exclaimed in a choked voice and held her hands out toward him appealingly. "I don't think you did — I don't want to think you did — but I'm so afraid." She put her hands to her face and began to cry.

Colyer went over to the woman. "Take it easy," he said. "We'll kick it out together."

Spade went into the outer office, shutting the door behind him.

Effie Perine stopped typing a letter.

He grinned at her, said, "Somebody ought to write a book about people sometime — they're peculiar," and went over to the water bottle. "You've got Wally Kellogg's number. Call him up and ask him where I can find Tom Minera."

He returned to the inner office.

Mrs. Haven had stopped crying. She said, "I'm sorry."

Spade said, "It's all right." He looked sidewise at Colyer. "I still got my job?"

"Yes." Colyer cleared his throat. "But if there's nothing special right now, I'd better take Mrs. Haven home."

"O.K., but there's one thing: According to the *Chronicle*, you identified him. How come you were down there?"

"I went down when I heard they'd found a body," Colyer replied deliberately. "I told you I had connections. I heard about the body through them."

Spade said, "All right; be seeing you," and opened the door for them.

When the corridor door closed behind them, Effie Perine said, "Minera's at the Buxton on Army Street."

Spade said, "Thanks." He went into the inner office to get his hat. On his way out he said, "If I'm not back in a couple of months tell them to look for my body there." . . .

Spade walked down a shabby corridor to a battered green door marked "411." The murmur of voices came through the door, but no words could be distinguished. He stopped listening and knocked.

An obviously disguised male voice asked, "What is it?"

"I want to see Tom. This is Sam Spade."

A pause, then: "Tom ain't here."

Spade put a hand on the knob and shook the frail door. "Come on, open up," he growled.

Presently the door was opened by a thin, dark man of twenty-five or -six who tried to make his beady dark eyes guileless while saying, "I didn't think it was your voice at first." The slackness of his mouth made his chin seem even smaller than it was. His green-striped shirt, open at the neck, was not clean. His gray pants were carefully pressed.

"You've got to be careful these days," Spade said solemnly, and went through the doorway into a room where two men were trying to seem uninterested in his arrival.

One of them leaned against the window sill filing his fingernails. The other was tilted back in a chair with his feet on the edge of a table and a newspaper spread between his hands. They glanced at Spade in unison and went on with their occupations.

Spade said cheerfully, "Always glad to meet any friends of Tom Minera's."

Minera finished shutting the door and said awkwardly, "Uh — yes — Mr. Spade, meet Mr. Conrad and Mr. James."

Conrad, the man at the window, made a vaguely polite gesture with the nail file in his hand. He was a few years older than Minera, of average height, sturdily built, with a thick-featured, dull-eyed face.

James lowered his paper for an instant to look coolly, appraisingly at Spade and say, "How'r'ye, brother?" Then he returned to his reading. He was as sturdily built as Conrad, but taller, and his face had a shrewdness the other's lacked.

"Ah," Spade said, "and friends of the late Eli Haven."

The man at the window jabbed a finger with his nail file, and cursed it bitterly. Minera moistened his lips, and then spoke rapidly, with a whining note in his voice: "But on the level, Spade, we hadn't none of us seen him for a week."

Spade seemed mildly amused by the dark man's manner.

"What do you think he was killed for?"

"All I know is what the paper says: His pockets was all turned inside out and there wasn't as much as a match on him." He drew down the ends of his mouth. "But far as I know he didn't have no dough. He didn't have none Tuesday night."

Spade, speaking softly, said, "I hear he got some Thursday night."

Minera, behind Spade, caught his breath audibly.

James said, "I guess you ought to know. I don't."

"He ever work with you boys?"

James slowly put aside his newspaper and took his feet off the table. His interest in Spade's question seemed great enough, but almost impersonal. "Now what do you mean by that?"

Spade pretended surprise. "But you boys must work at something?"

Minera came around to Spade's side. "Aw, listen, Spade," he said. "This guy Haven was just a guy we knew. We didn't have nothing to do with rubbing him out; we don't know nothing about it. You know, we —"

Three deliberate knocks sounded at the door.

Minera and Conrad looked at James, who nodded, but by then Spade, moving swiftly, had reached the door and was opening it.

Roger Ferris was there.

Spade blinked at Ferris, Ferris at Spade. Then Ferris put out his hand and said, "I *am* glad to see you."

"Come on in," Spade said.

"Look at this, Mr. Spade." Ferris's hand trembled as he took a slightly soiled envelope from his pocket.

Ferris's name and address were typewritten on the envelope. There was no postage stamp on it. Spade took out the enclosure, a narrow slip of cheap white paper, and unfolded it. On it was typewritten:

You had better come to Room No 411 Buxton Hotel on Army St at 5 PM this afternoon on account of Thursday night.

There was no signature.

Spade said, "It's a long time before five o'clock."

"It is," Ferris agreed with emphasis. "I came as soon as I got that. It was Thursday night Eli was at my house."

Minera was jostling Spade, asking, "What is all this?"

Spade held the note up for the dark man to read. He read it and yelled, "Honest, Spade, I don't know nothing about that letter."

"Does anybody?" Spade asked.

Conrad said "No" hastily.

James said, "What letter?"

Spade looked dreamily at Ferris for a moment, then said, as if speaking to himself, "Of course, Haven was trying to shake you down."

Ferris's face reddened. "What?"

"Shake-down," Spade repeated patiently; "money, blackmail."

"Look here, Spade," Ferris said earnestly; "you don't really believe what you said? What would he have to blackmail me on?"

"'To good old Buck'" — Spade quoted the dead poet's inscription — "'who knew his colored lights, in memory of them there days.'" He looked somberly at Ferris from beneath slightly raised brows. "What colored lights? What's the circus and carnival slang term for kicking a guy off a train while it's going? Red-lighting. Sure, that's it — red lights. Who'd you red-light, Ferris, that Haven knew about?"

Minera went over to a chair, sat down, put his elbows on his knees, his head between his hands, and stared blankly at the floor. Conrad was breathing as if he had been running.

Spade addressed Ferris: "Well?"

Ferris wiped his face with a handkerchief, put the handkerchief in his pocket, and said simply, "It was a shake-down."

"And you killed him."

Ferris's blue eyes, looking into Spade's yellow-gray ones, were clear and steady, as was his voice. "I did not," he said. "I swear I did not. Let me tell you what happened. He sent me the book, as I told you, and I knew right away what that joke he wrote in the front meant. So the next day, when he phoned me and said he was coming over to talk over old times and to try to borrow some money for old times' sake, I knew what he meant again, and I went down to the bank and drew out ten thousand dollars. You can check that up. It's the Seamen's National."

"I will," Spade said.

"As it turned out, I didn't need that much. He wasn't very big-time, and I talked him into taking five thousand. I put the other five back in the bank next day. You can check that up."

"I will," Spade said.

"I told him I wasn't going to stand for any more taps, this five thousand was the first and last. I made him sign a paper saying he'd helped in the — in what I'd done — and he signed it. He left sometime around midnight, and that's the last I ever saw of him."

Spade tapped the envelope Ferris had given him. "And how about this note?"

"A messenger boy brought it at noon, and I came right over. Eli had assured me he hadn't said anything to anybody, but I didn't know. I had to face it, whatever it was."

Spade turned to the others, his face wooden. "Well?"

Minera and Conrad looked at James, who made an impatient grimace and said, "Oh, sure, we sent him the letter. Why not? We was friends of Eli's, and we hadn't been able to find him since he went to put the squeeze to this baby, and then he turns up dead, so we kind of like to have the gent come over and explain things."

"You knew about the squeeze?"

"Sure. We was all together when he got the idea."

"How'd he happen to get the idea?" Spade asked.

James spread the fingers of his left hand. "We'd been drinking and talking — you know the way a bunch of guys will, about all they'd seen and done — and he told a yarn about once seeing a guy boot another off a train into a cañon, and he happens to mention the name of the guy that done the booting — Buck Ferris. And somebody says, 'What's this Ferris look like?' Eli tells him what he looked like then, saying he ain't seen him for fifteen

years; and whoever it is whistles and says, 'I bet that's the Ferris that owns about half the movie joints in the state. I bet you he'd give something to keep that back trail covered!'

"Well, the idea kind of hit Eli. You could see that. He thought a little while and then he got cagey. He asks what this movie Ferris's first name is, and when the other guy tells him, 'Roger,' he makes out he's disappointed and says, 'No, it ain't him. His first name was Martin.' We all give him the ha-ha and he finally admits he's thinking of seeing the gent, and when he called me up Thursday around noon and says he's throwing a party at Pogey Hecker's that night, it ain't no trouble to figure out what's what."

"What was the name of the gentleman who was red-lighted?"

"He wouldn't say. He shut up tight. You couldn't blame him."

"Uh-huh," Spade agreed.

"Then nothing. He never showed up at Pogey's. We tried to get him on the phone around two o'clock in the morning, but his wife said he hadn't been home, so we stuck around till four or five and then decided he had given us a run-around, and made Pogey charge the bill to him, and beat it. I ain't seen him since — dead or alive."

Spade said mildly, "Maybe. Sure you didn't find Eli later that morning, take him riding, swap him bullets for Ferris's five thou, dump him in the —?"

A sharp double knock sounded on the door.

Spade's face brightened. He went to the door and opened it.

A young man came in. He was very dapper, and very well proportioned. He wore a light topcoat and his hands were in its pockets. Just inside the door he stepped to the right, and stood with his back to the wall. By that time another young man was coming in. He stepped to the left. Though they did not actually look alike, their common dapperness, the similar trimness of their bodies, and their almost identical positions — backs to wall, hands in pockets, cold, bright eyes studying the occupants of the room — gave them, for an instant, the appearance of twins.

Then Gene Colyer came in. He nodded at Spade, but paid no attention to the others in the room, though James said, "Hello, Gene."

"Anything new?" Colyer asked Spade.

Spade nodded. "It seems this gentleman" — he jerked a thumb at Ferris — "was —"

"Any place we can talk?"

"There's a kitchen back here."

Colyer snapped a "Smear anybody that pops" over his shoulder at the two dapper young men and followed Spade into the kitchen. He sat on the one kitchen chair and stared with unblinking green eyes at Spade while Spade told him what he had learned.

When the private detective had finished, the green-eyed man asked, "Well, what do you make of it?"

Spade looked thoughtfully at the other. "You've picked up something. I'd like to know what it is."

Colyer said, "They found the gun in a stream a quarter of a mile from where they found him. It's James's — got the mark on it where it was shot out of his hand once in Vallejo."

"That's nice," Spade said.

"Listen. A kid named Thurber says James comes to him last Wednesday and gets him to tail Haven. Thurber picks him up Thursday afternoon, puts him in at Ferris's, and phones James. James tells him to take a plant on the place and let him know where Haven goes when he leaves, but some nervous woman in the neighborhood puts in a rumble about the kid hanging around, and the cops chase him along about ten o'clock."

Spade pursed his lips and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

Colyer's eyes were expressionless, but sweat made his round face shiny, and his voice was hoarse. "Spade," he said, "I'm going to turn him in."

Spade switched his gaze from the ceiling to the protuberant green eyes.

"I've never turned in one of my people before," Colyer said, "but this one goes. Julia's *got* to believe I hadn't anything to do with it if it's one of my people and I turn him in, hasn't she?"

Spade nodded slowly. "I think so."

Colyer suddenly averted his eyes and cleared his throat. When he spoke again it was curtly: "Well, he goes."

Minera, James, and Conrad were seated when Spade and Colyer came out of the kitchen. Ferris was walking the floor. The two dapper young men had not moved.

Colyer went over to James. "Where's your gun, Louis?" he asked.

James moved his right hand a few inches towards his left breast, stopped it, and said, "Oh, I didn't bring it."

With his gloved hand — open — Colyer struck James on the side of the face, knocking him out of his chair.

James straightened up, mumbling, "I didn't mean nothing." He put a hand to the side of his face. "I know I oughtn't've done it, Chief, but when he called up and said he didn't like to go up against Ferris without something and didn't have any of his own, I said, 'All right,' and sent it over to him."

Colyer said, "And you sent Thurber over to him, too."

"We were just kind of interested in seeing if he did go through with it," James mumbled.

"And you couldn't've gone there yourself, or sent somebody else?"

"After Thurber had stirred up the whole neighborhood?"

Colyer turned to Spade. "Want us to help you take them in, or want to call the wagon?"

"We'll do it regular," Spade said, and went to the wall telephone. When he turned away from it his face was wooden, his eyes dreamy. He made a cigarette, lit it, and said to Colyer, "I'm silly enough to think your Louis has got a lot of right answers in that story of his."

James took his hand down from his bruised cheek and stared at Spade with astonished eyes.

Colyer growled, "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Spade said softly, "except I think you're a little too anxious to slam it on him." He blew smoke out. "Why, for instance, should he drop his gun there when it had marks on it that people knew?"

Colyer said, "You think he's got brains."

"If these boys killed him, knew he was dead, why do they wait till the body's found and things are stirred up before they go after Ferris again? What'd they turn his pockets inside out for if they hijacked him? That's a lot of trouble and only done by folks that kill for some other reason and want to make it look like robbery." He shook his head. "You're too anxious to slam it on them. Why should they —?"

"That's not the point right now," Colyer said. "The point is, why do you keep saying I'm too anxious to slam it on him?"

Spade shrugged. "Maybe to clear yourself with Julia as soon as possible and as clear as possible, maybe even to clear yourself with the police, and then you've got clients."

Colyer said, "What?"

Spade made a careless gesture with his cigarette. "Ferris," he said blandly. "He killed him, of course."

Colyer's eyelids quivered, though he did not actually blink.

Spade said, "First, he's the last person we know of who saw Eli alive, and that's always a good bet. Second, he's the only person I talked to before Eli's body turned up who cared whether I thought they were holding out on me or not. The rest of you just thought I was hunting for a guy who'd gone away. He knew I was hunting for a man he'd killed, so he had to put himself in the clear. He was even afraid to throw that book away, because it had been sent up by the book store and could be traced, and there might be clerks who'd seen the inscription. Third, he was the only one who thought Eli was just a sweet, clean, lovable boy — for the same reasons. Fourth, that story about a blackmailer showing up at three o'clock in the afternoon, making an easy touch for five grand, and then sticking around till midnight is just silly, no matter how good the booze was. Fifth, the story about the paper Eli signed is still worse, though a forged one could be fixed up easy enough. Sixth, he's got the best reason for anybody we know for wanting Eli dead."

Colyer nodded slowly. "Still —"

"Still nothing," Spade said. "Maybe he did the ten-thousand-out-five-thousand-back trick with his bank, but that was easy. Then he got this feeble-minded blackmailer in his house, stalled him along until the servants had gone to bed, took the borrowed gun away from him, shoved him downstairs into his car, took him for a ride — maybe took him already dead, maybe shot him down there by the bushes — frisked him clean to make identification harder and to make it look like robbery, tossed the gun in the water, and came home —"

He broke off to listen to the sound of a siren in the street. He looked then, for the first time since he had begun to talk, at Ferris.

Ferris's face was ghastly white, but he held his eyes steady.

Spade said, "I've got a hunch, Ferris, that we're going to find out about that red-lighting job, too. You told me you had your carnival company with a partner for a while when Eli was working for you, and then by yourself. We oughtn't to have a lot of trouble finding out about your partner — whether he disappeared, or died a natural death, or is still alive."

Ferris had lost some of his erectness. He wet his lips and said, "I want to see my lawyer. I don't want to talk till I've seen my lawyer."

Spade said, "It's all right with me. You're up against it, but I don't like blackmailers myself. I think Eli wrote a good epitaph for them in that book back there — 'Too many have lived.'"

The London private investigator at work: Albert Campion *vs. the queer thief who looked like a question-mark.*

THE QUESTION MARK

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

WHEN Miss Chloe Pleyell became engaged to Sir Matthew Pearing, K.C., Mr. Albert Campion crossed her name off his private list entitled "Elegant Young Persons Whom I Ought to Take to Lunch" and wrote it in neatly at the foot of his "People I Ought to Send Christmas Cards to" folder.

He made the exchange with a smile that was only partially regretful. There had been a time when Miss Pleyell had seemed to him to have a lightheartedness all her own, but once or twice lately it had occurred to him somewhat forcefully that lightheadedness might be a more accurate description. Without the slightest trace of malice, therefore, he wished Sir Matthew, who was a monument of humorless pomposity, joy of his choice.

He was still wishing him every happiness, albeit a trifle dubiously, as he stood in the big old-fashioned office at the back of Julius Florian's Bond Street shop and watched the astute old silversmith persuading Chloe to decide whether Mr. Campion should signify his goodwill on her marriage with the Adam candlesticks or the baroque epergne.

Chloe was in form. She sat on the edge of the walnut desk, her cocoa ermine coat slipping off her shoulders and her small yellow head on one side. Her eyes were narrowed, their vivid blue intensified by the tremendous mental effort involved in the choice.

Mr. Florian appeared to find her wholly charming. He stood before her, his round dark face alight with interest, all the more remarkable since they had been in the shop for the best part of three quarters of an hour already.

"The epergne is exquisitely fashionable now," murmured Chloe, "and I adore it. It's so magnificently *silly*. But the Adam things will be there always, won't they, like a family butler or something?"

Old Florian laughed.

"So truly put," he observed with a little nod to Mr. Campion. "Which shall it be then? The fashion of the day or the pride of a lifetime?"

Miss Pleyell sighed heavily.

"The fashion," she said resignedly. "I know I shall regret it, but I can't help it. It's just my destiny or my character; I can't bother to decide which. Besides, I hate introspective people. I'll have the epergne, Mr. Florian. And you're an angel to give it to me, Albert. Every time I look across it at poor Matthew sitting at the other end of the table I shall think of you."

"That'll be nice for both of us," said Mr. Campion cheerfully, and Florian, who was a past master of practical psychology, swept the candlesticks hastily out of sight.

Chloe slid off the desk and drifted to the side table, where the epergne stood holding out its little silver baskets on slender curling arms. The silversmith trotted after her.

"A lovely thing," he said. "Fine early George the Third, eight sweetmeat baskets hand pierced and chased, gadroon edges, ball feet. It is a very beautiful thing. A ve-ry beau-ti-ful thing. I can tell you its entire history. It was made for Lord Perowne and remained in that family for seventy-two years, when it was purchased by a Mr. Andrew Chappell, who left it to his daughter who lived at Brighton and — "

Chloe's laugh interrupted him.

"How sweet!" she said. "Like a dog. Having a pedigree, I mean. I shall call it Rover. All my furniture's going to have names, Albert. I've got a stupendous sideboard from Matthew's uncle, the judge. I'm going to call it Maude. After his dead wife," she added patiently as he merely looked bewildered.

"Charming thought," said Mr. Florian, also a little at sea.

Chloe glanced at him sadly and he coughed.

"When one buys a fine piece of silver one usually likes to know something of its history," he said stiffly.

Miss Pleyell's brain struggled with the information and came out on top.

"Oh, of course, in case it's stolen," she said brightly. "I never thought of that. How fascinating! Tell me, do you deal much in stolen stuff, Mr. Florian? By accident, I mean," she added belatedly as the small man's face grew slowly red and then more slowly purple.

Campion hurried to the rescue.

"Miss Pleyell thirsts for sensational information," he murmured, scowling at her. "The police lists protect you from all disasters of that sort, don't they, Mr. Florian?"

The silversmith regained his poise and even his smile.

"Ah yes," he said graciously. "The police lists are very interesting. I'll show you one."

He touched a bell on his desk, and went on talking in his slow, slightly affected voice.

"Whenever there has been a robbery, the police circularize the trade with a list of the missing valuables. Then, if the thief or his agents are foolish enough to attempt to dispose of the haul to any reputable firm, they can be — ah — instantly apprehended."

"How lovely!" said Chloe with such emphasis that Campion glanced at her sharply, only to find her gazing at Mr. Florian with an eager interest in her china-blue eyes which was utterly disarming.

The silversmith thawed visibly, and by the time his clerk reappeared with the folder he was beaming.

"I don't show these to everybody," he said archly, his black eyes twinkling at Chloe. "Here's a list of things taken from a mansion in Surrey. And here's another very curious thing. These are the valuables taken from the Hewes-Bellewe house in Manchester Square. No doubt you read of the burglary? I found it particularly interesting because I'm familiar with Lady Hewes-Bellewe's collection of silver. Most of these pieces have been through my hands from time to time for special cleaning and minor repairs."

"Fascinating," murmured Chloe, glancing down a column of technicalities with what was only too obviously an uncomprehending eye. "What's an early silver muffineer with BG, LG?"

"A sugar sifter with a blue glass lining." Mr. Florian seemed delighted to explain, and it occurred to Mr. Campion that a lot of beauty went a remarkably long way. "That's a very interesting piece," the silversmith went on. "I had it here once when we gave a little loan exhibition of rare silver. It has a charming design of ivy leaves, hand pierced, and on one of the leaves a little putto in a boat has been engraved. Engraving with hand piercing is comparatively rare, and I told Lady Hewes-Bellewe that in my opinion the putto must have been the brilliant work of some eighteenth-century amateur. What a tragedy to think it's gone!"

"Frightful," agreed Chloe, blank but game. "But it all depends on how you look at it, doesn't it?"

Campion felt it time to be helpful.

"I remember that burglary," he remarked. "That was the Question Mark's last escapade, wasn't it? The newspapers call him the Crooked Crook."

"That's the man." The suave Mr. Florian was almost excited. "The police can't put their hands on him, and I understand they think he's responsible for at least half a dozen London burglaries. I'm particularly interested in him because he has a mania for fine silver. He must be quite a connoisseur in his way. I can't bring myself to believe he has that beautiful stuff melted down. It must go abroad."

Chloe smiled at the old man with ingratiating earnestness.

"This is wonderful," she said. "I feel I'm learning trade secrets. I like his name too — the Question Mark. Sounds quite thrilling. I thought burglars were always most disappointing people in real life — flat ears and no foreheads, and starving wives and things. This man sounds positively entertaining. Why is he called the Question Mark and the Crooked Crook?"

"Because he walks with a stoop, my child," explained Mr. Campion, coming to the rescue of Mr. Florian, who was showing signs of exhaustion. "He's been seen once or twice, a thin bent figure lurking in dark passageways and on unlighted staircases. Frighten yourself to death with that vision, my poppet, and come along."

"He's a cripple? How devastating!" Miss Pleyell was thinking rapidly, and the unaccustomed exercise brought most becoming spots of color to her cheekbones. "Tell me, how does he get up drain pipes and do all the energetic things burglars do do?"

Florian smiled, and Campion saw with relief that he had evidently decided to get into line with the rest of Chloe's acquaintances and consider her an adorable half-wit.

"Ah, but he's not a real crookback," he said, lowering his voice as though he were speaking to a child. "He was nearly captured on one occasion. A servant girl caught sight of him from an upper window and gave the alarm. He took to his heels, and the woman told the police that he straightened up as he ran."

"How very peculiar," commented Chloe unexpectedly.

"Not really." Florian's tone was still gently humorous. "Most crooks have their little foibles, their little trade-marks. It's a tradition. There's one man who always cuts a heart-shaped hole in the pane of a downstairs window, and lifts the piece out carefully with a small rubber sucker so that he can get to the latch. There's another who disguises himself as a milkman before he cracks a crib. The Question Mark probably looks normal in private life, but the police hunted for a long time for someone with a pronounced stoop."

"Really?" said Chloe, her breathlessness a little overdone.

"Oh yes. Dear me, yes. Crooks are extraordinary people. Ask Mr. Campion. He's the expert. Why, I remember when I was a young man first in business there was a thief who had our whole trade by the ears. We dreaded him. And he used to do his work in a Guardsman's uniform, red tunic, mustachios, a swagger cane and all."

Campion looked up with interest.

"That's a prize effort," he said, laughing. "I've never heard of him."

Florian shook his head.

"Ah well, it's thirty-five years ago at least. But he existed, believe me. We were all very much relieved when he was caught and jailed. I don't know what happened to him when he was released. Some of your older friends at Scotland Yard might remember him. They called him The Shiner. Dear me, that comes back to me after all these years. Yes, well, Miss Pleyell, you don't want to hear any more of my reminiscences, I'm sure. I'll have the epergne dispatched to you immediately."

Mr. Campion carried Miss Pleyell away.

"It's sweet of you," she said, thoughtfully eying him across the little table in the crowded but fashionable lounge where she had elected to take tea. "I shall treasure Rover always."

"But not next to your heart," murmured her host absently. His thoughts had wandered to a curious little notion which had come to him during the silversmith's lecture on the crooks of the past. It was an odd little idea, and presently he put it out of his mind as ridiculous.

He grinned at the girl.

"I hope you didn't let old Florian bore you?" he said.

"Bore me? My dear, you know I'm never bored." Chloe's eyes were gently reproachful. "Besides, the funny little creature was quite amusing. As it happens, I'm frightfully interested in crime just now."

"Oh?" Mr. Campion's eyebrows rose apprehensively.

Chloe's smile was candid and confiding.

"Albert, my pet," she said, "I want your advice. I don't know if I've been frightfully clever or terribly childish."

Her host resisted the impulse to cover his face with his hand.

"Criminal?" he enquired casually.

"Oh, no!" Chloe was amused. "Quite the reverse. I'm just employing a detective, that's all. It's really to oblige Gracie. Have you seen Gracie, my

maid? She's a girl with little black eyes. She has Bulgarian blood, or something. She sews exquisitely. I couldn't lose her. She's invaluable."

Her escort blinked.

"Perhaps I'm not quite right in the head," he remarked affably. "I don't get the hang of this at all. Is the detective keeping an eye on Gracie to see she doesn't wander off into the blue?"

"No, dearest." Chloe was patient. "The detective is engaged to Gracie — for the time being. It won't last. It never does. She's so temperamental. It's her Bulgarian blood. I'm simply giving him a job so she won't marry him and start a shop or something frightful. You don't follow me, do you? I'll explain it all most carefully because I'd like your advice. I think I've been rather bright."

The tall young man in the horn-rimmed spectacles sighed.

"Put the worst in words of one syllable," he invited.

Chloe leaned forward, her expression childlike and deadly serious.

"First of all you must realize about Gracie," she said earnestly. "If I were cynical I should say that Gracie was the most important person in my life. Without Gracie, my hair, my style, my clothes, my *entire personality* would simply go to pieces. Do you understand now?"

Mr. Campion thought she looked very charming and he said so. Chloe looked almost worried.

"Yes, well, there you are," she said. "I'm not a fool. I give Gracie full credit for everything. I'm simply hopeless alone and I know it. I simply can't afford to lose her. Unfortunately she's frightfully susceptible. It's her middle-European blood. It's always coming out. She's had nine serious love affairs in the past two years. Of course I always give her frightfully good advice, and I beg her to hang on until it wears off. So far it always has, although there was a young taxi driver last summer who gave me heart failure for months."

"Dear me," said Mr. Campion mildly. "And now it's a detective?"

"Ah yes. But he wasn't a detective to begin with," explained Miss Pleyell, and went on airily: "He was out of work, you see, and Gracie was passionately sorry for him. She gets all worked up on these occasions, urgently maternal and all that."

"Her Bulgarian blood, no doubt," put in Mr. Campion soberly.

"Yes. She can't help it. She wanted to marry Herbert immediately and invest her savings in a shop so that she could settle down and make something of him. What are you thinking, Albert?"

"Thank heaven she can sew," murmured her escort piously. "When did you turn Herbert into a detective?"

"Oh, I didn't do it. It was entirely his idea. You see, when Gracie first told me about him I begged her to wait. A man must have the kind of work he really loves, mustn't he? Even I know that. I told her that she simply must make Herbert find out what his vocation was and then I'd see he got into it. Then we could both wait and see how it worked."

She hesitated and smiled brightly across the table.

"And Herbert thought he felt the call to become a 'tec?" Mr. Campion's lean face split into a smile of pure amusement. "How charming! What did you do? Bribe a private agency to take him on?"

"No, I didn't." Miss Pleyell was wide-eyed. "That would have been an awfully good way of doing it, wouldn't it? I never thought of that. No, I simply employed him myself at two pounds a week. Gracie usually takes about six weeks to get over a passion, and I thought it would be the most inexpensive way of doing it."

Her companion looked at her almost affectionately.

"You have a sort of flair, my child, haven't you?" he said. "He just loafs around until Gracie's Bulgarian eye lights on another victim, I suppose?"

Chloe hesitated and evidently decided to make a clean breast.

"Well, no," she said at last. "Unfortunately he doesn't. In a way it's rather awkward. Herbert's devastatingly conscientious. He *will* work. He just insists on detecting all over the place. I put him onto mother for the first week, but he found out that her cook was taking bribes from the tradesmen and had the idiocy to want the woman dismissed. Mother was furious, of course, as cooks are so scarce. I had a frightful time with the three of them. Now I've been rather clever, I think. I've told Herbert to keep an eye on Matthew. Matthew is the complete model of rectitude. He never forgets his dignity for an instant. I think Matthew will exhaust Herbert, don't you?"

Mr. Campion took off his spectacles, a sign with him of deep emotion. In his mind's eye he saw again the pompous young K.C., so correct and conventional that even his mother did not dare to use any diminutive of his Christian name.

"You astound me," he said simply. "You have my undying respect. How did you get Sir Matthew to stand for it?"

Chloe was silent for some time, her glance resting thoughtfully on the middle distance.

"I didn't," she said at last. "Herbert is very discreet, so I didn't think it very necessary to mention it to Matthew at all. Do you think that was unwise?"

Mr. Campion's face grew blank.

"My good girl," he said flatly. "My good insane girl."

Miss Pleyell colored and glanced down at her plate.

"It did just occur to me once or twice that it might not be such a good idea as it looked. That's why I mentioned it to you," she murmured defensively. "Matthew's ridiculously stiff in some ways, isn't he?"

Since he did not trust himself to speak, her host made no comment. She forced a smile.

"Still, he'll never notice Herbert," she said. "Herbert's such an ordinary, nondescript little man. Matthew never notices unimportant people."

Mr. Campion took himself in hand and when he spoke his voice was almost gentle. For ten minutes Miss Pleyell sat and listened to him, her vivid eyes wide and her cheeks bright.

Campion had a gift for lucidity when he chose to employ it, and his short lecture on the gentle art of blackmail and its perpetrators was clear and to the point. He also touched upon the more ethical side of the arrangement, with a direct reference to the dictates of good taste. His feelings carried him away, and he only came to an abrupt pause when Miss Pleyell's small face began to pucker dangerously.

"Oh, how awful!" she said, waving away his belated apology. "I never looked at it like that. It never entered my head that Herbert might be dishonest. I do see it's dangerous and rather beastly, I do now, but before it never occurred to me. I was simply thinking of not losing Gracie. What shall I do? Anything except tell Matthew. I daren't do that. I just daren't. He wouldn't see it in my way at all and I am terribly fond of him. What shall I do?"

She looked so small and pretty and woebegone that Mr. Campion felt a brute.

"Call the watchdog off," he said cheerfully. "Go round to Paul Fenner of the Efficiency Detective Bureau and tell him from me to give Herbert a temporary job at your expense. Then keep quiet. Don't tell the story to anybody."

"No, of course I won't." Miss Pleyell's relief was charming. "You're a darling," she said. "A perfect dear. I'm terribly grateful to you, Albert.

You're so frightfully clever. I'll do exactly what you say and then everything will be all right, won't it? You don't think I'm a fool, though, do you? I couldn't bear that."

Mr. Campion surveyed her with great tolerance.

"I think you're fantastic, my child," he said gravely.

He made a different and more forceful remark about her the following morning when her telephone call coincided with his early tea. She was tearfully incoherent at the other end of the wire.

"It's happened." Her whisper reached him, shaken with tragic intensity. "It's Herbert. What shall I do?"

"Herbert?" Mr. Campion shook the sleep out of his head and strove to collect his thoughts. "Oh yes, Herbert's the amateur detective. I've got you now. What's he done?"

"Can I tell you on the phone?"

"Well, I hope so." Mr. Campion raised his eyebrows at the instrument. "What's he doing? Demanding money?"

"Oh no — no — worse than that. Albert, he's found out something about Matthew and he wants to go to the police."

"Something about Matthew? What about Matthew?"

"Herbert says he's got proof that Matthew's a crook."

There was a long silence from Mr. Campion's end of the wire and his caller repeated the operative word.

"A c-r-double o-k. He wants to go to the police. Can you hear me? What shall I do?"

Campion held the receiver an inch or so from his ear.

"Yes, I can hear," he said dryly. "My voice had left me, that was all. Well, my dear young friend, your course is clear. Tell Master Herbert to go to the police and make his accusation by all means. When he changes his tone and you get down to the vital question of the fiver he has in mind, threaten to send for the police. In fact, do send for them if he doesn't go quietly, but I don't think you'll have any difficulty."

"Oh, I see." Chloe sounded partially convinced. "Then you think Herbert's simply lying about Matthew being a mysterious thief and all that? He's very convincing. Are you there, Albert? Listen, you don't think it's true? What's the matter with your voice? Why does it keep going like this?"

"It's a form of nervous paralysis," explained Mr. Campion gently and rang off.

While he was dressing he thought of Chloe and shook his head over her. She was beautiful and she was charming and at heart a dear, he reflected, but unfortunately hardly safe out. He hoped most devoutly for her sake that the dignified Sir Matthew would never hear of Gracie's Herbert.

A morning at the Leicester Galleries and a protracted luncheon at the Junior Greys kept him away from the Piccadilly flat until halfway through the afternoon. He let himself in with his key, and was walking down the corridor to his study when an unexpected vision on the floor of his sitting room caught his eye through the half-open doorway. He paused and stared at it.

Lying on the carpet was a battered portmanteau, while round it, spread out in dazzling array, was as choice a collection of unfamiliar silver as ever he had seen. Blinking a little, he pushed open the door and glanced round. A sturdy, respectable figure with a round face and a permanently injured expression rose stiffly from an upright chair.

Campion surveyed the man in astonishment. He was a perfect stranger and was neatly dressed in nondescript tweeds.

"Mr. Campion?" he demanded in a brisk, high-pitched voice so often possessed by men of his figure. "Your man said I could wait 'ere for you."

"Oh yes, quite." Campion's gaze wandered back to the array upon the floor. "You've brought your — luggage, I see."

"My name's Boot," said the visitor, ignoring the remark. "Miss Pleyell said I was to see you before I went to the police. Come what might, I was to see you first. That's what she said."

A great light dawned slowly upon Mr. Campion.

"You're not Herbert, by any chance?" he enquired.

Mr. Boot blushed.

"My young lady calls me Herbert," he admitted grudgingly. "I'm a private enquiry agent in the employ of Miss Chloe Pleyell. She said she'd mentioned me to you. Is that right?"

"Oh yes. Yes, she did. She did indeed. Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Campion's pale eyes were narrowed behind his spectacles. Gracie's young man was not at all the type he had expected.

"I'd rather stand if you don't mind," said Herbert without impoliteness. "Time's short. I've been here since noon. Notice anything about this lot?"

Mr. Campion ran a thoughtful eye over the glistening treasure trove at his feet. One item in particular caught his special attention. It was a large

Georgian sugar sifter lined with blue glass and decorated with a design of hand-pierced ivy leaves. The center of one leaf was exquisitely engraved with the tiny likeness of a cupid in a boat.

"Dear me," said Mr. Campion.

"Seen the police lists lately, sir?" Herbert enquired, his aggrieved expression deepening. "I have. Do you know what this collection represents? It's the proceeds of a robbery committed on the night of the fifteenth at a house in Manchester Square. Hewes-Bellewe was the family's name. In the papers the police were said to be looking for a person they're pleased to call the Question Mark. Now you see, sir, whatever you or Miss Pleyell may say, I *must* go to the police with this stuff. I *must*. It's my duty and in a way my privilege. I owe it to myself. I've found it. I've got to report it. I know there's a dangerous criminal masquerading as a gentleman of title, and although I'm very sorry for Miss Pleyell, I'm in a cleft stick. I've got to do my duty."

Mr. Campion felt a little giddy.

"Look here, Herbert," he said at last, "let me get this clear. You're not thinking of accusing Sir Matthew Pearing of being the Question Mark, are you?"

Herbert's bright brown eyes became belligerent.

"I'm telling the police all I know," he said. "Since he done it he ought to be made to pay for it, lord though he may be."

"Baronet," corrected Mr. Campion absently, his mind grappling with the absurdities of the situation. "Before we go along to the Yard I think you'd better tell me the full story."

"Would that be *Scotland* Yard, sir?" Mr. Boot's tone was suddenly respectful. "I've always wanted to go there and see the big shots," he added naïvely. "I was afraid I'd have to take these along to a common police station and let some jack-in-office of a local inspector take most of the credit."

"Oh, I'll take you to Scotland Yard all right," said Mr. Campion, feeling a little foolish. "We'll go and have tea with the superintendent, if you like. Where did you get all this incriminating property?"

Mr. Boot smiled. The mention of the name Scotland Yard seemed to have thawed him into childlike affability. He sat down.

"I'll tell you," he said. "Out of the cloakroom at Charing Cross. Fancy that."

"Fancy indeed," echoed Campion. "Where did you get the ticket?"

"Ah . . ." Herbert raised his head. "Where do you think? Out of one of his lordship's own blessed suits, and that's a fact. I've got witnesses."

It seemed to Mr. Campion that ever since he had met Chloe on the previous afternoon the very flavor of life had been touched with the fantastic, a circumstance he had attributed entirely to the influence of her personality, but *this* was a frank absurdity and he began to doubt his ears.

Herbert beamed at his perplexity.

"I'll tell you the story," he said. "I can see you're a bit took back and I don't blame you. I was myself when I first opened this case. I was put on to Sir Matthew Pearing by Miss Pleyell, who got to know of me through my young lady. Just keep an eye on Sir Matthew, she said. Naturally I asked her in what way, and she said she didn't know but she thought there was something definitely mysterious about him. Those were her very words, sir; 'definitely mysterious.'"

Campion groaned silently and Herbert continued.

"Well, I kept an eye on the gentleman," he said, folding his hands on his waistcoat. "And what did I find? Nothing at all for a long time. That Sir Matthew's a sly bird. For weeks he went on living a most regular life with his servants as solemn as he was. And then — chance took a 'and."

He nodded complacently.

"Then I got a bit o' luck. There's a Mr. Tuke who is 'is lordship's valet. I ingratiated myself with 'im. He's one of these lazy overpaid gent's gents, and I found out he 'ad the sauce to send 'is master's suits down to the quick cleaners' to save 'isself the trouble of doing the pressing. 'E paid for them out of 'is own money, I daresay, but it wasn't right. I said nothing of course, and as it happened that little trick of Master Tuke's was lucky for me. This morning I was in the kitchen — I often go round there early — and Mr. Tuke asked me if I'd do him a favor by slipping down to the cleaners' and collecting a dinner jacket outfit he'd left there last night. I went, and when the girl gave me the parcel she handed over a little black wallet that had been left in the pocket. I examined it in accordance with my duties, and inside I found two penny stamps and a cloakroom ticket."

"You hung on to the wallet?"

"I did." Herbert spoke firmly. "I examined it in front of the girl. I'm very careful. You have to be in this business. I made her make a note of the case, the stamps and the number of the ticket. Then I came away. I gave the suit to Mr. Tuke, who identified it, mind you, but I kept the wallet and I went

down to Charing Cross. I gave up the ticket at the cloakroom. I got this suitcase in return and I opened it before the attendant. 'Now, my lad,' I said to him when I see what was inside, 'I'm a detective. Take a good look at me. Here's my card,' I said. 'Take a look at this stuff,' I said. 'I'll need you as a witness.' After that I gave 'im a signed receipt for the case and kept the cloakroom ticket. I took a copy of the receipt and I mentioned the number of the cloakroom ticket on each slip of paper."

"Did you, though?" said Mr. Campion, whose respect for Herbert's perspicacity was slowly mounting. "Then you went to Miss Pleyell and she sent you on to me, I suppose?"

"Exactly," his visitor agreed. "And now, if you please, sir, I'd like to go to Scotland Yard."

Mr. Campion glanced at the silver at his feet.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Yes. Quite. I think you'd better. I'll come with you."

A little over an hour later, Superintendent Stanislaus Oates sat behind his desk in his private office at the headquarters of the Central Branch and stared at his friend Mr. Albert Campion, a slightly bewildered expression in his bright blue eyes.

Herbert had retold his story once and was now obligingly doing so again to a sergeant in another room, while a constable wrote it all down. The two friends were alone.

"It's idiotic," said Oates suddenly. "We'll check up on Boot's story, of course, and it *may* be false, yet I'm open to bet it's the truth. I know that type. We've got plenty of 'em in the Force. What an extraordinary thing!"

Campion lit a cigarette and his eyes were thoughtful.

"Oh, our Herbert is honest," he said. "Herbert's as honest as the day. You're sure you can identify the stuff?"

"Certain." Oates glanced toward the battered suitcase on the table in the corner. "There's no doubt of that. You heard what Inspector Baker said. He's working on the case. He's seen photographs and studied descriptions. Besides, my dear chap, it's all there. That's the proceeds of the Question Mark's Manchester Square haul all right; no doubt about it. We'll check up on the cloakroom attendant and the girl at the cleaners', and if these are okay we'll have to interview Sir Matthew. There's no other way out. We must find out where that ticket came from. He'll be able to give us an explanation all right, but we must have it."

Campion thrust his hands into his pockets and his lean face was troubled.

"That's going to be infernally awkward, isn't it?" he ventured. "You'll have to drag in Herbert to protect yourselves and he'll have to mention Miss Pleyell to protect himself."

Oates, one of the kindest and most sympathetic of men, spread out his stubby fingers in a gesture of regret.

"He's a lawyer," he said. "Her name will come out in the end. You can't suppress it. She's asked for it, you know."

Campion nodded. "Still, it seems a pity she should get it," he said and grimaced. "Sir Matthew's obviously not the Question Mark himself and it's a pity to drag him into it. He'll never forgive her. He's not that type."

The superintendent did not smile.

"I know, I know, my lad," he said. "You needn't tell me. I'd like to do all I could for the girl. Indirectly she's put us on to a very important thing. But what other course is open to me? I ask you."

The tall young man in the horn-rimmed spectacles was silent for some moments. The vague idea which had come to him on the previous afternoon when Mr. Florian had been talking to Chloe, and which had been knocking at intervals on the door of his mind ever since, suddenly presented itself as a concrete thing. He looked up.

"What was the number of the ticket for the suit?" he demanded.

"The cloakroom ticket?"

"No, that was for the suitcase. What was the number of the cleaners' ticket that Tuke gave Herbert when he sent him down to claim Sir Matthew's dinner jacket?"

Oates regarded him silently.

"Wait a minute," he said at last. "I've got it here. Boot got it from the girl and gave her a receipt instead. He's a cautious lad, is Herbert. I rather like him. Here you are — one hundred and sixty-one."

He pushed over a small square of magenta paper on which the figures were roughly printed beneath a single line of very small type announcing the Birch Road Quick Cleaning Co'y. Campion folded the heading over carefully and turned the slip round before he gave it back.

"How about that, if a girl was in a hurry?" he enquired.

The superintendent's heavy eyebrows rose as he stared at it.

"That's an idea," he said cautiously. "A genuine idea. You get 'em, don't you?"

Campion leaned over the desk.

"Come down yourself to the cleaners' with me now and bring the wallet," he said. "I've got an idea."

"Another?"

"I think so. It's a notion which has been fidgeting me all day. There's just a chance I may be on to the man you want. Those two descriptions of the Question Mark which you had, one from a postman in the Clarges Street show and one from the nurse in the earlier business, both agreed that he was a stooping, sinister figure, didn't they?"

"Yes, but the other woman who saw him running said he straightened up when he was on the move," Oates objected.

"Ah, but she saw him from above," said Mr. Campion. "Will you come down to the cleaners' with me?"

The superintendent rose, grumbling.

"I don't mind you working yourself to death for your friends," he said, "but I resent it when I'm expected to do the same. She's pretty, this Miss Pleyell, I suppose?"

"Exquisite."

Oates sighed. "That's a comfort," he said. "If she was only crackers, I should loathe this. Come on, we'll take Herbert and a sergeant. I hope you have got something up your sleeve."

"So do I," murmured Mr. Campion fervently. "I should hate to have to take back that epergne."

The Birch Road Quick Cleaning Company's establishment was not a large affair. It was situated in a back street some way behind the magnificent block in which Sir Matthew Pearing had his super-flat. Herbert and the sergeant remained in the taxicab some little distance down the road, while Campion and the superintendent interviewed the harassed but by no means unintelligent young woman in charge.

She left the steaming press in the window and listened carefully to their questions.

She remembered Herbert perfectly, which was not unnatural since he had taken so much care that she should, and readily produced his receipt for the suit and the wallet. Moreover, she remembered Mr. Tuke, who was a regular customer, bringing in the dinner jacket on the previous evening. She also identified her own official ticket.

"One hundred and sixty-one," she said. "I remember it."

Campion turned the magenta slip round.

"How about one hundred and ninety-one? It's an easy slip if you look at it quickly," he suggested.

She glanced up at him with shrewd cockney eyes.

"It could 'ave 'appened," she admitted. "But it didn't. I remember the suit. See? The suit I give the gentleman who gave me the receipt was the suit I took from Mr. Tuke."

"Very likely, miss." Oates beamed upon her in his most avuncular fashion. "But that's not the point. It's the wallet we're interested in. What happens when something is left in the pocket of a coat which comes in to be cleaned?"

The girl's face cleared.

"That's about it," she said suddenly. "Just a minute."

As she crossed the shop to the inner room, Oates glanced at Campion.

"She's sharp," he said. "We're lucky."

"George," shouted the girl, "come here, will you?"

A tall, thin man, clad in bedraggled trousers and a singlet, came out of the steam chamber, wiping his face and arms with a towel.

"This is my brother George," the girl explained. "He does the suits. He'd know what you want."

George stared at the black wallet which the superintendent showed him for some little time before he committed himself.

"That's right," he said at last. "I found it in an inside pocket in a waistcoat. It was very nearly empty when I saw it — a couple of stamps and a ticket."

"That's right. It's of no value. But what did you do with it?"

"Put it in here, like I always do when I come across things."

George pulled open a drawer in the cash desk, where several odds and ends were stacked neatly, each with a slip of paper attached.

"See?" he said. "I lay the article in here and I write the number of the suit I took it from on a bit of paper and lay it on top of the thing. When Sis gives the clothes back, she just matches the numbers and returns the property."

Campion sighed with relief.

"Then it would have been possible to mistake the number one-six-one for one-nine-one, for instance?"

George hesitated. "It might," he said. "I'll tell you one thing, if it's any

help to you. I took that wallet from the inside waistcoat pocket of a brown tweed suit. I remember it distinctly — a brown tweed suit. What the number was I can't say."

The girl pounced on the ledger and ran her finger down a column of hieroglyphics.

"You're right," she said, grinning at Campion. "That's how it happened. I took George's writing the wrong way up. One-nine-one was a brown tweed suit. The fellow came in for it half an hour ago."

A muffled exclamation escaped the superintendent, but Campion interrupted him.

"Just a minute," he said. "Was he by any chance a very tall, well-set-up man, about fifty-five to sixty? Gray hair, perhaps?"

"Yes, he was." The girl seemed surprised. "I didn't see his hair because he had a hat on, but he wasn't young. I noticed him particularly, being so tall. He was a bit hasty too. He said his landlady had taken the suit to be cleaned without his knowing — seemed quite shirty about it. I told him she only meant to be kind. He didn't ask about the wallet."

"No, he wouldn't," said Campion. "He wouldn't want to call your attention to it."

"He'll come back," put in Oates suddenly. "When he gets that parcel undone and finds he's lost the wallet he'll come back, if he doesn't see us first. We must clear out. Now look here, my dear, here's the wallet. It's got two stamps and a ticket in it. When he comes, give it to him, and whatever you do, don't act in any way that may make him suspicious. Can I rely on you?"

She nodded and stretched out a firm, capable hand for the black folder.

The superintendent hurried his friend from the shop and the waiting sergeant received his instructions.

"Right you are, sir," he said, touching his felt hat. "I'll lay for him and I'll tail him. He won't get away from me."

Oates nodded and thrust Campion into the cab.

"The Yard first to get the stuff and then Charing Cross," he said briefly. "Is that how you were figuring it out, Campion?"

The younger man leaned back in the cab.

"Perfect," he said contentedly. "There's nothing like a fair cop."

Herbert, who had watched the proceedings with his little ferret's eyes glistening with excitement, ventured a question.

"Are we going to see Sir Matthew now, sir?"

Campion glanced at Oates.

"No," he said. "Sorry to disappoint you, Herbert, but no. For the time being, the aristocracy is out of it. But we're going to meet a celebrity, I fancy, and when we see him we're going to take his fingerprints."

The superintendent regarded his friend with eyes that were bright and suspicious.

"I want a word or two with you, my lad," he said. "What do you know about this chap we're after? When did you see him?"

"I haven't," said Mr. Campion.

"What about that description you gave the girl?"

The younger man grinned.

"That was rather good, wasn't it?" he agreed. "I made that up."

Oates opened his mouth to speak, but caught sight of Herbert's fascinated gaze and thought better of it.

"Wait till I get you on your own," he murmured darkly, and rapped on the window to urge the driver to hurry.

The next fifteen minutes did not give anybody much opportunity for conversation. The cab paused for a moment at the Yard to take on board two plain-clothes men and the bag of silver, and afterward swung round to speed back to Charing Cross station.

"If I know the type we shan't have long to wait," said Oates as he and Campion took up their positions in a convenient doorway, which afforded them a good view of the cloakroom window. "As soon as he gets his hands on that ticket he'll beetle down here and make sure that the stuff is safe. I'm trusting that girl."

Campion glanced casually across the station to where two inconspicuous plain-clothes figures were lounging by the bookstall.

"The clerk's giving them the sign, is he?"

Oates nodded. "Yes, they understand one another. He's a good man, that clerk. The way he corroborated Herbert Boot's story was intelligent and convincing. He realized the necessity for haste, too. A fool in that position might have held us up for hours. My fellows have got to rely on him. They haven't the least idea who they're waiting for, see?"

Campion coughed.

"I don't think they'll miss him," he murmured. "He's a distinctive sort of chap, you know."

Oates swung round on him.

"Blast it, Campion, what do you know about this business?" he demanded.

"Nothing that I haven't told you."

"But this tale about the tall elderly man, where did you get it from? What are you playing at?"

"Wait." Campion laid a restraining hand on his friend's arm and nodded toward a figure which had come striding in through the crowd. The man was striking and even distinguished. Well over six feet four, he was very erect, with a clean-shaven, sharp-featured face which must in youth have been remarkably handsome.

Oates stiffened, a startled expression creeping into his eyes.

"Recognize him?" murmured Campion.

"Yes, I think so." The superintendent's voice was wondering, and he stepped forward at the same moment as the two Yard men darted out into the open and closed in on either side of the stranger as he took the heavy, battered suitcase from the cloakroom counter. There was only a very brief struggle.

The tall man glanced shrewdly at his adversaries.

"I guess I'm too old for a scrap, boys," he said. "I'll come quietly. It's all there in the bag — oh, you know that, do you?"

As Mr. Campion and the superintendent drove quietly back to the Yard together, Oates was still thoughtful.

"It must be nearly thirty years ago," he said at last. "I was a sergeant at the Thames Court Police Station, I remember, and we had that fellow in the cells there for a couple of days. I can't think of his name, but as soon as I set eyes on him this afternoon I recognized him. He looks much older, of course, but you can't mistake that height or that face. We'll get his prints when we get back and identify him. What was his name now?"

Mr. Campion hesitated.

"Does The Shiner convey anything to you?" Mr. Campion said diffidently.

"The Shiner! That's it, The Shiner!" The superintendent's voice rose with excitement. "By George, it's the same lark too. Old silver shipped to a fence in Amsterdam. That's him. Good heavens, Campion, how did you know?"

The younger man looked pleased.

"Oh, it occurred to me, you know," he said modestly. "I was in old

Florian's shop yesterday, talking about these burglaries, and he got reminiscing about crooks who had specialized in old silver in the past. He mentioned this chap, The Shiner, and said he hadn't been heard of since he came out of jail, which made me think he'd probably gone abroad. Florian also said that The Shiner used to do his early burglaries in full Guardsman's uniform."

"That's right," said Oates. "So he did. Amazing vanity these fellows have. A Guardsman before the War was a picturesque figure and there were a lot of them about in London."

Campion ignored the interruption.

"The fancy dress appealed to me," he said, "and I was thinking about it, and also about your mysterious Question Mark, when the astonishing points of similarity between the two occurred to me. I didn't see how it worked out, of course, until I'd heard Herbert's contribution and put things together a bit."

Oates shook his head.

"I'll buy it," he said. "I don't see any similarity between the Question Mark and The Shiner. One was a bent, sinister figure straightening up to run, and the other made himself conspicuous in a red tunic. They both pinched silver, I know, but if you can see any other likeness between the two you're a cleverer man than I am, or off your head."

"It's imagination you lack, guv'nor." Mr. Campion regarded his friend regretfully. "Think of the fellow. See him in your mind's eye. What is his one inescapable and most damning characteristic? His height. There's six foot four of the wretched chap. Think of it! What was he to do?"

"Good lord!" The superintendent sat up. "You're right," he said slowly. "Of course. It didn't occur to me at once. The uniform disguised him when he was young, it didn't make him conspicuous. Everyone expected to see a tall soldier in a scarlet tunic. A shorter man would have looked peculiar. When he came back and started up again, he had to think of something else, I suppose, so he counterfeited a stoop for the actual job, only straightening up when he made a dash for it. Wait a minute, though; he was seen running. The witness didn't mention his height."

"Because she didn't see it," Campion protested. "She only saw him from above. It was that that strengthened my first suspicion. By the way, there'll be no need to interview Sir Matthew now, I take it?"

"No, it's a fair cop." Oates spoke with satisfaction. "We caught him with the stuff. That's good enough. You're saved again, Campion, or your girl

friend is. Give her my regards and tell her she doesn't know how lucky she is to have a lucky pal."

Mr. Campion opened his mouth to protest but thought better of it. In his experience it was far more comfortable to be considered lucky than clever by any policeman. He was silent for some time and sat looking out of the window, a faint smile playing round his lips.

The superintendent glanced at him.

"What are you thinking of now?" he enquired suspiciously.

"I was wondering," said Mr. Campion truthfully, "I was just wondering who young Gracie is going to get engaged to next."

When is a smuggler not a smuggler? Psychologist Poggioli *gets a lesson in psychology.*

THE CABLEGRAM

by T. S. STRIBLING

IN THE COURSE of his evasions over the telephone, Mr. Henry Poggioli, investigator in criminal psychology, said apologetically —

"Mr. Slidenberry, my work here in Miami is purely theoretic, and if I devote any time to practical crimes . . ."

"But this is theoretic," pressed the voice in the receiver earnestly. "The *Stanhope* is due in today and we want you to go aboard with us and —"

"If the trouble is aboard a ship it must be smuggling," surmised the scientist. "I am really no expert as a baggage searcher."

"Oh, it isn't that at all. It's an A. J. P. A. cablegram."

"Let's see — that's the American Jewelers' Protective Association?"

"Right you are, Doctor, and the trouble is we can't quite decode it."

There was something whimsical in the Miami customs force receiving a cablegram which they could not decode. Mr. Poggioli smiled over the telephone as he suggested —

"If you have it by you would you like to read it to me over the wire?"

"M-m — we'd a lot rather you'd come down to the docks, but if you think you can decode the thing right off . . ."

Came a pause, and after about a half minute interval the voice began again:

"Here it is:

> "BARBERRY. EXTREME CARE. STANHOPE. 36-B — FEATHERS — CONSULAR REPORTS 1915 PP. 1125–6. REWARD CLAIMED. — J. DUGMORE LAMPTON, CARE AMERICAN CONSULATE, BELIZE, B. C. A."

"What is it you don't understand?" inquired the psychologist.

"Feathers — do you know what feathers means?"

"I don't know what any of it means."

"The rest is simple. Barberry means a diamond smuggler. *Stanhope* is the name of a ship that will dock here in half an hour. The 36-B is his cabin number. The rest is just plain English. If we capture him J. Dugmore

Lampton wants the reward offered by the American Jewelers' Protective Association."

"What about the consular reports?"

"Don't know yet. I set a clerk to looking up the reports for 1915. We keep them in the attic of the customs house in goods boxes. This is the first time anybody ever had any reason to refer to them."

"You don't suppose consular reports could be another code word?"

"No; we suspected that at first. We searched through all the codes, but 'consular reports' seems to have no meaning beyond just — you know, the actual reports themselves."

"That's an extraordinary detail of your telegram," Poggioli admitted after a pause. "It creates a kind of puzzle as to the sender of the message."

"How's that?"

"That he should not only quote the consular reports, but he is so familiar with them he actually refers to a particular page."

"The man is probably in the consular service himself," returned the customs officer.

"That doesn't alter anything. Every consul knows that the consular reports are never read, are never filed away properly and are seldom even preserved. Really, Mr. Slidenberry, your cablegram is not only puzzling, it is enigmatic."

"Really, Doctor," interposed the inspector, "we wish you'd come down here yourself and see —"

"I think I will; yes, I'll come. But while I'm on the way down, please cable Belize and get a report on J. Dugmore Lampton. I would like to know something more about a man who refers in a cablegram to a particular page in the American consular reports."

Fifteen minutes later a group of three uniformed men met Mr. Poggioli's taxi at pier 26. Captain Slidenberry gripped the arrival's hand.

"She's just swinging in now, Dr. Poggioli," he said gratefully. "Come on inside. The passengers will be down immediately."

"Now, as I said," cautioned the psychologist, "I am utterly inexperienced in searching baggage."

Slidenberry held up a hand.

"The boys will take care of that."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"Well, I want you to look over the passenger who occupies cabin 36-B

and tell me if he is the type of man who would hide his diamonds in his baggage, or drop them in the pocket of some fellow passenger to be retrieved later — or would he wrap his gems in meat and feed them to his pet dog?"

Poggioli smiled and shook his head.

"There may be some physiological index to classify the different types of smugglers; they say it's true of murderers. I haven't gone into the matter yet."

"How would you like to make your headquarters here and measure all the smugglers we arrest?"

"I'll think that over. By the way, you cabled for the information about J. Dugmore Lampton?"

"Certainly, but I don't see how that information can aid us here?"

"Well, don't you think it queer to quote a consular report?"

"Mm — ye-es — queer enough, but what is the connection between a diamond smuggler at this end of the line and a man quoting the reports at the other?"

"I have no idea. That's what we want to see. When anything seems queer, Mr. Slidenberry, that is merely a psychologic signal that it has connections with something we do not understand. In any crime queerness may very well be a clue."

The psychologist's theory was interrupted by cabin boys streaming down the gangplank of the *Stanhope* bringing luggage and arranging it in alphabetical piles. Captain Slidenberry went aboard to the window of the ship's purser and asked who occupied room 36-B. The purser ran his finger down the passenger list.

"Dr. Xenophon Quintero Sanchez — what's the matter with Dr. Sanchez?"

"That's what we are trying to find out, Purser."

"His bags will be in the S pen, sir."

Slidenberry was searching among the S's for the initials X.Q.S. when a cabin boy came up and touched his cap.

"Excuse me, sir, but the passenger in 36-B asks if you will please come to his cabin?"

The inspector became suspicious at once.

"What's the point in that? Why doesn't he bring down his keys?"

"His bags are not down yet," explained the boy. "He sent me to ask if you would please examine them in his cabin."

Slidenberry lifted an eyebrow at Poggioli, and the two men started aboard the *Stanhope*. When they reached stateroom 36-B Slidenberry tapped on the door, and a man's voice called —

"Enter, señor, and pardon my occupation."

The shutter swung open and Poggioli saw a heavy man of dark complexion and dissipated features sitting on his bunk apparently cutting up his wardrobe with a pair of scissors. Two or three garments already were in pieces, and he was taking out the lining of a coat. The two visitors stood looking at the queer sight.

"Are you a tailor, Mr. Sanchez?" inquired Slidenberry.

The heavy man on the bunk made a deprecatory gesture.

"A kind of analytic tailor, señores. I am preparing to make my declaration in customs."

"Just how?" inquired the inspector dryly. "Are you trying to reduce the value of your wardrobe?"

"I am trying to find out what my portmanteau contains, señores."

"Don't you know already?" asked Slidenberry in a brittle voice.

"I do not," stated Sanchez sharply. "I know what I put in my baggage, but what others have slipped into it I have no way of knowing except by some such method as this." He jabbed his shears into a garment.

As Mr. Poggioli viewed this irrational scene there seemed a touch of something familiar in the old Latin's somber face. He stood trying to recall where he had met the man while Slidenberry went on with his astonished questioning.

"Do you mean some one has slipped something in your bags?"

"That's what I mean, señor."

"Why didn't you find out before the *Stanhope* entered customs?"

"Because I did not want to sit in my cabin all day long to make sure nothing else was added. I wanted to go to my meals, take the air, sleep."

Slidenberry looked at the old man intently, then glanced at Poggioli, said, "Pardon us a moment," and drew the psychologist outside the cabin.

"Crazy," he said in an undertone, "or do you think it's a hoax?"

"Our cablegram shows there is a reality to it somewhere, so I would mark out insanity."

"But if it's a hoax why didn't he select a more reasonable falsehood?"

"You know, the fact that it's unreasonable is an argument for its truth," pointed out Poggioli — "that is, if he really isn't insane."

"That somebody actually planted dutiable goods of value in his bags?"

Poggioli shrugged.

"But whoever did would lose money on it," went on Slidenberry. "His reward would be only a part of the value of the goods smuggled. He would certainly lose half of his investment even if his scheme worked."

"This can't be simply a trick to get a reward," agreed Poggioli at once. "There is something — something else —" The scientist drew out a cigaret and tapped it on his thumbnail. "You know — I've seen that old man before!"

"Something criminal?" asked Slidenberry hopefully.

"Must have been, if I remember him."

"Good, good." The inspector nodded. He turned back into the cabin. "Dr. Sanchez," he began, "I want to ask you pointblank: Have you any diamonds to declare?"

"I don't know," said the old man, still scissoring away. "That's what I'm trying to find out for you."

"Do you think somebody hid diamonds in your trunk and clothes?"

"I have no idea what they hid — diamonds possibly."

Slidenberry gave a brief smile.

"Suppose you let me help you hunt. I've a knack at that sort of thing."

Dr. Sanchez straightened and held up a prohibitory hand.

"Not as you are, señor, please," he said with a dry smile.

"Not as I am — what do you mean?"

"I mean, señor, not with your coat and vest and trousers on, if you please."

The customs officer stared in amazement.

"Are you suggesting that I undress myself to inspect your —"

Poggioli interposed —

"He means he is afraid *you* will put something in his bags and then arrest him for having it."

Slidenberry looked at Poggioli, tapped his forehead and shook his head slightly.

"Listen, Señor Sanchez," reasoned Poggioli, "no matter what Mr. Slidenberry should plant in your trunk he could not arrest you for it. You have declared that you don't know what your baggage contains. All he could do would be to confiscate anything illegal he discovered or let you pay the duty on it and keep it yourself. Either way he would lose and you would go free."

Sanchez nodded.

"That is the legal theory — but if he slipped something in my pocket and I walk off the ship carrying goods on which I have paid no duty, I go to jail. That has happened to me many times, señor."

The psychologist was astonished and incredulous.

"You don't mean to tell me the customs officers themselves —"

Sanchez interrupted —

"Certainly, señor; there is no tyranny so inescapable and so difficult to prove as that of the police department."

"But why should the customs officers themselves wish to —" Poggioli broke off, studying the old man's almost remembered face.

Dr. Sanchez shrugged, then spoke in a bitter voice —

"If I were a North American, señor, I would not only tell you my story; I would also tell the newspapers and the radio broadcasters, but we Latin-Americans—" he spread his palms sardonically—"feel somewhat differently about our private affairs."

"In my opinion," interposed Slidenberry dryly, "you handle not only your private affairs with the greatest reticence, but the truth also. The idea of a customs officer planting something in the baggage of a traveler! It was never done in the history of American customs."

The old man bristled at such an insult, but the dawning quarrel was interrupted by the voice of a cabin boy paging Captain Slidenberry. The officer stepped outside to call the boy, and Poggioli followed curiously.

As the messenger came up, the inspector turned to Poggioli and asked sharply:

"What do you think of him now? Is he crazy, or is he just a hopeless liar?"

Poggioli shook his head.

"If he really has been framed —"

"Framed, the devil! Did you ever hear of customs men framing a casual traveler?"

"I never did, but it is the most probable explanation of this riddle."

"You don't mean it has really happened?"

"I do because the old man doesn't insist on it. If he were a simple liar he would have gone on with a long cock-and-bull story to prove what he said was the truth, but he simply says it's so."

Slidenberry shook his head.

"You may believe it for psychological reasons if you want to, but I'm a customs man. No such thing ever happened on the face of the earth!"

The messenger boy came running up the deck and delivered a parcel. Slidenberry signed for it and opened it.

"Oh," he ejaculated, "the clerk has found the consular reports at last. Let me see; what was the page?" He drew out his cablegram and consulted it. "1125 and 6."

The inspector turned through the pages until he found his citation, then stood looking at it blankly.

Poggioli glanced over his shoulder, then drew in his breath.

"Oh — that man!" he ejaculated.

The inspector turned sharply.

"That man? What man?"

"Read there at the bottom of the page."

Slidenberry read with an uncomprehending expression,

> July 5th. Today visaed the passport of the Magnificent Pompalone. Shipped him to Guiana on the French Line.

"Of course! Of course! Of course!" shouted Poggioli in amazed remembrance. "Dr. Sanchez is the Magnificent Pompalone — or once was. Heavens, yes, I remember him now!"

Slidenberry looked around.

"Who is he — or was he?"

"Why he's an ex-dictator of Venezuela."

"Is what he says true?"

"I suppose it is. In fact, I'm sure it is."

"But, Mr. Poggioli, how is it possible —"

"Why, you see, a group of nations — America, England, France, Holland and some others — went into an agreement not to allow the ex-dictator to return to his country because he would start another revolution. That would upset business and cost everybody money and time. When I knew him the Dutch authorities were trying to keep him on Curaçao, but he got away during a storm."

Slidenberry was amazed.

"Then there must be some truth in what he's telling. I suppose the authorities got tired of following him about and just lodged him in jail on some charge or other as the easiest way to keep him."

"Certainly. And what could be simpler than a customs offense?"

The inspector was moved at the old man's trials.

"Well, I'm going back and tell him he has nothing to fear from me."

The two men re-entered the stateroom and found Dr. Sanchez sitting on his bunk, which was scattered with small, snowy, harp-like designs. The old man said acridly —

"I trust, señores, my finding these hasn't upset any plan you may have had to land me in prison."

Slidenberry exclaimed automatically —

"Poggioli, there are the feathers!"

Dr. Sanchez laughed with brief irony.

"Officer, I declare these egret feathers. I don't know how many there are."

The inspector looked blankly at the ornaments.

"You can't enter these in the United States; they are prohibited."

"I know that, señor. It has always struck me as touchingly beautiful for the American people to be so considerate of the wild birds of Venezuela while they kept a Venezuelan imprisoned year after year for fear he might go home and upset their commerce."

Slidenberry paid no attention to this.

"What are you going to do with your feathers? They can't go ashore."

For answer the old man drew out his cigar lighter, snapped a flame and began applying it to the egrets one by one. The stench filled the cabin. Slidenberry watched the destruction rather blankly.

"Have you got any diamonds in your bags?" he asked after a space.

"That I don't know," said the ex-dictator.

"Well, since you have feathers, I suspect you have diamonds too."

"Why? Do the two things go together?"

"So I've been informed."

"If I fail to find them and you do find them, will I be put in prison as a smuggler?" inquired the old man.

"Of course not," snapped the inspector. "If you actually help me search your bags for diamonds we'll be partners in the matter, won't we?"

With this agreement the two returned to the work in good earnest, rummaging through the trunks and the rest of the clothes. Slidenberry was more expert than the ex-dictator; he examined the trunks for false bottoms and double tops; he ran his fingers along the seams of the coats and trousers; he looked under the lining of Dr. Sanchez' hat. In the midst of this work

he pushed aside a stray envelope on the floor with the toe of his shoe. A faint tinkle made him stoop and pick it up. He opened the flap and looked inside.

"Here they are," he said dryly.

Poggioli was astonished.

"You don't mean they were thrown around loose like that!"

"That's part of the technique," returned the inspector, "hiding it right under our eyes."

Dr. Sanchez watched this discovery impassively.

"What would you have done, señor," he inquired, "if by chance I had picked up the envelope before you did?"

The customs officer had to think twice before he knew what the old man meant, then he exclaimed —

"You think I put them there!"

"Think?" snapped the old man in sudden wrath. "I know it! Do you imagine I would deliberately help you customs men land me in jail by attempting to smuggle so much as a pin into your country?"

Slidenberry studied the exiled Venezuelan —

"You and I started searching for these diamonds together, didn't we?"

Sanchez nodded slowly and questioningly.

"You admitted you had them — or might have them — but neither of us knew where they were?"

"*Si, señor* — and what is your conclusion?" asked Sanchez in suspense.

"My conclusion is you have declared these diamonds and all that is required is for you to pay the normal duty on them and enter this country as a free man, señor."

Poggioli interrupted.

"Look here," he pointed out. "These diamonds were *not* mislaid in a chance envelope in the middle of the floor. That's impossible."

Slidenberry gave a short laugh.

"I know that, but under the circumstances I am going to rule arbitrarily that these diamonds were mislaid and found."

The scientist turned to the passenger.

"Dr. Sanchez, how do you explain this envelope?"

"Señor," said the old man, "why does so simple a thing need any explanation? Captain Slidenberry comes into my room and throws a package of diamonds on my floor. He means to arrest me, but for some reason he has a change of heart —"

"Look here," interrupted Slidenberry, "you know that's a falsehood!"

"Slidenberry! Slidenberry!" protested the psychologist. "Maybe he actually believes what he says!"

"How can he? Either he or I —"

"No, not necessarily; some third person could have stepped in here and dropped the envelope; then each one of you would think the other did it."

"What third person?"

"I don't know — the man who sent the cable; another inspector besides yourself. You see, when the United States has pledged itself to keep Dr. Sanchez out of Venezuela, what easier method would there be than to keep him in jail?"

Slidenberry nodded, unconvinced, and cooled off.

"Well, at any rate I have agreed to let Sanchez go free when he pays the duty on these jewels. I stand by my agreement."

As the inspector said this Poggioli poured some of the stones out in his palm and looked at them, at first casually, then with dawning astonishment and suspicion.

"Mr. Slidenberry," said the scientist in an odd tone, "Dr. Sanchez didn't bring these stones on this ship."

"Why do you say that?" demanded the officer.

The criminologist handed over the jewels.

"Because they're glass."

The inspector received the sparkling bits incredulously, or at least with an excellent imitation of incredulity.

"Then I should say," he diagnosed slowly, "that Dr. Sanchez was fooled in his purchase."

Poggioli shook his head.

"No, an ex-dictator, an ex-millionaire, would hardly mistake paste for diamonds."

"Then what is there to think?" demanded Slidenberry quite at sea.

"Well, if some third person didn't bring the sack in here —"

"You mean I did?" cried Slidenberry, amazed.

"What else is there to think? Sanchez didn't do it."

"Look here," cried Slidenberry, thrown for a moment on the defensive, "it's absurd the idea of my doing such a thing! I couldn't incriminate Dr. Sanchez with such brummagem as this! There's no law against bringing glass into America!"

The old Latin-American himself shook his head slowly.

"I believe this is the most complicated plot that has ever been woven around me," he said. "If it had been in a French port I would not have been surprised. Even the Dutch might have originated it; but for simple minded North Americans to hatch up anything so complicated — it amazes me."

Suddenly Slidenberry tossed the envelope on the bunk.

"I've got it!" he announced triumphantly, turning to confront the psychologist with a grim smile. "I've got it now!"

"What is it?" inquired Poggioli.

"Why, that was a blind to throw us off the trail, of course. Now let's get to work and find the real stones!"

As the inspector searched, Poggioli introduced himself to the dictator and recalled to him the matter of the murder in Curaçao. The old adventurer was immensely moved.

"*Gracias a Dios* that I should see that clever young American again before I die," he cried. "The mystery you solved in that Godforsaken island, señor, was much darker than that which surrounds me now."

The old man arose, embraced and kissed Poggioli in the affectionate Venezuelan manner.

"But still this is rather an oddly twisted case, Dr. Sanchez," suggested Poggioli.

"Puh, nothing of the sort; simply a customs inspector trying to send me to jail with glassware!"

Poggioli looked puzzled.

"But why is he searching so thoroughly now?"

"To save his face, señor."

"But, señor, look at him. That isn't the psychology of a desultory search. It isn't necessary to squeeze out your shaving cream to save his face. Then he found feathers in your room. He didn't bring them in with him."

"No-o. That is a queer thing, señor. Feathers — was the inspector expecting feathers?"

"Yes, he was. I'll tell you the truth, señor; he had a cable from Belize instructing him to search you for feathers and diamonds."

"Oh la! So those feathers were sewn into my military uniform in British America!"

"Or possibly on the voyage here. The cable could have been filed ahead of time to be sent later."

"You have a great head, señor; you think of every combination that can possibly exist. You catch the truth not in the Latin style of a burst of divination, but in the North American style of wearing her down by endless analysis, of making her surrender out of sheer boredom, Señor Poggioli."

This somewhat dubious compliment was interrupted by Slidenberry. He arose from his search, stood balked in the middle of the cabin.

"You may go," he said slowly, "I pass your trunks. I find nothing dutiable in them."

The old man looked at him cryptically.

"I can go ashore free?"

"That's what I said."

Sanchez shrugged.

"Do you imagine I would fall into so obvious a trap as that, señor?"

Slidenberry stared at the Latin.

"What the hell are you talking about now?"

Dr. Sanchez sighed wearily.

"You know very well. You find glassware; you say, 'These are not his diamonds; I will find genuine diamonds.' Well, I am as wary as you. I look at the glassware; I say to myself, 'These are not his diamonds; I will be as clever as he is and avoid his genuine diamonds.' " The old man patted himself on the chest.

Slidenberry looked at him.

"I almost thank God I don't know what you are talking about."

"I'll make myself clear. How easy it would have been for you to have hidden a real diamond in my trunk or toothpaste or clothes; then, when I step ashore, I will be searched and, la! caged up again."

"Good Lord, you don't think I'd plant a real diamond —"

"Think! I know it. Why would you make such a stir with paste if you did not intend to plant a real one?" The old man laughed.

Slidenberry looked at him.

"Really, our faith in each other is touching. All right, what do you intend to do if I can't even clear your baggage and let you go ashore?"

"This," said the old Venezuelan pungently. "By the strangest coincidence there is a man in my cabin whom I can trust. I am going to ask Señor Poggioli to take my money ashore, buy me a complete new outfit of clothes, bring them back here, let me dress and disembark from this ship in a virgin costume."

With this the old man went to his trunk, drew out a canvas bag of specie, silver and gold, swung it toward Poggioli and set it clinking on a chair.

The psychologist looked at the old man in amazement.

"Why any such rigmarole as this, señor?" he asked curiously.

"Señor," said Sanchez, "how can you ask me? You know how long I have sweated in prison on trumped-up charges. You would be wary too if you saw ahead of you one tiny glimpse of freedom."

Poggioli stood pondering this new development when Slidenberry nodded him aside. When they were outside the cabin door the inspector whispered intently —

"Well, what do you make of that, Dr. Poggioli?"

"I think — I think that throws a new light on the subject," answered the psychologist carefully.

"How?"

"This is a positive move. Don't you see — up to this point his maneuvering has been negative and defensive; now it is for me to do something for him.".

"But, listen," pressed the inspector, "don't you see it works out just right for us? If he takes absolutely nothing ashore, he takes nothing ashore — does he? Now I believe he's cracked — as you would say, got a complex, not to say a mania — on the subject of prisons. I suppose he has been driven to it by his experiences which you describe. So, if you don't mind, I wish you would go get him an outfit and let him walk off the ship in his birthday clothes as far as anything he brought into this country is concerned."

Poggioli could see why Slidenberry jumped at such an opportunity. He agreed to the plan, full of vague suspicion created by this new quirk of the ex-dictator. Dr. Sanchez handed him the bag of Venezuelan coins, gave him a money changer's address in the Latin quarter of Miami and also a list of the shirt, suit and shoe sizes that he wore. The psychologist went ashore in an odd mood.

The money changer was in Miramar Street near the harbor. He ran a mere booth, arranged in the room of a private house, evidently one of those men who attend to the wants of his fellow Venezuelans before they learn the ways of American banks.

The fellow weighed the gold and silver coins in a pair of scales instead of counting them and gave Poggioli the exchange in American money.

An hour later the scientist took the clothes on board the *Stanhope*. Sliden-

berry had occupied his time by re-searching everything in the cabin, but without results. The whole affair would apparently remain an unsolved mystery, that is if it really were a mystery and not the maunderings of an unbalanced brain.

Dr. Sanchez had Slidenberry stand completely outside the cabin while he changed his apparel from hat to shoes. Then he pointed to his baggage.

"That I am going to leave in bond, señores, until I get ready to sail from this country. Then I'll search it myself and see what you planted in it at the last hour."

The inspector shook his head.

"Crazy as bedlam," he said, as he and Poggioli watched Sanchez go ashore.

After the ex-dictator had gone the different phases of the incident simmered in Poggioli's mind. No two pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit together. Slidenberry, too, was curious, but he was relieved.

"That was a devil of a layout," he said. "Egret feathers, glass diamonds. I suppose they really must have been planted by that J. Dugmore Lampton, after all — he was an English customs officer, and he was no doubt following precedent in the consular reports when he arranged for Sanchez to be seized at this end of the line."

"Why did Sanchez wish that complete change of clothes?" pressed Poggioli, unsatisfied. "You know he could have worn ashore his shirt, undershirt, socks —"

"Oh, that was just his obsession, his craziness."

"All right. Admit that. Then why did J. Dugmore Lampton quote the consular reports? As I said long ago, if he is a consul he knows those reports go in the discard the moment they are published. For Lampton's memory to go back to 1915, and quote reports of that year, that isn't human, Mr. Slidenberry."

"Well, I'm not worrying about that end of the line," the inspector laughed. "Sanchez is ashore and he took nothing with him."

At this moment a Western Union boy came bicycling down the wharf and rounded into the inspector with a message.

Slidenberry looked at the enclosure, then puckered his brow and read aloud:

"NO SUCH PERSON AS J. DUGMORE LAMPTON REGISTERED WITH AMERICAN CONSULATE AT BELIZE. ERROR POSSIBLE. MAY BE J. HAMILTON SMITH."

The two men stood holding this second cablegram between them, looking at it.

"Well," said Slidenberry slowly, "so there was no J. Dugmore Lampton, or if there is one he is not expecting any reward after all —"

Poggioli burst out:

"My heavens! Of course, of course, that's the solution of it!"

"What? What's the solution of what?"

"The whole thing! There isn't any Lampton. Dr. Sanchez himself sent that cablegram. Why didn't I think of that at once? Of course he is the only man in the world who could quote year and page of consular reports as far back as 1915 because you see his name is mentioned in them. In fact, he was deported then. He would have no trouble at all remembering the date."

"But there's no sense to that!" cried Slidenberry. "What in the world would he want to make all this trouble for himself for?"

"He is like a sleight-of-hand performer; he wanted to center our attention on diamonds and feathers while he slipped something else past us. He wanted to make absolutely sure of it. I suppose he needs money for some new revolutionary undertaking."

Slidenberry dropped his hands hopelessly.

"But, look, man, he didn't go ashore with anything — nothing at all. Even his clothes are new!"

Poggioli laughed wryly.

"No-o, he didn't, but I did."

Slidenberry looked surprised.

"You — you went ashore — what with?"

"Why, his money, of course; I took that ashore, didn't I?"

"But money can't conceal diamonds and egret feathers!"

"Of course not, but you could take a five-bolivar piece, couldn't you, and — come on, come on, let's get to that money changer's address and look into this thing."

The two men hailed a taxi and whirled a few blocks to Miramar Street. When they reached the house, a very simple old householder met them.

"Where is that money changer, the one I traded with an hour or so ago?" hurriedly asked the psychologist.

The householder, who was an Ecuadorian, spread his hands.

"Señores, he gave up his room. He is gone. Did he cheat you? No, I hope not."

"No, he didn't cheat me! He smuggled dope — cocaine, I imagine — out of a ship down at the docks."

"Are you Señor Poggioli?" asked the householder.

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"A very fine gentleman left with me a note and a little token. He said you would call and get it."

"Well, give it to me!"

The Ecuadorian hustled away for a moment and returned with a note and a five-bolivar piece. The note said:

> *Muchas gracias, señor,* for your highly esteemed services. I am leaving you a little souvenir which will assure that your deductions, although somewhat tardy, are correct.
>
> Always your friend and admirer,
>
> — XENOPHON QUINTERO SANCHEZ

The souvenir was a very light five-bolivar piece. Poggioli twisted it experimentally. It unscrewed and disclosed the fact that it was a small silver container. It was empty and had been cleaned thoroughly. Legally it proved nothing.

The case of the meek little man and the spread-eagled corpse. A Thatcher Colt *story.*

ABOUT THE PERFECT CRIME OF MR. DIGBERRY

by ANTHONY ABBOT

THE FACTS in the case of Mr. Digberry have not been disclosed by the New York Police Department. Absurd as the statement may sound, Mr. Thatcher Colt, then Police Commissioner, actually connived with the little man to conceal all evidence of his singular misdeeds. Mr. Digberry was guilty of one felony and deeply involved in a second crime of peculiar fiendishness and horror. Yet he was allowed to go free, with his pockets stuffed with money and his secret utterly safe.

Now, after three years, the Digberry bargain has come to an end. In revealing the circumstances, as I learned them while I was confidential secretary to the commissioner, I am able to give at last a complete account of the murder of one of the most beautiful women in New York.

I first saw Mr. Digberry in the line-up about nine-thirty one scorching August morning. More than a thousand detectives were crowded into the old gymnasium of the Headquarters Building at 240 Centre Street. Across the runway, that Monday morning, passed a defiant parade of law-breakers. Auto thieves and dope peddlers, gunmen and blackmailers, they came forth, put on their hats and took them off again, stood fullface and profile, and were marched off in custody.

It was in such unholy company that Thatcher Colt and I encountered one of the truly unique conspirators of criminal history.

"Everett P. Digberry!"

Assistant Chief Inspector Flynn barked the name angrily, and a small, bald-headed man, with a fringe of gray hair around his temples and with large, blinking eyes, walked indignantly toward the center of the platform. His gray Palm Beach suit was wrinkled, and against his left side he pressed a stiff straw hat, banded with a gay ribbon of red and blue.

"You were found climbing over the back wall of St. Christopher's Ceme-

tery, the Bronx, at two A.M. on Sunday, and you are charged with carrying a concealed weapon without a license. Are you guilty or not?"

"I would like to explain," began Mr. Digberry. "As a citizen, I demand—"

"Have you ever been arrested before?"

"Never. I can explain everything!"

"You'll have to!" was Flynn's grim assurance. "Where did you get this gun — a thirty-two-caliber French Touron? Come on, now, speak up!"

"I haven't the remotest idea where I got it," rasped Mr. Digberry. "All this was due to a letter from the Driller. If you would only listen —"

But by then he was being yanked through the door, and the next suspect faced the lights.

"Tony," whispered Thatcher Colt to me, "get that fellow and bring him to my office. I want to talk to him!"

I glanced at Colt in surprise. But orders were orders, and at ten o'clock I led my man into the commissioner's private office.

"I've just read a report about you, Digberry," Colt stated accusingly. "You've been lying! What were you doing in that graveyard at two o'clock in the morning?"

Mr. Digberry gulped. "I've been trying to answer that all night long, and no one will listen to me! Won't you let me tell my story in my own way?"

"Do I understand that you have a letter signed by the Driller?" asked Colt.

"I have, chief!"

"Then go ahead and tell your story in your own way."

"Well, you see, to begin with, I'm a wigmaker," explained Mr. Digberry. "I carry on a manufacturing business founded by my grandfather. I produce wigs of mohair, human hair, and of silk and wool, suitable for all characters and impersonations. Also, a complete line of wigs for dolls."

"What has that to do with your recent behavior? You'll have to come to the point!"

"I am now at the point," declared Mr. Digberry. "I am only a victim, chief. You see, I've been spending the summer alone at my home in New Rochelle. My family — I have a wife and six daughters — are at a bungalow in Maine. That's why I've had to face the whole thing alone. This letter — this ghastly letter from the Driller — came at a moment when I needed all my mental resources for my own business. I am about to launch a new idea in the wig field: a soft, flexible cap of silk gauze, with the hair sewn —"

"When did you get this letter?" interrupted Colt.

"One week ago."

"What did it say?"

"It told me I must pay the sum of one thousand dollars or be killed!"

"And how were you to pay this money?"

"I was to wait for directions."

"And you received them?"

"Yes, chief; that's why I was in the graveyard. Three days after the letter arrived, my telephone rang about six in the morning. A harsh voice told me to get the thousand dollars, and on Saturday — really, two o'clock Sunday morning — carry it in a bundle to Waverly Avenue and Gorsuch Street, in the Bronx; to climb over the wall of St. Christopher's Cemetery and go at once to my own family plot. I have three aunts buried in that plot. I was told to lay the money on the middle grave — Aunt Kate's."

"And you did that — without consulting the police?"

"Yes, I did, chief. After all, I have my wife and six daughters to think of. I drew the money out of our savings, laid it on Aunt Kate's grave and ran. But as I ran, I looked back and I saw a tall man pick up the money and disappear among the trees. Then I climbed over the wall and practically dropped into the arms of one of your policemen!"

"But you carried a revolver. Where did that come from?"

"As heaven is my witness, I don't know! I found it in my room about half past ten last Saturday night. I had gone out for a few minutes, and when I returned, I found the gun on the bed. A burglar has been in our apartment house three times recently. Perhaps he left it there. I don't know. But I took it along when I started for the cemetery. I meant to give it to an officer and explain —"

Colt looked incredulous and changed the subject. "From what bank did you get the money?"

"The Drovers and Mechanics in New Rochelle."

Colt glanced at me; a flash of his eyes that was an instruction. Going to another room, I called the manager of the Drovers and Mechanics Bank. Back in Colt's office, I nodded quickly — Colt knew I had confirmed the fact that Mr. Digberry had withdrawn one thousand dollars from his savings account.

"I'm going to be reasonable with you," Colt told the nervous little man. "Frankly, I don't believe your story about that revolver. I'll give you the

benefit of the doubt, but only if you're on the level and help the police."

"I'll do anything — anything."

"Where is your letter from the Driller?" Colt demanded, as he pressed a buzzer.

"In the top left-hand drawer of my wife's bureau at home."

The door opened to admit Captain Israel Henry, the official guardian of Colt's office.

"Send a detective with Mr. Digberry to his home for a letter," ordered Colt. "Bring down all his personal papers — bankbooks, insurance policies. Arrange with the district attorney to delay his appearance before the magistrate. And come back here with the letter."

At the door the captive turned. "Chief, my wife and daughters are coming home tomorrow afternoon. Can't I be released in time to meet them? And can't I get out of this without anybody being the wiser?"

Captain Henry practically tossed him through the door. Meanwhile, Colt had opened a drawer of his desk, lifted out a sheaf of papers and cast them on the blotter.

"The Driller's been causing some excitement, Tony."

"Don't believe I ever heard of him."

"Probably some harmless nitwit, but because of the people involved, I have to take it seriously. Ten of Manhattan's foremost citizens have received letters like the one that fellow just described. The chairman of the Opera Society got the first one. That was two weeks ago. Since then, several friends of mine have received similar threats. Each letter was typewritten and demanded payment of money, with death as the penalty for disobedience. Each promised further instructions as to how payment was to be made, and each was signed 'The Driller.'"

"Of course it's a crank!"

"The fantastic entrance of Mr. Digberry into the affair makes me wonder. Remember that all the other letters went to eminent citizens, ranging from John Otts, the bank president, to Margaret Coleman, the coloratura soprano. All persons of position and wealth — except Digberry. And Digberry is a wigmaker!"

Two minutes later, at Colt's summons, Inspector Flynn stalked into the office and Colt explained the situation.

"Get in touch with all these people who received Driller letters, Flynn! Find out if any of them know Digberry or have had any dealings with him."

Within half an hour Flynn phoned me. "Tell the chief I've got a man in my office who knows all about Digberry."

"Send him right up!" was Colt's instruction.

The stranger who entered the commissioner's office a minute or two later was young and slender and blond, with keen blue eyes and the grace that expresses athletic strength. He was Captain Edgar Walters, a correspondent for foreign journals, who lived in an East Side riverview apartment.

"I am a friend of Margaret Coleman," the visitor explained. "I was told you wished to question me."

"You know Digberry?"

"Madame Coleman does. I've met him once or twice. Eggy runt, you know — harmless but full of eloquence."

"How does Madame Coleman know Digberry?"

Captain Walters grinned. "Through his art as a wigmaker. He's an enthusiast about his work — a left-handed chap who can draw curious designs. He made Madame Coleman a remarkable wig for her rôle as Gilda in 'Rigoletto,' and has since made her other wigs. Mr. Digberry has a passion for exactitude. His wigs are most realistic."

Colt nodded thoughtfully and asked, "Where is Madame Coleman now?"

"In Norway."

"But she received one of these letters?"

"It was turned over to me."

"And what is your relation to Madame?"

Captain Walters made an expressive gesture with his hands. "I am what is called a 'ghost.' Madame Coleman's book of memoirs is soon to be published. I'm writing them for her — under her name, of course. We came to know each other when I was publishing a Riviera society and fashion magazine at Menton, and interviewed her there. That was before her divorce — you recall she was married to Lucius Polk Coleman, that jealous old poof-poof? A millionaire, but a hopeless muffle-head. I told her she was a fool to stick to him, and when that blew up —"

"Is the wigmaker trustworthy?"

Captain Walters chuckled. "Honest, yes; harmless, too, but the most garrulous creature alive. I don't know him well, but Madame Coleman finds him stimulating."

When Captain Walters had departed, after seeing the other Driller letters, Colt once more signaled for Flynn.

"I want to keep busy on this case," he told the inspector. "Trace that Digberry revolver. And let's go further with that paper, too — all those Driller notes were on identical sheets. . . . Now, Tony, let's get at this budget report."

But the budget was doomed to be neglected. Just before noon, Colt's phone rang sharply. The commissioner listened a minute, then swore devoutly. He hung up the receiver and reached for his hat. "Woman murdered on Sixty-fourth Street. One of our men who was at the line-up this morning is on the scene. And what did he find on the mantelpiece but a photograph of our Mr. Digberry!"

I reached for my hat as Colt braced Captain Henry.

"When Digberry is brought back here, hold him incommunicado. See particularly that he learns nothing about this Sixty-fourth Street murder!"

Drawn up under the porte-cochère on the Broome Street side of Headquarters was the commissioner's car. At the wheel sat the moonfaced Neil McMahon, Colt's chauffeur. With the siren blowing defiance of all the red lights, we raced uptown to the Wedgeworth Arms on Sixty-fourth Street, a few doors from Central Park.

The crime had been committed in a fourth-floor rear apartment, furnished — two rooms, kitchenette and bath. Here we found a full detail from the Homicide Squad and Doctor J. L. Multooler, an assistant medical examiner.

"We didn't want to move the body until you came, commissioner," the doctor explained. "You'll find it a peach of a case!"

"What's the woman's name?"

"She was known here as Mrs. Samuel Smith. Probably a fake!"

I am not easily shaken by woeful sights, but the scene that awaited us in that inner room was unnerving.

It was like a living room, but with a bed that collapsed into a wall closet, The door to that closet was now open wide, and the body of the victim was standing bolt upright, facing us — a beautiful blond woman, her face rouged and powdered.

She had been shot through the left temple, and the powder burns showed that the weapon had been held close to her head. It must have been the killer who placed her in this extraordinary position. Her shoeless feet were on the floor; a scarf was tied around her throat and drawn through the bedsprings. Her arms were lifted so that the ripped sleeves of her costly dress were attached to hooks in opposite sides of the closet.

Doctor Multooler's voice broke the silence. "I wonder who she really is!"

Colt turned to the surgeon with an amazed expression. "You don't recognize her?" he exclaimed. "This is the body of Margaret Coleman, the coloratura soprano. She was believed to be in Norway."

The commissioner's piercing glances searched the room, rested finally upon an overstuffed armchair drawn up to a window, overlooking a courtyard. The chair faced the singer's body.

Colt studied this chair with patient care.

"Blood on the upholstery," he announced. "She must have been sitting in this chair. The murderer entered the room unheard. He crept up behind her and shot through her left temple."

"But only a left-handed person would do that!" I exclaimed.

To this deduction of mine (of which I felt rather proud), Colt made no answer. Instead, he approached the body once more and lifted its left wrist.

"Bracelet watch with crystal broken," he announced. "That slight bruise over the right eye probably means the body toppled forward, striking the watch on the floor. The hands of the watch stopped at ten minutes past twelve."

"So the time of the murder is fixed," said Doctor Multooler.

Again Colt refrained from comment. Instead, he turned to Captain Allerton of the Homicide Squad.

"Observe that she had recently powdered and rouged her face. Get the trademark name of the powder, rouge and lipstick," directed the commissioner. "There must be samples in this apartment."

As Allerton moved along, Colt turned to a detective from the D. A.'s office.

"Where's that picture of Digberry?"

The detective pointed to the mantel behind us. There, indeed, stood a likeness of the wigmaker of New Rochelle. The picture had been torn across as if by angry hands. The top of it was missing. Colt picked it up with a low whistle of amazement.

Just then Captain Allerton brought in the manager of the Wedgeworth Arms, Percy J. Cooper. Colt questioned him in the outer room.

"When did anyone in this apartment house last see this woman alive?"

"Saturday night, about seven-thirty, when she had a meal served in her room."

"Did she have any visitors that night?"

"Yes, sir. That man there!" The manager pointed to Digberry's photograph.

"Do you know him?"

"I disrecollect his name, but we noticed him around here all the time."

"At what hour was he here on Saturday night?"

"The elevator boy says he got here late. He don't remember just when."

Mr. Cooper had not known his tenant was a famous singer; Margaret Coleman had not been recognized by the employees or tenants. She had come to the Wedgeworth Arms early in June — three days after her reported sailing, as it later developed — and engaged the apartment, paying two months' rent in advance.

"Did Madame have many visitors?"

"A few. One I distinctly remember — a gray-haired man about sixty. They had a terrific row about money. The neighbors heard Madame Coleman crying that she had been robbed and made penniless. I had to object to the noise."

"When was that?"

"About a month ago. I think the gray-haired man — he was short and dapper, I remember, and he carried a stick — came two or three times before, but never after that scene. She stopped at the desk the next morning and apologized. She said the man was her husband and asked me never to let him up in the elevator again."

"And Mr. Digberry — did he come often?" asked Colt, placing the torn photograph in his pocket.

"Nearly every night."

"Who discovered the body?"

"The floor maid. She couldn't get in yesterday, so she decided the tenant did not wish to be disturbed. But this morning, when no one answered her knocking, she went in. Seeing nobody around, she went ahead and cleaned up — until she opened that door!"

Colt dismissed the manager and we returned to the inner room. Inspector Flynn, who had arrived shortly after we did, came forward with something that gleamed dully in his hand. "The bullet that did it," he announced. "It flattened against the wall beside that armchair. My guess would be a thirty-two."

"Send it to the ballistics department," Colt ordered. "Tell them to compare it with the bullets from Digberry's gun."

Hedge, one of the assistant D. A.'s, was conferring with Captain Allerton.

"Our men have searched everywhere," Allerton reported, seeing Colt. "But all Madame Coleman's personal papers are missing. Whoever did it was thorough. No fingerprints, except the lady's."

Colt nodded abstractedly, his eyes once more searching the room for some significant detail. But there seemed to be no visible clues.

"Our men questioned twenty people in flats near this one; nobody heard the shot," continued Allerton. "But on Saturday night there were radios going in a lot of rooms in the house."

Colt's stalking around the room had brought him back to the open closet. The expanse of coiled bedspring filled his gaze. Beginning at the upper left-hand corner, he studied it by inches. Presently he lifted an almost invisible object that had been caught in the bedspring.

It was a gray hair!

On the sleeve of his left arm, Colt placed that threadlike clue. Against the blue serge, he could study it clearly; it was, indeed, a human hair, and yet there was a tiny fragment at one end that was certainly not human; it seemed more like a knotted sliver of white gauze.

I produced a department envelope from my pocket. In this, the hair was sealed and marked for identification.

Meanwhile, Colt was giving Flynn instructions. "Get Madame Coleman's husband. I want to question him downtown. And get that writer — Captain Walters. There are a few things he'll have to clear up. I'd like pictures of both of them. And come down to my office as soon as you can, inspector. I want you there when I talk to Digberry."

But our leaving was still delayed. Captain Allerton had obtained samples of Madame's facial preparations and Colt sat down to study them.

As I waited for him near the door, I felt a clammy hand touch mine. I turned around hastily to find myself staring into the pale eyes of Cooper.

"Take this," he whispered.

He placed in my hands a legal-sized envelope with bulky contents. A rubber band was around it; the flap was sealed.

"A thousand dollars reward for anyone who finds the guilty man — it might help the hotel's reputation," Cooper gurgled, and darted away.

As soon as we were in the car, I told the commissioner about the money. He merely nodded and shoved the envelope into his pocket. He remained silent until we reached Headquarters at two-thirty.

Digberry was waiting for us. "Where's the letter?" was Colt's first question.

Detective Mulvaney, who stood beside the prisoner, handed over a much-fingered envelope, from which Colt drew out a single sheet of notepaper. It was a duplicate of the ten others reposing in the drawer at his right hand.

"This calls for one thousand dollars or death," he commented. "Where is your bank passbook?"

Mulvaney promptly offered a gray-backed booklet, on the front of which appeared the names of Everett P. and Hattie Elizabeth Digberry, and a statement that the account was payable to either, or both, and to the survivor.

Colt flipped the pages; then glanced at the prisoner. "This is a new book. It has just been issued!"

"I lost the old one about three weeks ago. The bank advertised the loss, and then issued this new one for me."

Colt's eyes were solemn and accusing. "We'll come back to the bankbook matter later. In the meantime, what were your relations with Margaret Coleman?"

Mr. Digberry's cheeks blanched. "She was one of my customers," he replied.

"Wasn't she an intimate friend?"

"Miss Coleman reposed a great deal of confidence in me as an artist in my own line," the wigmaker admitted.

"Is that why she put your picture on her mantel? And is that why you visited her almost every night, when she was supposed to be in Europe?" pursued Colt relentlessly.

The prisoner thrust out his chin. His silence was plainly meant for defiance.

"Are you refusing to answer?"

"I am!" declared Mr. Digberry. "I really am! There's such a thing as professional confidence. Any questions about Madame Coleman she can answer for herself."

"You know better than that, Digberry. You know as well as I do that Margaret Coleman cannot answer any questions."

"How should I know that? Why can't she?"

"Because she's dead!"

"Dead! Margaret — dead?"

"Murdered!" Colt added. "With a bullet through her head. And you didn't know anything about that, did you?"

"Nothing!" groaned Digberry. "As God is my witness, I knew nothing about it."

"Didn't you visit Margaret Coleman Saturday night?" Colt demanded.

"No! Indeed, no!"

"Where were you?"

"I was in the cemetery."

"Where were you at midnight?"

"I was waiting outside the cemetery until the time to leave the money."

"Anybody see you from eleven-thirty until you were arrested at two?"

"Not a soul."

"And you call that an alibi?"

"I call it hell!" declared Mr. Digberry.

"I'm waiting to know what your relations were with Margaret Coleman."

"She liked me," replied Digberry. "There was nothing immoral in our friendship. She was lonely. So was I. She was tired of her smart friends. She always said she could talk to me. And she admired my work. You know she was divorced?"

"Well?"

"Her husband was Lucius Polk Coleman — a very rich man. When they parted he made a settlement. But even though they were divorced, he still wanted to tell her what to do with her money. Soon the money was all gone. She said she had been cheated out of it. She blamed a man — she would not name him, but I never had any doubt. Literally, Mr. Colt, that poor lady, that truly great musical artist, was broke. Think of that humiliation. Yet she had to keep up appearances. So she pretended to go abroad. Her idea was to save every cent to prepare for next season. But her stocks went down to nothing — literally nothing. And all the time she was working with a man at the bank to punish the man who had robbed her."

"What bank?" interposed Colt.

"The Harrison National."

Colt reached for the telephone. In five minutes one of our Wall Street Squad was on his way to the Harrison National Bank. While Colt was talking, Inspector Flynn came in. He saluted and sat down.

"Go on!" prompted Colt, when he had finished phoning.

"I was telling you," resumed Digberry, "how Madame pretended —"

"Never mind. Take a look at this, and see if you know what it is."

On his desk Colt laid the envelope containing the gray hair. He extracted the strand with a small pair of pincers.

"I recognize that," Digberry said spitefully. "It's evidently from a very poor wig made by a faker named Wilkins."

"How can you make a positive statement like that?" asked Colt.

"I know by the way that knot is tied. One wigmaker knows another's work."

Colt put away the hair. "Whom did Madame Coleman fear most?" he asked.

"Her husband. She was getting evidence to bring action against him."

Flynn chuckled grimly. "Surely you can tell us more than that. For instance, what time did you leave the Wedgeworth Arms on Saturday night?"

"I just told the chief I wasn't there on Saturday night," reiterated Mr. Digberry.

"But the manager saw you!"

"Not me. On Saturday night I had my own worries; I had to put a thousand dollars on Aunt Kate's grave."

"Is that the best you can do?" Colt cried. "All right, Flynn. Take him downstairs and let the boys talk to him!"

"The third degree!" groaned Digberry.

Flynn sent him off, shut the door and walked over to Colt's desk. "Here are the two pictures you wanted. I talked with Walters. He's out of it. At the time this woman was killed, Walters and a friend who spent the night with him were talking with our sergeant on that beat. That's an alibi nobody can smash."

"But what about her husband?"

Flynn sighed. "He sailed at one A.M. Saturday on a liner due in Cherbourg five days from now."

The door closed on Inspector Flynn.

"Get me the address of Wilkins," Colt called to me.

As I hurried to the outer office, I left him, telephone in hand, asking to be connected with the chief of the Paris police. I found the address of Elmer Wilkins, wigmaker, and Colt decided to call upon him.

Mr. Wilkins, a man with ears too big, a nose too long and a mouth too wide, received us with a Chinaman's smile. Before we had spoken, he assured

us that his firm was the oldest and most reliable in the United States.

Colt silenced him by stating, "I don't wish to buy any artificial hair today. I'm the police commissioner, and I want information." He drew forth the gray hair. "Now, what can you tell me about that?"

Mr. Wilkins produced a magnifying glass. "Perhaps it's from a wig that was made here," he conceded.

"How long since you made a gray wig?"

"I'll show you my records."

For ten minutes Colt and Wilkins pored over the books. Then I saw Colt produce three photographs from his pocket.

"Recognize any one of these men?"

"Why — why, yes I do. This one — it's the man himself."

"You have a quick eye, Mr. Wilkins. That's all I want to know."

With Wilkins' promise to remain within call, we hurried off. It was now six-thirty P.M.

"Amusing thing!" Colt said. "Just before we left, I had a telephone call from our Wall Street man. He discovered what Coleman was up to in her investigation, and it certainly ties up with that wig."

For the rest of that night and down to the Tuesday-morning breakfast hour Colt labored constantly on the Coleman murder case. Three times that night he talked on the transatlantic telephone with the Paris police. He also held a ten-minute conversation by radiophone with the captain of the liner on which Lucius Coleman had sailed. But not until an hour before midnight did we get a break in the case.

That came with the report of Doctor Multooler. At eleven he called Colt. "The autopsy fixes the time of death within ten minutes of ten o'clock," he announced.

"But Madame's watch stopped shortly after midnight!" gasped Colt.

"Nevertheless, my evidence is positive. I'll send you a full report in writing."

Multooler's discovery upset Colt's previous calculations. "I think we'll go up to the abode of Digberry," he announced.

The wigmaker's home was in St. Nicholas Place, not far from the railroad station in New Rochelle. During our swift drive to the suburb, Colt remarked, "That watch must have been stopped by opening the back and depressing the spring. Not a new alibi — but I didn't suspect it."

No more was said until we reached our destination, an old-fashioned,

five-story apartment building known as the Gloria Arms. Mr. Digberry leased Suite G, on the second floor, and the janitor willingly let us in. For ten minutes we traversed our prisoner's deserted rooms, but Colt admitted that his search was almost barren.

On our way out, he paused to question the girl in charge of the outmoded lobby switchboard. Yes, she had worked last Saturday night. Yes, she remembered a call for Mr. Digberry around ten-thirty. She finally admitted she had listened in.

"I heard a man say he had a message from Madame Coleman and would like to see Mr. Digberry at once, down at the railroad station. Right after that Mr. Digberry went out. But he came right back. After a little while I saw him go out again, and he didn't come back for quite a while. Even then, he went out later."

As Colt lighted his pipe in the car, his face was grave. "I won't know how to put this thing together," he confessed, "if all Digberry's extraordinary story is proved true. But this much is obvious. If our little bald friend is innocent, then the murderer played him a villainous trick.

"I believe I see through this crime now, Tony — but I don't know yet how to pin it on the murderer. There's one long shot," he added. "Do you remember that Walters had a visitor who spent the night with him? Well, Tony, there's our long shot; if it hits, we might get a perfect case."

When we returned to Headquarters, I sat down at my typewriter. I had three books full of stenographic pothooks on the case, and soon I was absorbed in their transcription. It must have been an hour later when I was disturbed by voices in the commissioner's office. I entered to find Colt seated at his desk. Spread before him were a gray Palm Beach suit and a straw hat with a band of red and blue. Colt was issuing orders to a detective.

"Use the vacuum cleaners on these clothes," directed the commissioner, "and turn the results over to our laboratory. The chemists know what to look for."

The detective saluted, gathered up the costume and departed.

"I've taken a chance on our long shot, Tony," declared Colt wearily.

It was Tuesday noon — twenty-four hours after the discovery of Margaret Coleman's body. Gathered in Colt's office were Inspector Flynn and Digberry, the commissioner and myself.

Flynn had failed to break down Digberry; nevertheless the inspector was satisfied of the little man's guilt.

"Mr. Digberry, where did you go when you left your house at ten-thirty Saturday night?" Colt demanded.

"I went to the station to see a man who didn't show up."

Flynn snorted. "I think we've stalled long enough with this fellow. I want to charge him with murder!"

"You have no case against me at all!" Digberry cried. "I demand to be represented by a lawyer!"

"You'll need a doctor if you take that tone," Flynn came back. "You wrote those Driller letters. We've traced the paper from the manufacturer to the dealer and found a supply of it in that hair works you run in New Rochelle. And the experts swear all the letters were written on a typewriter in your joint. And the one you wrote to yourself was only to cover up."

"Why should I do such a thing?" shouted Digberry.

Flynn gave a harsh chuckle. "You're asking me? You sent them as a blind, so the police would think the Driller killed Margaret Coleman. And he did. For you're the Driller, Digberry."

"I did *not* kill her!" Digberry screamed. "Why should I kill her?"

"Because you had a love affair with her. You've lied about everything. Here's the report from the bank. It's true that you drew out a thousand dollars. But not as ransom money, in one lump sum, as you said. You've been drawing that cash out in dribs and drabs all summer. While your wife was away, you were spending money on an opera singer. It was high life for you, Digberry, my boy. But now the end of the summer is near. You thought there was only one way to get rid of that woman. So the whole hocus-pocus was just a scheme of yours to kill Margaret Coleman and put the blame on some made-up villain!"

"Try to prove that I killed her!" Digberry taunted. "Just try!"

"I can do that, too," Flynn grated. "You had a gun on you, didn't you? Well, the shot that killed Margaret Coleman was fired from that gun."

Digberry whirled to Colt. "Mr. Commissioner, I'm not guilty of these things! How am I to face my wife —"

An attendant was ushering Captain Walters into the office.

"Hello!" he cried. "What's the row?"

"Just a few questions, captain," began Colt. "I believe you told me yesterday you met Madame Coleman at Menton?"

"Quite!"

Colt stood up and pointed at Captain Walters with the bowl of his pipe.

"It's a curious fact," he said, "that the revolver which Mr. Digberry says was left in his apartment by a burglar is one of French manufacture, purchased from a dealer in Menton, and containing a mark recognizable to the police!"

Walters began, "Do you infer —?"

"Tony, open that door!"

I opened a door just behind Colt's desk. Wilkins was standing there.

"Mr. Wilkins," called Colt, "do you recognize in this room any of your recent customers?"

Wilkins nodded. "The little blond fellow over there," he rumbled, pointing to Captain Walters. "He's the man I made the bald wig for the other day."

"See any head in this room that your wig resembled?"

The eyes of the two wigmakers met, and Wilkins roared, "Of course! Why didn't I think of it before? That wig was the dead image of old Digberry's head."

"That will do!" said Colt, and I closed the door after Wilkins, as an attendant led him away. Colt again faced Walters.

"I have your complete history," he announced. "This morning you kindly left your fingerprints on sensitized paper that I gave you when I showed you the Driller letters. Your prints were telephotoed to the police in Europe. You served time in France and Holland for blackmail."

Captain Walters laughed convincingly. "My dear Mr. Colt, you can't connect me with this murder. My alibi is complete. I had no motive and no opportunity."

Colt smiled. "You stole Madame Coleman's money, Walters," he said. "A banking friend of hers helped her to investigate you. The Parisian police co-operated and they told me all about that. Somehow you learned that the singer was in a fair way to send you to Devil's Island. So you decided to kill her!"

"That is preposterous! I refuse —"

"And you decided to make it a perfect crime. A perfect crime demands that the police have a victim. You decided on Digberry after calling on Margaret Coleman. She refused to forgive you. That was when you tore Digberry's picture. You wanted only the upper part of his head — the lower part might have been recognized by Wilkins, a fellow craftsman. For you meant to kill a woman and have it appear that Digberry was her

murderer. That was why you had a wig designed to make you resemble Digberry. That was why you bought a duplicate of his Palm Beach suit and his straw hat. We've traced the shops where you made those purchases. Too bad you didn't destroy the suit and hat and wig, but before you got around to it, they were in our hands.

"You dressed up like Digberry and went to the Wedgeworth Arms. It was a hot night; the door was open and you crept in. Mr. Digberry was left-handed, so you fired the fatal shot with your left hand."

"You can't prove one word of this."

"The concierge in Menton can prove that you owned the revolver with which Margaret Coleman was killed," pursued Colt. "That was the gun you planted in Digberry's apartment by calling him out and then going in yourself. After that, you thought the job was finished. You had faked the time on the wrist watch; by eleven o'clock, you were at home with your friend. You expected to prove you were home an hour before the crime was thought to be committed. Too bad a hair of your wig caught in that bedspring."

"You have no evidence that will put me on the scene of the crime," Walters snarled.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Walters," Colt replied. "But I really can put you on the scene of that murder. You remember that Margaret Coleman's face was powdered and rouged. She preferred a distinctive powder made by a craftsman in Norway. Madame still had some of it left from more prosperous days. When the killer lifted that body it was inevitable that some of the powder should fall on his clothing. And we found some of it on your suit — our chemists have identified it."

"I've nothing to say," replied Walters thickly, "until I talk with my attorney."

Two detectives came and took him away to a fate that all New York remembers.

When the door had closed, Inspector Flynn rose. "Mr. Commissioner," he protested, "that was wonderful work, but there's still the evidence against Digberry. He did write those letters; he did lie about taking the money out of the bank."

Colt chuckled. "You're right," he agreed. "Mr. Digberry, as Captain Walters told us, has a passion for realism, for exactitude. That is shown in his masterpieces of wigs, and also in his visit to the cemetery."

"But he didn't have a thousand dollars with him, chief —"

"Because he wanted to befriend a lady who had been gracious to him, Mr. Digberry drew on the savings which were the joint property of his wife and himself. Tomorrow, Mrs. Digberry returns. The day of reckoning is at hand. The new bankbook will hide the withdrawals. But what about the balance? Mr. Digberry must explain to his wife what he did with the missing thousand. Hence, he invented these letters and included himself among ten illustrious others."

Flynn began to laugh. But Colt, opening a strongbox in his lower drawer, drew out a sheaf of green paper money.

"The Wedgeworth Arms has posted a reward of one thousand dollars," he explained. "Mr. Digberry, you identified the Wilkins wig — I think you earned the cash and the glory."

"I would like the cash," Digberry admitted. "But chief, my wife mustn't know about this affair. Give the credit to Mr. Flynn."

With his pockets full of money, the wigmaker ran off to meet the train. Colt had promised to keep the facts a deep secret. And so he did — but Digberry, since a widower, has married again and the necessity for silence has passed.

A distinguished yarn of the hard-boiled school, with the impact of a machine gun and the jangle of honky-tonk.

DIME A DANCE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

PATSY MARINO was clocking us as usual when I barged in through the foyer. He had to look twice at his watch to make sure it was right when he saw who it was. Or pretended he had to, anyway. It was the first time in months I'd breezed in early enough to climb into my evening dress and powder up before we were due on the dance floor.

Marino said, "What's the matter, don't you feel well?"

I snapped, "D'ya have to pass a medical examination to get in here and earn a living?" and gave him a dirty look across the frayed alley-cat I wore on my shoulder.

"The reason I ask is you're on time. Are you sure you're feeling well?" he pleaded sarcastically.

"Keep it up and you won't be," I promised, but soft-pedalled it so he couldn't quite get it. He was my bread and butter after all.

The barn looked like a morgue. It always did before eight — or so I'd heard. They didn't have any of the "pash" lights on yet, those smoky red things around the walls that gave it atmosphere. There wasn't a cat in the box, just five empty gilt chairs and the coffin. They had all the full-length windows overlooking the main drag open to get some ventilation in, too. It didn't seem like the same place at all; you could actually breathe fresh air in it!

My high heels going back to the dressing-room clicked hollowly in the emptiness, and my reflection followed me upside-down across the waxed floor, like a ghost. It gave me a spooky feeling, like tonight was going to be a bad night. And whenever I get a spooky feeling, it turns out to be a bad night all right.

I shoved the dressing-room door in and started: "Hey, Julie, why didn't you wait for me, ya getting too high-hat?" Then I quit again.

She wasn't here either. If she wasn't at either end, where the hell was she?

Only Mom Henderson was there, reading one of tomorrow morning's tabs. "Is it that late?" she wanted to know when she saw me.

"Aw, lay off," I said. "It's bad enough I gotta go to work on a empty stomach." I slung my cat-pelt on a hook. Then I sat down and took off my pumps and dumped some foot powder in them, and put them back on again.

"I knocked on Julie's door on my way over," I said, "and didn't get any answer. We always have a cup of Java together before we come to work. I don't know how I'm going to last the full fifteen rounds —"

An unworthy suspicion crossed my mind momentarily: Did Julie purposely dodge me to get out of sharing a cup of coffee with me like I always took with her other nights? They allowed her to make it in her rooming-house because it had a fire-escape; they wouldn't allow me to make it in mine. I put it aside as unfair. Julie wasn't that kind; you could have had the shirt off her back — only she didn't wear a shirt, just a brassière.

"Matter?" Mom sneered. "Didn't you have a nickel on you to buy your own?"

Sure I did. Habit's a funny thing, though. Got used to taking it with a side-kick and — I didn't bother going into it with the old slob.

"I got a feeling something's going to happen tonight," I said, hunching my shoulders.

"Sure," said Mom. "Maybe you'll get fired."

I thumbed my nose at her and turned the other way around on my chair. She went back to her paper. "There haven't been any good murders lately," she lamented. "Damn it, I like a good, juicy murder wanst in a while!"

"You're building yourself up to one right in here," I scowled into the mirror at her.

She didn't take offense; she wasn't supposed to, anyway. "Was you here when that thing happened to that Southern girl, Sally, I think, was her name?"

"No!" I snapped. "Think I'm as old as you? Think I been dancing here all my life?"

"She never showed up to work one night, and they found her — That was only, let's see now. . . ." She figured it out on her fingers. "Three years ago."

"Cut it out!" I snarled. "I feel low enough as it is!"

Mom was warming up now. "Well, for that matter, how about the Fred-

ericks kid? That was only a little while before you come here, wasn't it?"

"I know," I cut her short. "I remember hearing all about it. Do me a favor and let it lie."

She parked one finger up alongside her mouth. "You know," she breathed confidentially, "I've always had a funny feeling one and the same guy done away with both of them."

"If he did, I know who I wish was third on his list!" I was glowering at her, when thank God the rest of the chain gang showed up and cut the death-watch short. The blonde came in, and then the Raymond tramp, and the Italian frail, and all the rest of them — all but Julie.

I said, "She was never as late as this before!" and they didn't even know who or what I was talking about. Or care. Great bunch.

A slush-pump started to tune up outside, so I knew the cats had come in too.

Mom Henderson got up, sighed. "Me for the white tiles and rippling waters," and waddled out to her beat.

I opened the door on a crack and peeped out, watching for Julie. The pash lights were on now and there were customers already buying tickets over the bird cage. All the other taxi-dancers were lining up — but not Julie.

Somebody behind me yelled, "Close that door! Think we're giving a free show in here?"

"You couldn't interest anyone in that second-hand hide of yours even with a set of dishes thrown in!" I squelched absent-mindedly, without even turning to find out who it was. But I closed it anyway.

Marino came along and banged on it and hollered, "Outside, you in there! What do I pay you for anyway?" and somebody yelled back: "I often wonder!"

The cats exploded into a razz-matazz just then with enough oompah to be heard six blocks away, so it would pull them in off the pave. Once they were in it was up to us. We all came out single file, to a fate worse than death, me last. They were putting the ropes up, and the mirrored tops started to go around in the ceiling and scatter flashes of light all over everything, like silver rain.

Marino said, "Where you goin', Ginger?" and when he used your front name like that it meant he wasn't kidding.

I said, "I'm going to phone Julie a minute, find out what happened to her."

"You get out there and goona-goo!" he said roughly. "She knows what time the session begins! How long's she been working here, anyway?"

"But she'll lose her job, you'll fire her," I wailed.

He hinged his watch. "She is fired already," he said flatly.

I knew how she needed that job, and when I want to do a thing I do it. A jive-artist was heading my way, one of those barnacles you can't shake off once they fasten on you. I knew he was a jive, because he'd bought enough tickets to last him all week; a really wise guy only buys them from stretch to stretch. The place might burn down for all he knows.

I grabbed his ticket and tore it quick, and Marino turned and walked away. So then I pleaded, "Gimme a break, will you? Lemme make a phone call first. It won't take a second."

The jive said, "I came in here to danst."

"It's only to a girl friend," I assured him. "And I'll smile pretty at you the whole time." (*Clink! Volunteer* 8–1111.) "And I'll make it up to you later, I promise I will." I grabbed him quick by the sleeve. "Don't go way, stand here!"

Julie's landlady answered. I said, "Did Julie Bennett come back yet?"

"I don't know," she said. "I ain't seen her since yesterday."

"Find out for me, will ya?" I begged. "She's late and she'll lose her job over here."

Marino spotted me, came back and thundered: "I thought I told you —"

I waved the half ticket in his puss. "I'm working," I said. "I'm on this gentleman's time," and I goona-gooed the jive with teeth and eyes, one hand on his arm.

He softened like ice cream in a furnace. He said, "It's all right, Mac," and felt big and chivalrous or something. About seven cents worth of his dime was gone by now.

Marino went away again, and the landlady came down from the second floor and said, "She don't answer her door, so I guess she's out."

I hung up and I said, "Something's happened to my girl friend. She ain't there and she ain't here. She wouldn'ta quit cold without telling me."

The goona-goo was beginning to wear off the jive by this time. He fidgeted, said, "Are you gonna danst or are you gonna stand there looking blue?"

I stuck my elbows out. "Wrap yourself around this!" I barked impatiently. Just as he reached, the cats quit and the stretch was on.

He gave me a dirty look. "Ten cents shot to hell!" and he walked off to find somebody else.

I never worry about a thing after it's happened, not when I'm on the winning end anyway. I'd put my call through, even if I hadn't found out anything. I got back under the ropes, and kept my fingers crossed to ward off garlic-eaters.

By the time the next stretch began, I knew Julie wasn't coming any more that night. Marino wouldn't have let her stay even if she had, and I couldn't have helped her get around him any more, by then, myself. I kept worrying, wondering what had happened to her, and that creepy feeling about tonight being a bad night came over me stronger than ever, and I couldn't shake it off no matter how I goona-gooed.

The cold orangeade they kept buying me during the stretches didn't brace me up any either. I wasn't allowed to turn it down, because Marino got a cut out of the concession profits.

The night was like most of the others, except I missed Julie. I'd been more friendly with her than the rest of the girls, because she was on the square. I had the usual run of freaks.

"With the feet, with the feet," I said wearily, "lay off the belt-buckle crowding."

"What am I supposed to do, build a retaining wall between us?"

"You're supposed to stay outside the three-mile limit," I flared, "and not try to go mountain climbing in the middle of the floor. Do I look like an Alp?" And I glanced around to see if I could catch Marino's eye.

The guy quit pawing. Most of them are yellow like that. But on the other hand, if a girl complains too often, the manager begins to figure her for a trouble-maker. "Wolf!" you know, so it don't pay.

It was about twelve when they showed up, and I'd been on the floor three and a half hours straight, with only one more to go. There are worse ways of earning a living. You name them. I knew it was about twelve because Duke, the front man, had just wound up "*The Lady is a Tramp*," and I knew the sequence of his numbers and could tell the time of night by them, like a sailor can by bells. Wacky, eh? Half-past — "*Limehouse Blues*."

I gandered at them when I saw them come in the foyer, because customers seldom come in that late. Not enough time left to make it worth the general admission fee. There were two of them; one was a fat, bloated little guy, the kind we call a "belly-wopper," the other was a pip. He wasn't tall, dark and

handsome because he was medium-height, light-haired and clean-cut looking without being pretty about it, but if I'd had any dreams left he coulda moved right into them. Well, I didn't, so I headed for the dressing-room to count up my ticket stubs while the stretch was on; see how I was making out. Two cents out of every dime when you turn them in.

They were standing there sizing the barn up, and they'd called Marino over to them. Then the three of them turned around and looked at me just as I made the door, and Marino thumbed me. I headed over to find out what was up. Duke's next was a rhumba, and I said to myself: "If I draw the kewpie, I'm going to have kittens all over the floor."

Marino said, "Get your things, Ginger." I thought one of them was going to take me out; they're allowed to do that, you know, only they've got to make it up with the management for taking you out of circulation. It's not as bad as it sounds, you can still stay on the up and up, sit with them in some laundry and listen to their troubles. It's all up to you yourself.

I got the backyard sable and got back just in time to hear Marino say something about: "Will I have to go bail for her?"

Fat said, "Naw, naw, we just want her to build up the background a little for us."

Then I tumbled, got jittery, squawked: "What is this, a pinch? What've I done? Where you taking me?"

Marino soothed: "They just want you to go with them, Ginger. You be a good girl and do like they ast." Then he said something to them I couldn't figure. "Try to keep the place here out of it, will you, fellas? I been in the red for six months, as it is."

I cowered along between them like a lamb being led to the slaughter, looking from one to the other. "Where you taking me?" I wailed, going down the stairs.

Maiden's Prayer answered, in the cab. "To Julie Bennett's, Ginger." They'd gotten my name from Marino, I guess.

"What's she done?" I half sobbed.

"May as well tell her now, Nick," Fat suggested. "Otherwise she'll take it big when we get there."

Nick said, quietly as he could, "Your friend Julie met up with some tough luck, babe." He took his finger and he passed it slowly across his neck.

I took it big right there in the cab, Fat to the contrary. "Ah, no!" I whispered, holding my head. "She was on the floor with me only last night!

Just this time last night we were in the dressing-room together having a smoke, having some laughs! No! She was my only friend." And I started to bawl like a two-year-old, straight down my make-up onto the cab floor.

Finally this Nick, after acting embarrassed as hell, took a young tent out of his pocket, said: "Have yourself a time on this, babe."

I was still working on it when I went up the rooming-house stairs sandwiched between them. I recoiled just outside the door. "Is she — is she still in there?"

"Naw, you won't have to look at her," Nick reassured me.

I didn't, because she wasn't in there any more, but it was worse than if she had been. Oh God, that sheet, with one tremendous streak down it as if a chicken had been — ! I swivelled, played puss-in-the-corner with the first thing I came up against, which happened to be this Nick guy's chest. He sort of stood still like he liked the idea. Then he growled, "Turn that damn thing over out of sight, will you?"

The questioning, when I was calm enough to take it, wasn't a grill, don't get that idea. It was just, as they'd said, to fill out her background. "When was the last time you saw her alive? Did she go around much, y'know what we mean? She have any particular steady?"

"I left her outside the house door downstairs at one-thirty this morning, last night, or whatever you call it," I told them. "We walked home together from Joyland right after the session wound up. She didn't go around at all. She never dated the boys afterwards and neither did I."

The outside half of Nick's left eyebrow hitched up at this, like when a terrier cocks its ear at something. "Notice anyone follow the two of you?"

"In our racket they always do; it usually takes about five blocks to wear them out, though, and this is ten blocks from Joyland."

"You walk after you been on your pins all night?" Fat asked, aghast.

"We should take a cab, on our earnings! About last night, I can't swear no one followed us, because I didn't look around. That's a come-on, if you do that."

Nick said, "I must remember that," absent-mindedly.

I got up my courage, faltered: "Did it — did it happen right in here?"

"Here's how it went: She went out again after she left you the first time —"

"I knew her better than that!" I yipped. "Don't start that, Balloon Lungs, or I'll let you have this across the snout!" I swung my cat-piece at him.

He grabbed up a little box, shook it in my face. "For this," he said. "Aspirin! Don't try to tell us different, when we've already checked with the all-night drugstore over on Sixth!" He took a couple of heaves, cooled off, sat down again. "She went out, but instead of locking the house-door behind her, she was too lazy or careless; shoved a wad of paper under it to hold it on a crack till she got back. In that five minutes or less, somebody who was watching from across the street slipped in and lay in wait for her in the upper hallway out here. He was too smart to go for her on the open street, where she might have had a chance to yell."

"How'd he know she was coming back?"

"The unfastened door woulda told him that; also the drug clerk tells us she showed up there fully dressed, but with her bare feet stuck in a pair of carpet-slippers to cool 'em. The killer musta spotted that too."

"Why didn't she yell out here in the house, with people sleeping all around her in the different rooms?" I wondered out loud.

"He grabbed her too quick for that, grabbed her by the throat just as she was opening her room-door, dragged her in, closed the door, finished strangling her on the other side of it. He remembered later to come out and pick up the aspirins which had dropped and rolled all over out there. All but one, which he overlooked and we found. She wouldn't 've stopped to take one outside her door. That's how we know about that part of it."

I kept seeing that sheet, which was hidden now, before me all over again. I couldn't help it, I didn't want to know, but still I had to know. "But if he strangled her, where did all that blood —" I gestured sickly, "come from?"

Fat didn't answer, I noticed. He shut up all at once, as if he didn't want to tell me the rest of it, and looked kind of sick himself. His eyes gave him away. I almost could have been a detective myself, the way I pieced the rest of it together just by following his eyes around the room. He didn't know I was reading them, or he wouldn't have let them stray like that.

First they rested on the little portable phonograph she had there on a table. By using bamboo needles she could play it late at night, soft, and no one would hear it. The lid was up and there was a record on the turn-table, but the needle was worn down half-way, all shredded, as though it had been played over and over.

Then his eyes went to a flat piece of paper, on which were spread out eight or ten shiny new dimes; I figured they'd been put aside like that, on paper, for evidence. Some of them had little brown flecks on them, bright as they

were. Then lastly his eyes went down to the rug; it was all pleated up in places, especially along the edges, as though something heavy, inert, had been dragged back and forth over it.

My hands flew up my head and I nearly went wacky with horror. I gasped it out because I hoped he'd say no, but he didn't, so it was yes. "You mean he danced with her *after* she was gone? Gave her dead body a dime each time, stabbed her over and over while he did?"

There was no knife, or whatever it had been, left around, so either they'd already sent it down for prints or *he'd* taken it out with him again.

The thought of what must have gone on here in this room, of the death dance that must have taken place. . . . All I knew was that I wanted to get out of here into the open, couldn't stand it any more. Yet before I lurched out, with Nick holding me by the elbow, I couldn't resist glancing at the label of the record on the portable. "*Poor Butterfly.*"

Stumbling out the door I managed to say, "She didn't put that on there. She hated that piece, called it a drip. I remember once I was up here with her and started to play it, and she snatched it off, said she couldn't stand it, wanted to bust it then and there but I kept her from doing it. She was off love and men, and it's a sort of mushy piece, that was why. She didn't buy it, they were all thrown in with the machine when she picked it up second-hand."

"Then we know his favorite song, if that means anything. If she couldn't stand it, it would be at the bottom of the stack of records, not near the top. He went to the trouble of skimming through them to find something he liked."

"With her there in his arms, already!" That thought was about the finishing touch, on top of all the other horror. We were on the stairs going down, and the ground floor seemed to come rushing up to meet me. I could feel Nick's arm hook around me just in time, like an anchor, and then I did a clothes-pin act over it. And that was the first time I didn't mind being pawed.

When I could see straight again, he was holding me propped up on a stool in front of a lunch-counter a couple doors down, holding a cup of coffee to my lips.

"How's Ginger?" he said gently.

"Fine," I dribbled mournfully all over my lap. "How's Nick?"

And on that note the night of Julie Bennett's murder came to an end.

Joyland dance-hall was lonely next night. I came in late, and chewing cloves, and for once Marino didn't crack his whip over me. Maybe even he had a heart. "Ginger," was all he said as I went hurrying by, "don't talk about it while you're on the hoof, get me? If anyone asks you, you don't know nothing about it. It's gonna kill business."

Duke, the front man, stopped me on my way to the dressing-room. "I hear they took you over there last night," he started.

"Nobody took nobody nowhere, schmaltz," I snapped. He wore feathers on his neck, that's why I called him that; it's the word for long-haired musicians in our lingo.

I missed her worse in the dressing-room than I was going to later on out in the barn; there'd be a crowd out there around me, and noise and music, at least. In here it was like her ghost was powdering its nose alongside me at the mirror the whole time. The peg for hanging up her things still had her name penciled under it.

Mom Henderson was having herself a glorious time; you couldn't hear yourself think, she was jabbering away so. She had two tabloids with her tonight, instead of just one, and she knew every word in all of them by heart. She kept leaning over the gals' shoulders, puffing down their necks: "And there was a dime balanced on each of her eyelids when they found her, and another one across her lips, and he stuck one in each of her palms and folded her fingers over it, mind ye! D'ye ever hear of anything like it? Boy, he sure must've been down on you taxis —"

I yanked the door open, planted my foot where it would do the most good, and shot her out into the barn. She hadn't moved that fast from one place to another in twenty years. The other girls just looked at me, and then at one another, as much as to say: "Touchy, isn't she?"

"Get outside and break it down; what do I pay you for anyway?" Marino yelled at the door. A gob-stick tootled plaintively, out we trooped like prisoners in a lock-step, and another damn night had started in.

I came back in again during the tenth stretch ("*Dinah*" and "*Have You Any Castles, Baby?*") to take off my kicks a minute and have a smoke. Julie's ghost came around me again. I could still hear her voice in my ears, from night-before-last! "Hold that match, Gin. I'm trying to duck a cement-mixer out there. Dances like a slap-happy pug. Three little steps to the right, as if he were priming for a standing broad-jump. I felt like screaming: For Pete's sake, if you're gonna jump, jump!"

And me: "What're you holding your hand for, been dancing upside-down?"

"It's the way he holds it. Bends it back on itself and folds it under. Like this, look. My wrist's nearly broken. And look what his ring did to me!" She had shown me a strawberry-size bruise.

Sitting there alone, now, in the half-light, I said to myself: "I bet *he* was the one! I bet *that's* who it was! Oh, if I'd only gotten a look at him, if I'd only had her point him out to me! If he enjoyed hurting her that much while she was still alive, he'd have enjoyed dancing with her after she was dead." My cigarette tasted rotten, I threw it down and got out of there in a hurry, back into the crowd.

A ticket was shoved at me and I ripped it without looking up. Gliding backward, all the way around on the other side of the barn, a voice finally said a little over my ear: "How's Ginger?"

I looked up and saw who it was, said, "What're you doing here?"

"Detailed here," Nick said.

I shivered to the music. "Do you expect him to show up *again*, after what he's done already?"

"He's a dance-hall killer," Nick said. "He killed Sally Arnold and the Fredericks girl, both from this same mill, and he killed a girl in Chicago in between. The prints on Julie Bennett's phonograph records match those in two of the other cases, and in the third case — where there were no prints — the girl was holding a dime clutched in her hand. He'll show up again sooner or later. There's one of us cops detailed to every one of these mills in the metropolitan area tonight, and we're going to keep it up until he does."

"How do you know what he looks like?" I asked.

He didn't answer for a whole bar. "We don't," he admitted finally. "That's the hell of it. Talk about being invisible in a crowd! We only know he isn't through yet, he'll keep doing it until we get him!"

I said, "He was here that night, he was right up here on this floor with her that night, before it happened; I'm sure of it!" And I sort of moved in closer. Me, who was always griping about being held too tight. I told him about the impression the guy's ring had left on her hand, and the peculiar way he'd held it, and the way he'd danced.

"You've got something there," he said, and he left me flat on the floor and went over to phone it in.

Nick picked me up again next dance.

He said, shuffling off, "That was him all right who danced with her. They found a freshly made impression still on her hand, a little off-side from the first, which was almost entirely obliterated by then. Meaning the second one had been made after death, and therefore stayed uneffaced, just like a pinhole won't close up in the skin after death. They made an impression of it with moulage, my lieutenant just tells me. Then they filled that up with wax, photographed it through a magnifying lens, and now we know what kind of a ring he's wearing. A seal ring shaped like a shield, with two little jewel splinters, one in the upper right-hand corner, the other in the lower left."

"Any initials on it?" I gaped, awe-stricken.

"Nope, but something just as good. He can't get it off, unless he has a jeweler or locksmith file it off, and he'll be afraid to do that now. The fact that it would press so deeply into her hand proves that he can't get it off, the flesh of his finger has grown around it; otherwise it would have had a little give to it, the pressure would have shifted the head of it around a little."

He stepped all over my foot, summed up: "So we know how he dances, know what his favorite song is, '*Poor Butterfly*,' know what kind of a ring he's wearing. And we know he'll be back sooner or later."

That was all well and good, but I had my own health to look out for; the way my foot was throbbing! I hinted gently as I could, "You can't do very much watching out for him, can you, if you keep dancing around like this?"

"Maybe you think I can't. And if I just stand there with my back to the wall, it's a dead give-away. He'd smell me a mile away and duck out again. Keep it quiet what I'm doing here, don't pass it around. Your boss knows, of course, but it's to his interest to cooperate. A screwball like that can put an awful dent in his receipts."

"You're talking to the original sphinx," I assured him. "I don't pal with the rest of these twists anyway. Julie was the only one I was ever chummy with."

When the session closed and I came downstairs to the street, Nick was hanging around down there with the other lizards. He came over to me and took my arm and steered me off like he owned me.

"What's this?" I said.

He said, "This is just part of the act, make it look like the McCoy."

"Are you sure?" I said to myself, and I winked to myself without him seeing me.

All the other nights from then on were just a carbon copy of that one, and they started piling up by sevens. Seven, fourteen, twenty-one. Pretty soon it was a month since Julie Bennett had died. And not a clue as to who the killer was, where he was, what he looked like. Not a soul had noticed him that night at Joyland, too heavy a crowd. Just having his prints on file was no good by itself.

She was gone from the papers long ago, and she was gone from the dressing-room chatter, too, after a while, as forgotten as though she'd never lived. Only me, I remembered her, because she'd been my pal. And Nick Ballestier, he did because that was his job. I suppose Mom Henderson did too, because she had a morbid mind and loved to linger on gory murders. But outside of us three, nobody cared.

They did it the wrong way around, Nick's superiors at Homicide, I mean. I didn't try to tell him that, because he would have laughed at me. He would have said, "Sure! A dance-mill pony knows more about running the police department than the commissioner does himself! Why don't you go down there and show 'em how to do it?"

But what I mean is, the dance mills didn't need all that watching in the beginning, the first few weeks after it happened, like they gave them. Maniac or not, anyone would have known he wouldn't show up *that* soon after. They needn't have bothered detailing anyone at all to watch the first few weeks. He was lying low then. It was only after a month or so that they should have begun watching real closely for him. Instead they did it just the reverse. For a whole month Nick was there nightly. Then after that he just looked in occasionally, every second night or so, without staying through the whole session.

Then finally I tumbled that he'd been taken off the case entirely and was just coming for — er, the atmosphere. I put it up to him unexpectedly one night. "Are you still supposed to come around here like this?"

He got all red, admitted: "Naw, we were all taken off this duty long ago. I — er, guess I can't quit because I'm in the habit now or something."

"Oh, yeah?" I said to myself knowingly. I wouldn't have minded that so much, only his dancing didn't get any better, and the wear and tear on me was something awful. It was like trying to steer a steam-roller around the place.

"Nick," I finally pleaded one night, when he pinned me down flat with one of his size twelves and then tried to push me out from under with the

rest of him, "be a detective all over the place, only please don't ask me to dance any more, I can't take it."

He looked innocently surprised. "Am I that bad?"

I tried to cover up with a smile at him. He'd been damn nice to me even if he couldn't dance.

When he didn't show up at all next night, I thought maybe I'd gone a little too far, offended him maybe. But the big hulk hadn't looked like the kind that was sensitive about his dancing, or anything else for that matter. I brought myself up short with a swift, imaginary kick in the pants at this point. "What the heck's the matter with *you?*" I said to myself. "You going soft? Didn't I tell you never to do that!" And I reached for the nearest ticket, and tore it, and I goona-gooed with a: "Grab yourself an armful, mister, it's your dime."

I got through that night somehow but I had that same spooky feeling the next night like I'd had *that* night — like tonight was going to be a bad night. Whenever I get that spooky feeling, it turns out to be a bad night all right. I tried to tell myself it was because Nick wasn't around. I'd got used to him, that was all, and now he'd quit coming, and the hell with it. But the feeling wouldn't go away. Like something was going to happen, before the night was over. Something bad.

Mom Henderson was sitting in there reading tomorrow morning's tab. "There hasn't been any good juicy murders lately," she mourned over the top of it. "Damn it, I like a good murder y'can get your teeth into wanst in a while!"

"Ah, dry up, you ghoul!" I snapped. I took off my shoes and dumped powder into them, put them on again. Marino came and knocked on the door. "Outside, freaks! What do I pay you for anyway?"

Someone jeered, "I often wonder!" and Duke, the front man, started to gliss over the coffin, and we all came out single file, me last, to a fate worse than death.

I didn't look up at the first buyer, just stared blindly at a triangle of shirt-front level with my eyes. It kept on like that for a while; always that same triangle of shirt-front. Mostly white, but sometimes blue, and once it was lavender, and I wondered if I ought to lead. The pattern of the tie across it kept changing too, but that was all.

"*Butchers and barbers and rats from the harbors*
Are the sweethearts my good luck has brought me."

"Why so downcast, Beautiful?"

"If you were standing where I am, looking where you are, you'd be downcast too."

That took care of him. And then the stretch.

Duke went into a waltz, and something jarred for a minute. My timetable. This should have been a gut bucket (low-down swing music) and it wasn't. He'd switched numbers on me, that's what it was. Maybe a request. For waltzes they killed the pash lights and turned on a blue circuit instead, made the place cool and dim with those flecks of silver from the mirror-top raining down.

I'd had this white shirt-triangle with the diamond pattern before; I remembered the knitted tie, with one tier unravelled on the end. I didn't want to see the face, too much trouble to look up. I hummed the piece mentally, to give my blank mind something to do. Then words seemed to drop into it, fit themselves to it, of their own accord, without my trying, so they must have belonged to it. "*Poor butterfly by the blossoms waiting.*"

My hand ached, he was holding it so darned funny. I squirmed it, tried to ease it, and he held on all the tighter. He had it bent down and back on itself. . . .

"*The moments pass into hours —*"

Gee, if there's one thing I hate it's a guy with a ring that holds your mitt in a strait-jacket! And he didn't know the first thing about waltzing. Three funny little hops to the right, over and over and over. It was getting my nerves on edge. "If you're gonna jump, jump!" Julie's voice came back to me from long ago. She'd run into the same kind of a —

"*I just must die, poor butterfly!*"

Suddenly I was starting to get a little scared and a whole lot excited. I kept saying to myself: "Don't look up at him, you'll give yourself away." I kept my eyes on the knitted tie that had one tier unravelled. The lights went white and the stretch came on. We separated, he turned his back on me and I turned mine on him. We walked away from each other without a word. They don't thank you, they're paying for it.

I counted five and then I looked back over my shoulder, to try to see what he was like. He looked back at me at the same time, and we met each other's looks. I managed to slap on a smile, as though I'd only looked back because he'd made a hit with me, and that I hoped he'd come around again.

There was nothing wrong with his face, not just to look at anyway. It was

no worse than any of the others around. He was about forty, maybe forty-five, hair still dark. Eyes speculative, nothing else, as they met mine. But he didn't answer my fake smile, maybe he could see through it. We both turned away again and went about our business.

I looked down at my hand, to see what made it hurt so. Careful not to raise it, careful not to bend my head, in case he was still watching. Just dropped my eyes to it. There was a red bruise the size of a small strawberry on it, from where his ring had pressed into it the whole time. I knew enough not to go near the box. I caught Duke's eye from where I was and hitched my head at him, and we got together sort of casually over along the wall.

"What'd you play '*Poor Butterfly*' for that last time?" I asked.

"Request number," he said.

I said, "Don't point, and don't look around, but whose request was it?"

He didn't have to. "The guy that was with you the last two times. Why?" I didn't answer, so then he said, "I get it." He didn't at all. "All right, chiseler," he said, and handed me two dollars and a half, splitting a fiver the guy had slipped him to play it. Duke thought I was after a kick-back.

I took it. It was no good to tell him. What could he do? Nick Ballestier was the one to tell. I broke one of the singles at the orangeade concession — for nickels. Then I started to work my way over toward the phone, slow and aimless. I was within a yard of it when the cats started up again!

And suddenly *he* was right next to me, he must have been behind me the whole time.

"Were you going any place?" he asked.

I thought I saw his eyes flick to the phone, but I wasn't positive. One thing sure, there wasn't speculation in them any more, there was — decision.

"No place," I said meekly. "I'm at your disposal." I thought, "If I can only hold him here long enough, maybe Nick'll show up."

Then just as we got to the ropes, he said, "Let's skip this. Let's go out to a laundry and sit a while."

I said, smooth on the surface, panic-stricken underneath: "But I've already torn your ticket, don't you want to finish this one out at least?" And tried to goona-goo him for all I was worth, but it wouldn't take. He turned around and flagged Marino, to get his O. K.

His back was to me, and across his shoulder I kept shaking my head, more and more violently, to Marino — no, no, I don't want to go with him. Marino just ignored me. It meant more money in his pocket this way.

When I saw that the deal was going through, I turned like a streak, made the phone, got my buffalo in. It was no good trying to tell Marino, he wouldn't believe me, he'd think I was just making it up to get out of going out with the guy. Or if I raised the alarm on my own, he'd simply duck down the stairs before anyone could stop him and vanish again. Nick was the only one to tell, Nick was the only one who'd know how to nail him here.

I said, "Police headquarters, quick! Quick!" and turned and looked over across the barn. But Marino was already alone out there. I couldn't see where the guy had gone, they were milling around so looking over their prospects for the next one.

A voice came on and I said: "Is Nick Ballestier there? Hurry up, get him for me."

Meanwhile Duke had started to break it down again; real corny. It must have carried over the open wire. I happened to raise my eyes, and there was a shadow on the wall in front of me, coming across my shoulders from behind me. I didn't move, held steady, listening.

I said, "All right, Peggy, I just wanted to know when you're gonna pay me back that five bucks you owe me," and I killed it.

Would he get it when they told him? They'd say: "A girl's voice asked for you, Nick, from somewhere where there was music going on, and we couldn't make any sense out of what she said, and she hung up without waiting." A pretty slim thread to hold all your chances on.

I stood there afraid to turn. His voice said stonily, "Get your things, let's go. Suppose you don't bother any more tonight about your five dollars." There was a hidden meaning, a warning, in it.

There was no window in the dressing-room, no other way out but the way I'd come in, and he was right there outside the door. I poked around all I could, mourning: "Why don't Nick come?" and, boy, I was scared. A crowd all around me and no one to help me. He wouldn't stay; the only way to hang onto him for Nick was to go with him and pray for luck. I kept casing him through the crack of the door every minute or so. I didn't think he saw me, but he must have. Suddenly his heel scuffed at it brutally, and made me jump about an inch off the floor.

"Quit playing peek-a-boo, I'm waiting out here!" he called in sourly.

I grabbed up Mom Henderson's tab and scrawled across it in lipstick: "Nick: He's taking me with him, and I don't know where to. Look for my ticket stubs. Ginger."

Then I scooped up all the half tickets I'd accumulated all night long and shoved them loose into the pocket of my coat. Then I came sidling out to him. I thought I heard the phone on the wall starting to ring, but the music was so loud I couldn't be sure. We went downstairs and out on the street.

A block away I said, "There's a joint. We all go there a lot from our place," and pointed to Chan's. He said "Shut up!" I dropped one of the dance checks on the sidewalk. Then I began making a regular trail of them.

The neon lights started to get fewer and fewer, and pretty soon we were in a network of dark lonely side streets. My pocket was nearly empty now of tickets. My luck was he didn't take a cab. He didn't want anyone to remember the two of us together, I guess.

I pleaded, "Don't make me walk any more, I'm awfully tired."

He said, "We're nearly there, it's right ahead." The sign on the next corner up fooled me; there was a chop-suey joint, there, only a second-class laundry, but I thought that was where we were going.

But in between us and it there was a long dismal block, with tumbledown houses and vacant lots on it. And I'd run out of dance checks. All my take gone, just to keep alive. He must have worked out the whole set-up carefully ahead of time, known I'd fall for that sign in the distance that we *weren't* going to.

Sure, I could have screamed out at any given step of the way, collected a crowd around us. But you don't understand. Much as I wanted to get away from him, there was one thing I wanted even more: To hold him for Nick. I didn't just want him to slip away into the night, and then do it all over again at some future date. And that's what would happen if I raised a row. They wouldn't believe me in a pinch, they'd think it was some kind of a shakedown on my part. He'd talk himself out of it or scram before a cop came.

You have to live at night like I did to know the real callousness of passers-by on the street, how seldom they'll horn in, lift a finger to help you. Even a harness-cop wouldn't be much good, would only weigh my story against his, end up by sending us both about our business.

Maybe the thought came to me because I spotted a cop ahead just then, loitering toward us. I could hardly make him out in the gloom, but the slow steady walk told me. I didn't really think I was going to do it until we came abreast of him.

The three of us met in front of a boarded-up condemned house. Then, as though I saw my last chance slipping away — because Nick couldn't bridge

the gap between me and the last of the dance checks any more, it was too wide — I stopped dead.

I began in a low tense voice: "Officer, this man here —"

Julie's murderer had involuntarily gone on a step without me. That put him to the rear of the cop. The whole thing was so sudden, it must have been one of those knives that shot out of their own hilts. The cop's eyes rolled, I could see them white in the darkness, and he coughed right in my face, warm, and he started to come down on top of me, slow and lazy. I sidestepped and he fell with a soft thud and rocked a couple of times with his own fall and then lay still.

But the knife was already out of him long ago, and its point was touching my side. And where the cop had been a second ago, *he* was now. We were alone together again.

He said in a cold, unexcited voice, "Go ahead, scream, and I'll give it to you right across him."

I didn't, I just pulled in all my breath.

He said, "Go ahead, down there," and steered me with his knife down a pair of steps into the dark area-way of the boarded-up house it had happened in front of. "Stand there, and if you make a sound — you know what I told you." Then he did something to the cop with his feet, and the cop came rolling down into the area-way after me.

I shrank back and my back was against the boarded-up basement door. It moved a little behind me. I thought, "This must be where he's taking me. If it is, then it's open." I couldn't get out past him, but maybe I could get *in* away from him.

I turned and clawed at the door, and the whole framed barrier swung out a little, enough to squeeze in through. He must have been hiding out in here, coming and going through here, all these weeks. No wonder they hadn't found him.

The real basement door behind it had been taken down out of the way. He'd seen what I was up to, and he was already wriggling through the gap after me. I was stumbling down a pitch-black hallway by then.

I found stairs going up by falling down on top of them full length. I sobbed, squirmed up the first few on hands and knees, straightened up as I went.

He stopped to light a match. I didn't have any, but his helped me too, showed me the outline of things. I was on the first-floor hall now, flitting

down it. I didn't want to go up too high, he'd only seal me in some dead-end up there, but I couldn't stand still down here.

A broken-down chair grazed the side of my leg as I went by, and I turned, swung it up bodily, went back a step and pitched it down over the stair-well on top of him. I don't know if it hurt him at all but his match went out.

He said a funny thing then. "You always had a temper, Muriel."

I didn't stand there listening. I'd seen an opening in the wall farther ahead, before the match went out. Just a blackness. I dived through it and all the way across with swimming motions, until I hit a jutting mantel slab over some kind of fireplace. I crouched down and tucked myself in under it. It was one of those huge old-fashioned ones. I groped over my head and felt an opening there, lined with rough brickwork and furry with cobwebs, but it wasn't wide enough to climb up through. I squeezed into a corner of the fireplace and prayed he wouldn't spot me.

He'd lit another match, and it came into the room after me, but I could only see his legs from the fireplace opening, it cut him off at the waist. I wondered if he could see me; he didn't come near where I was.

The light got a little stronger, and he'd lit a candle stump. But still his legs didn't come over to me, didn't bend down, or show his face peering in at me. His legs just kept moving to and fro around the room. It was awfully hard, after all that running, to keep my breath down.

Finally he said out loud: "Chilly in here," and I could hear him rattling newspapers, getting them together. It didn't sink in for a minute what was going to happen next. I thought, "Has he forgotten me? Is he that crazy? Am I going to get away with it?" But there'd been a malicious snicker in his remark; he was crazy like a fox.

Suddenly his legs came over straight to me, without bending down to look he was stuffing the papers in beside me. I couldn't see out any more past them. I heard the scrape of a match against the floor boards. Then there was the momentary silence of combustion. I was sick, I wanted to die quick, but I didn't want to die that way. There was the hum of rising flame, and a brightness just before me, the papers all turned gold. I thought, "Oh, Nick! Nick! Here I go!"

I came plunging out, scattering sparks and burning newspapers.

He said, smiling, pleased with himself, casual, "Hello, Muriel. I thought you didn't have any more use for me? What are you doing in my house?" He still had the knife — with the cop's blood on it.

I said, "I'm not Muriel, I'm Ginger Allen from the Joyland. Oh, mister, please let me get out of here, please let me go!" I was so scared and so sick I went slowly to my knees. "Please!" I cried up at him.

He said, still in that casual way, "Oh, so you're not Muriel? You didn't marry me the night before I embarked for France, thinking I'd be killed, that you'd never see me again, that you'd get my soldier's pension?" And then getting a little more vicious, "But I fooled you, I was shell-shocked but I didn't die. I came back even if it was on a stretcher. And what did I find? You hadn't even waited to find out! You'd married another guy and you were both living on my pay. You tried to make it up to me, though, didn't you, Muriel? Sure; you visited me in the hospital, bringing me jelly. The man in the next cot died from eating it. Muriel, I've looked for you high and low ever since, and now I've found you."

He moved backwards, knife still in hand, and stood aside, and there was an old battered relic of a phonograph standing there on an empty packing-case. It had a great big horn to it, to give it volume. He must have picked it up off some ash-heap, repaired it himself. He released the catch and cranked it up a couple of times and laid the needle into the groove.

"We're going to dance, Muriel, like we did that night when I was in my khaki uniform and you were so pretty to look at. But it's going to have a different ending this time."

He came back toward me. I was still huddled there, shivering. "No!" I moaned. "Not me! You killed her, you killed her over and over again. Only last month, don't you remember?"

He said with pitiful simplicity, like the tortured thing he was: "Each time I think I have, she rises up again." He dragged me to my feet and caught me to him, and the arm with the knife went around me, and the knife pressed into my side.

The horrid thing over there was blaring into the emptiness, loud enough to be heard out on the street: "*Poor Butterfly.*" It was horrible, it was ghastly.

And in the candle-lit pallor, with great shadows of us looming on the wall, like two crazed things we started to go round and round. I couldn't hold my head up on my neck; it hung way back over my shoulders like an overripe apple. My hair got loose and went streaming out as he pulled me and turned me and dragged me around. . . .

"*I just must die, poor butterfly!*"

Still holding me to him, he reached in his pocket and brought out a palmful of shiny dimes, and flung them in my face.

Then a shot went off outside in front of the house. It sounded like right in the area-way where the knifed cop was. Then five more in quick succession. The blare of the music must have brought the stabbed cop to. He must've got help.

He turned his head toward the boarded-up windows to listen. I tore myself out of his embrace, stumbled backwards, and the knife point seemed to leave a long circular scratch around my side, but he didn't jam it in in time, let it trail off me.

I got out into the hall before he could grab me again, and the rest of it was just kind of a flight-nightmare. I don't remember going down the stairs to the basement; I think I must have fallen down them without hurting myself — just like a drunk does.

Down there a headlight came at me from the tunnel-like passage. It must have been just a pocket-torch, but it got bigger and bigger, then went hurling on by. Behind it a long succession of serge-clothed figures brushed by me.

I kept trying to stop each one, saying: "Where's Nick? Are you Nick?"

Then a shot sounded upstairs. I heard a terrible death cry: "Muriel!" and that was all.

When I next heard anything it was Nick's voice. His arm was around me and he was kissing the cobwebs and tears off my face.

"How's Ginger?" he asked.

"Fine," I said, "and how's Nick?"

GLOSSARY OF SLANG IN STORY

cats	swing musicians	oompah	heavy percussion
box	bandstand	laundry	chop-suey joint
coffin	piano	goona-goo	let go; give it everything you've got
slush-pump	trombone	jive-artist	a dumb guy who thinks he's smart
barn	ballroom	front man	orchestra leader
gob-stick	clarinet		
stretch	intermission		

The rarest form of detective story — a humorous tale in dialect. This excellent one is about hillbillies.

WILD ONIONS

by FREDERICK HAZLITT BRENNAN

OLD BUSHWHACKER never does anything by halves. When it rains in Bushwhacker, medium-sized Indian Runner ducks perish in the gully washes; and when Bushwhacker gets a big dry, shorthorn steers are lost for weeks in the dust clouds. Hence I knew that when Doc Fraser, unterrified Pike County Democrat and Bushwhacker's historian, announced there had been a murder mystery in Bushwhacker it must have been a humdinger.

"Humdinger? 'Twas, dern you!" said Doc. "My back hair still won't lay right to the comb — an' when I go to the root cellar these nights I allus carry *two* lanterns. A mouse squeak can start me a-shiverin' and a-shakin'—"

"That scary, Doc?"

"Shet up, son," said Doc, severely, taking a three-breath swig of sorghum beer to steady his nerves, "an' be glad you wasn't along with me the night I left old man Cunningham Yackey's place. I'd been a-doctorin' three colicky heifers till nigh onter one in the morning. Them heifers all taken a notion to die on me. They didn't pass on peaceable like a good veter'nary doctor like me has a right to expect — but with a powerful groaning and sighing.

Thet started the rats in the walls of Cunningham's old barn to scuffling and squealing. And on top of thet the wind stirred up drafts in the barn — I dassn't turn my head but whut a draft would go "Pooooh" agin the back of my neck. Like a ghost a-whisperin', son.

All of a sudden I remembered how Missus Otily Yackey had hanged herself up in the loft. And on top of thet a rusty hinge started a-screeching. I should have stopped long enough to snap shet the locks on my medicine satchel, but I knowed I wasn't man enough.

I went away f'm thet barn, son, and clumb inter my car. An' dern' if I didn't see two eyes looking at me in the rear-vision mirror. Whut say? Nope 'twasn't nothing but a hoot owl thet had flew inter the back seat, but it

give me right smart of a turn. I chased the hoot owl and whilst I was doin' it I taken a look at the moon. Then I knowed.

Some human body was dead. Thet moon, son, looked like a big round platter of blood. Ongodliest moon you ever seed. I turned on my lights full-power an' prayed she'd start. She started — on three cylinders. But I didn't have no heart fer tinkerin'; I left Cunningham Yackey's barnyard right then and there.

We-ell, I crossed Cuivre Crick at Dead Slaves' Holler without hearin' nothin' but a few moans; and I made it over the ridge past the White Caps' buryin' ground without seeing nothing I could *swear* was a hant. But thet moon was a-riding on my left shoulder and when I turned inter the Louisville road I could feel a kind of bloody light acrosst my cheek. Yep. Fact.

Down in a deep, dark gully betwixt Bose Jenkins' an' Johnny Durvupp's places, my headlights turned up this cross. It was a-stickin' in a ditch alongside the road. Yep. A cross. Made outer fresh persimmon saplings. Whut say, son? Did I stop? Why, son, I didn't have no choice exactly. My motor, she went plumb dead on me — jest sighed like one of Cunningham Yackey's heifers, and quit. Fact.

Bein' a releegious man, I taken comfort in The Sign. It give me courage to see whut I knowed I was a-going to see. Stretched out behind the cross was a long something covered with a piece of tarpaulin. My headlights still was a-burnin' bright; and when I lifted up thet tarpaulin I was mighty grateful fer *human* light.

Speak well of the dead, but Ross Murphy Murdock wasn't no *good* sight when he was alive, bein' the meanest, oneriest cuss in the hull of Bushwhacker. Layin' there dead hadn't improved him none.

Yep. Thet's whut I seed. Ross Murphy Murdock a-layin' straight and respectful on his back. He had a mattress-ticking piller under his head and his hands was clasped undertaker-fashion with a big bunch of black-eyed Susans under 'em. His eyes had been shet with a couple of binder-bolt taps. There was a big Baptist hymnbook a-leanin' agin the cross. A sight to caution this hell-bent, gone-gosling generation, son.

Whut say? Kilt? Sartainly he'd been kilt. The hull middle part of the pore feller had been wrapped in kitchen towels over his everyday clothes; but even in my sweating conniption I could see he'd been shot plumb in the back with a load of buckshot.

We-ell, arter the fust shock passed off, I found I could still holler. And arter I got out one good holler I found I could walk. And arter I walked a piece along the road I found I could run. But I didn't feel real good until I had got Bose Jenkins and his hull family outer bed and the oil lamps in Bose's parlor lighted up.

Bose and his missus wasn't in no hurry to visit the scene; they allowed they was satisfied jest to hear me tell it. And thet give me time to reellize whut old Bushwhacker had on its hands — a fust-class murder meestery, son!

Whut say? Clues? Hold on — what sane man is a-goin' to start pokin' around fer clues on the loneliest stretch of Louisville road at one-thutty in the mornin'? Be reasonable, son.

I could tell thet Bose was in favor of callin' the Pike County sheriff; but I had presence of mind enough to recollect thet Mitch Gullen, the Lincoln County sheriff, laid claim to G-man expeerience. In fact, the feller had got hisself elected on the strength of it. So I up and telephones to Mitch Gullen.

Mitch, he come right over with two deputies an' one of these here submachine guns. Right there I seed I'd made a big mistake. Mitch was a wild-eyed feller with a nervous Adam's apple an' jest too plumb quick on the trigger to solve a big murder meestery in Bushwhacker. His methods was all right fer them city folks around Troy; but Bushwhacker folks is peculiar.

I mind the fust thing Mitch Gullen said when he looked at Ross Murphy Murdock was: "Some woman who loved him done it. She was sorry she done it and laid him out with loving-kindness. That's plain as daylight!"

Well, sir, I jest looked at Mitch like he was plumb daft.

"Sheriff," says I, "no woman never loved Ross Murphy Murdock exceptin' maybe his old mother, who's been dead twenty year. Ross Murphy Murdock was the meanest, oneriest, no-count cuss thet ever lived in Bushwhacker. Why, Sheriff," says I, "anyone will tell you thet Ross Murphy's own hound dogs never follered him inter town. They allus hung back in the bushes, bein' ashamed to own to him afore them tother dogs."

Mitch Gullen, he'd had G-man expeerience.

"Who's handling this case, you or me?" he says smart-aleck.

Jest then a Bushwhacker red-hog gave a snort in a fence corner an' one of them fool deputies cut loose with thet machine gun. Well, sir, I laughed right smart.

Disregardin' my advice was only the fust big mistake Mitch made. His

secont blunder come when he insisted on movin' the body afore half the folks in Bushwhacker could get to the scene. It created a lot of hard feeling among the folks thet lived in Skunk Crick community 'way back in the hills. Arter all, this was the biggest murder case Bushwhacker had ever seed; 'twouldn't've done no harm to give everybody a good look at Ross Murphy Murdock.

Howsomever, Mitch, he was the sheriff, an' he wouldn't listen to reason. He gathered up thet cross an' hymnbook an' piller an' tarpaulin — the best clues — and allowed he'd send 'em down to Saint Looey fer G-men to examine fer fingerprints. Son, have you ever handled a Bushwhacker Baptist hymnbook thet's been used hard? It ain't nothin' *but* fingerprints. Let alone thet old piece of tarpaulin.

We-ell, Mitch sent his best clues off to Saint Looey an' then he went to work on his love theory. It taken him two hard days to find out thet back in '16 Ross Murphy Murdock had cuffed Missus Cowdray allowin' she owed him four bits fer sassage meat; an' thet summer before last Murdock had been give a pistol-whupping fer trying to cheat the Widder Spencer on a red-hog swap. Thet was the sum an' substance of Ross Murphy Murdock's love relations with women.

Even Mitch Gullen could finally see thet he was off on the wrong foot. So he up an' allows thet some man-enemy of Ross Murphy Murdock shot him in the back an' then laid him out to make it look like a woman done it. Mitch an' his deputies rounds up thutty-odd near an' far neighbors of Ross Murphy Murdock an' hauls them over to Troy fer questioning. Word got out thet Mitch was aimin' fer to third-degree the boys; all their womenfolks went along to see it, an' Troy looked like the old Lincoln County Fair days.

Mitch questioned Sim Sime Bowcock as his fust suspect. Sim Sime retained me as his attunney.

"Mr. Bowcock," says Mitch, "did you ever threaten to kill Ross Murphy Murdock?"

"Yep," says Sim Sime, afore I can stop him, "I 'pinely did. I threatened the no-good feller eight or nine times — might've been ten."

"Why did you threaten him?"

"Don't answer," says I, doing my legal duty.

"Shucks, Sheriff," says Sim Sime, "any man thet's a man in Bushwhacker has threatened to kill Ross Murphy Murdock. He was pizen mean — he kicked dogs."

"Did you shoot Mr. Murdock?"

Sim Sime hangs his head, ashamed.

"Nope," says he, "I aimed to but I jest never got around to it. I reckon I'm kind of shiffless."

The secont suspect was Joe Tuck. I acted as Joe's pussonal attunney likewise. But the dern' fool went right ahead an' incriminated hisself.

"Yep, Sheriff," says Joe Tuck, "I shorely did tell Mister Murdock I'd kill him. He ruint my best patch of possum-timber, a-settin' bee-traps in it on the sly."

"Where was you the night of the murder?"

"Don't answer thet," says I, sharp.

Joe Tuck shuffled his feet.

"I was whur no married man ought to've been," says Joe Tuck, "an' on account of it I plumb missed the sight of Ross Murphy Murdock in thet gully."

The upshot of the questioning come to the fact thet out of some thutty men all but three allowed they'd threatened to kill Ross Murphy Murdock. Their reasons was manifold an' various, but their regret fer not makin' good their threats was unanimous. Old man Stump Wheelock was one of the three thet allowed they'd never *threatened* to kill Ross Murphy.

"I was aimin' to shoot the feller some day soon, Sheriff," says old man Stump Wheelock, "but I don't believe in threatenin' a man aforehand. 'Tain't Christian to cause a man to worry under sech sarcumstances."

Mitch Gullen got hot under the collar. "You trying to make fun of me?" he yells.

"Don't answer on advice of counsel," says I.

Old man Stump Wheelock taken my advice. It got Mitch Gullen so riled up he refused to question Johnny Durvupp. Pore Johnny taken it right hard; he lived near neighbor to Ross Murphy Murdock an' he thought he deserved some consideration. I reckon Mitch was within his rights, though. Johnny Durvupp never was right bright an' had the repertation for bein' the laziest white man in Bushwhacker.

"I'm a taxpayer an' I voted fer Mister Mitch Gullen," Johnny complained. "He's got no call to slight me thisaway." Some of the boys boughten him a sorghum-beer ice-cream sody an' hushed him up.

Whut say? Wasn't they any arrests made? Yep. Sartainly.

A passel of gossipy Pike County women told Mitch thet Bijah Yackey,

third youngest son of Cunningham Yackey, had good reason to kill Ross Murphy Murdock. It appeared like Bijah was sweet on Pearlina Murdock, who was Ross Murphy's secont cousin. Pearlina's folks an' Ross Murphy hadn't spoke fer eight year, but jest the same Ross Murphy taken upon hisself to warn Pearlina agin Bijah. Pearlina sassed Ross Murphy Murdock at a basket dinner an' then Ross Murphy and Bijah tangled. The women said Bijah swore 'pinely he'd kill Ross Murphy fer tryin' to turn Pearlina agin him.

Whut say? Why did Ross Murphy object to Bijah? We-ell, Bijah Yackey was a harmonica player an' a dancer an' a gal-sparker. It did make a fairly reasonable motive fer the quarrel. Anyway, Mitch Gullen arrested Bijah Yackey an' th'owed his pants inter jail charged with fust-degree murder.

Pearlina Murdock come to my justice-of-the-peace office in Eolia a-cryin' her purty eyes out.

"The sheriff put Bijah in jail, Jedge," she says, "an' Mister Cunningham Yackey won't lift a finger to help him. You're the finest legal mind in Pike County," she says, "an' you're Bijah's only hope. Will you take the case?"

We-ell, son, I knowed my fee would be right dubious if old man Cunningham had turned agin his own boy. Pearlina Murdock had all her worldly goods an' chattels on her own back, an' her folks had owed me a veter'nary bill since the good days durin' the war. But true love has allus made a plumb fool of me an' a purty gal's tears weakens an old man's sensible resolutions. I taken the case.

I an' Pearlina druv down to Troy in my car. On the way I asked Pearlina if Bijah reelly had kilt Ross Murphy Murdock. Knowin' your client is guilty allus helps an attunney plan a good defense.

Pearlina busted out a-cryin' again.

"Bijah allows he never done it," she told me, "but Mister Cunningham Yackey thinks he did. Mister Cunningham Yackey is plumb out of patience with Bijah for shootin' Cousin Ross in the back. He says Bijah should rest a spell in jail on general principles."

"Do *you* think the boy is guilty?"

"I'm powerful a-feared he is, Jedge," she sobs.

When I an' the gal reached the Lincoln County jail, the hull Yackey family was a-settin' in the yard. Bijah's six brothers was a-chawin' grass, and old man Cunningham Yackey was rared back a-talkin' to Sheriff Mitch Gullen.

"By Joe," yells old man Cunningham, "us Yackeys has allus kilt our men fair an' fit fair on all tother occasions. It shore saddens my heart to think thet a son of mine would shoot a yaller-bellied skunk like Ross Murphy Murdock in the back, let alone desecrating a Baptist hymnbook like he done arterwards!"

"He ain't confessed yet," says Mitch.

"He ain't a-goin' to confess neither," says I, formal. "As his attunney I aim to prove him innercent."

Sheriff Mitch Gullen couldn't think of a word to say. But old man Cunningham Yackey rared back and let fly:

"Ye'll have to be a dern' sight better shyster than ye are a cow doctor, Jedge!" yells old man Cunningham Yackey. "My pore boy is guilty an' I don't no-ways approve of you bein' his lawyer an' encouragin' him in sinful ways." Then, he taken a look at Pearlina Murdock. "Cain't say as I approve of this gal for Bijah, by Joe. Murdock blood will out in the next generation, by Joe!"

Pearlina sasses the old man.

"Leastways," says Pearlina, "I ain't turned agin Bijah like his paw — even if he is guilty!"

I left them to argue it out an' went inter the jail to talk to my client.

Pore Bijah Yackey was hunched up in thet leetle cell like a bull calf in a chicken crate. He looked a caution.

"Howdy, Jedge," he says.

"Howdy, Bijah," says I. "I'm your attunney."

Bijah shaken his head.

"Don't reckon you can do much good, Jedge," says he. "Paw's turned plumb agin me. I reckon I'll swing."

I could see thet Bijah taken it hard. "Guilty, son?" I asks.

"Nope, I ain't," says Bijah. "I aimed fer to kill Ross Murphy Murdock, but I aimed to ketch him in the woods with his squirrel gun an' shoot it out fair."

"Whut's your alibi, son?" says I. "Where was you the night Murdock got kilt?"

Bijah cheered up an' lit into a long rigmarole. Fust he finished milking. Then he et supper. Then he rode over to spark Pearlina Murdock. Her maw put him off'n the porch at ten-thutty sharp. Then, Bijah rode home, but didn't go to the house. His setter she-dog, Peggy, had gnawed her rope an'

had run off to the woods. Bijah knowed she was expectin', so he went off to look fer Peggy an' save her f'm droppin' pups in the woods. Bijah didn't get back to the house with Peggy an' the pups ontil long arter midnight.

"A plumb bad alibi, son," I told him.

"Yep. Reckon I'll swing," said Bijah.

Just then there was a big commotion in the sheriff's office. I went out thetaway to see how come.

We-ell, sir, Mitch Gullen had jest got back his clues f'm Saint Looey. He was a-settin' at his desk lookin' at a tarnation lot of pictures them G-men had sent him by the mornin' bus. The pictures was full of fingerprints.

"Quite a passel of fingerprints, Sheriff," I says, casual.

"A hundred an' sixty-one different prints," grunts Mitch Gullen. "Most of 'em from that pesky hymnbook!"

I taken a look at the clues a-layin' on a chair. Suddenlike I caught a sniff of wild onion smell f'm the piller that had been under Ross Murphy Murdock's head.

"Mighty queer, thet smell," I said, jest thinking aloud. "No wild onions a-growin' this time of year."

"That ain't neither here nor there," says Mitch Gullen, a-swingin' his big magnifying glass so's all the folks peeking in could see thet he was a feller with G-man expeerience.

"Mebbe not, mebbe not, Sheriff," I says, meek.

Sheriff Mitch Gullen p'ints to a picture of Bijah Yackey's fingerprints.

"If these prints tally with any of the hundred an' sixty-one, the case is solved," says he.

"*If'n* they do — still mebbe!" says I.

I went along outside, leavin' Mitch to his magnifying glass'n.

The very fust pusson I run inter on the courthouse square was Johnny Durvupp.

"Howdy, Johnny," says I.

"Howdy, Jedge," says Johnny. "I hear tell they put Mister Bijah Yackey in the calaboose."

"Temporary," says I.

I started to walk on. An' son, it'd take a smarter man than you be to guess whut came over me.

Whut say? We-ell — yep, thet's right. I got a powerful whiff *of wild onions.*

Well, sir, I turned back to Johnny sort of casual.

"Whur'd you be gettin' wild onions this time of year, Johnny?" says I.

Johnny grins, right well pleased. It tickled him to think a prominent citizen would bother to notice anything particklar about a shiftless, lazy white trash like him. Even a smell of wild onions.

"My missus cans 'em, Jedge," says Johnny. "I shore like wild onion flavor on my sidemeat. Ever tried it?"

"Can't say as I have," I says, "but it must give sidemeat a right gamey flavor."

"It shore does, Jedge," says Johnny, tickled pink.

"Mighty glad to have met up with you, Johnny," I says. "Goin' ter be in town long?"

Johnny shaken his head.

"Dunno, Jedge," says he. "My mules busted the whiffletree. I could fix it, if'n I could borrer a hammer an' pick up a couple of ten-penny nails. Don't happen to have some wire about ye, Jedge?"

I told him to inquire at the blacksmith shop an' walked on casual-like. But in two shakes of a lamb's tail I was hot-footing it out to Johnny Durvupp's farm.

Missus Durvupp an' them nine Durvupp children couldn't make out why I would bother to call on 'em. I told a white lie about lookin' over the buildings fer insurance. Missus Durvupp made me light down a spell in the parlor. Whilst she went to get me some buttermilk, I taken a look at the double bed.

Whut say? Who's tellin' this, son? Sartainly, sartainly. There was only one mattress-ticking piller on thet bed. The tother piller was a corn-shuck an' wheat-sack affair.

When Missus Durvupp came back with the buttermilk, I says, casual: "By the way, do y'all folks happen to have a Baptist hymnbook in the house? There's a hymn been a-runnin' through my head an' I can't place it."

Missus Durvupp colors up an' looks scairt plumb witless.

"I — I dunno, Jedge," she says. "I'll look. We usedter have — no, come to think of it I don't believe we ever did have no Baptist hymnbook."

I walks over an' picks up Johnny's gun whur it was proppin' open a winder. One look at the stock told me all I wanted ter know. Thet gun stock had been screwed an' wired recent. "Mighty nice gun Johnny's got," says I. "But he's split the stock by putting it in a weasel-trap."

Missus Durvupp looks more scairt.

"It was them skunks, Jedge," says Missus Durvupp. "They been thicker'n bedbugs in our hen house." She looks ashamed. "I told Johnny thet it's a mighty lazy man who won't set up to shoot his own skunks outer the hen house. But y'all knows Johnny. He allowed a gun trap fer skunks was jest as handy."

I nods careless an' sashays out to the hen house. A body had spilled white lye over a patch jest outside the hen-house door. They wasn't no nests inside — jest boxes setting on the ground an' filled with straw. I seen then why Johnny Durvupp desarved his repertation. A man who won't knock together some reg'lar high nests for his settin' hens is mighty piddlin', mighty piddlin'.

Well, sir, I druv purty fast back to Troy.

Johnny Durvupp had borrered hisself a hammer whilst I was gone, but he was still lookin' fer some nails. I walks straight up to the feller an' looks him in the eye.

"Ain't it about time fer you to tell the sheriff how Ross Murphy Murdock got hisself kilt?" says I.

I'll give Johnny credit, son. The cuss batted nary eye. He jest grins, lazy-like.

"I aimed fer to tell the sheriff, Jedge," says he. "Thet fust mornin'. But Mister Mitch Gullen wouldn't give me no consideration."

"You come along an' tell him now," says I.

Sheriff Mitch Gullen was a mighty sick-lookin' feller when I walked in with Johnny Durvupp. He was sicker-lookin' when Johnny admitted right out thet Ross Murphy Murdock had been kilt accidental in thet skunk trap. But bein' natchelly hardheaded, Mitch tried to get around it.

"You mean to tell me," says he, "thet you went to all that trouble to cover up an accident, Mister Durvupp?"

Johnny nods his head.

"Seemed like the easiest way out at the time, Sheriff," drawls Johnny. "My health ain't good no-ways an' I had all my winter pertaters to dig an' it seemed like I jest wouldn't have no time to come down h'yere to Troy an' explain how it happened." Then, he thinks a minute an' brightens up. "Furthermore, Sheriff, thet doubletree was cracked an' the whiffletree plumb broke through. I jest wasn't in no condition to make a long trip thetaway."

Still, Mitch Gullen wouldn't give in.

"Why did you lay the body out with a cross an' a hymnbook an' a pillow an' a tarpaulin?"

Johnny Durvupp sinks plumb exhausted inter a chair. He's got somethin' stickin' between his teeth but he's too dern' lazy to lift a arm to pick at it.

"We-ell Sheriff," says Johnny Durvupp, sleepy, "I shore didn't aim to do nothin' fer Ross Murphy Murdock. I figgered he desarved whut he got for tryin' to rob a pore man's hen roost. But my missus is a good Christian 'ooman. She allowed it was plumb sinful to leave a corpse in a ditch without respectful attention."

Says I: "Knowed it. Missus Durvupp done all thet trimmin' of the corpse."

Johnny looks plumb hurt.

"Thet's mighty hard on a feller, Jedge," he says. "I found them binderbolts fer her. Had ter hunt mighty near a hour fer them bolt-taps, too."

Sheriff Mitch Gullen hits the ceilin', an' I can't say I blamed the feller. He'd mighty near wore his eyes out a-lookin' at them fingerprint pictures. I knowed he hadn't found a one thet tallied with Bijah Yackey's neither.

"By rights the county ought to make you pay for the expense of this investigation," yells Sheriff Mitch Gullen, "an' serve out the bill at a dollar a day."

Johnny Durvupp is a meek, amiable feller.

"That's all right, Sheriff," he says, "I aim to do whut's fair. I'll start sarving my time right now."

Whut say? Nope. Mitch didn't. He jest made Johnny sign an affidavit to whut happened an' told him to stay outer Troy f'm now on.

Whilst all this was goin' on, Bijah Yackey had been turned loose. Him an' Pearlina made some purty nice comments on my legal ability — not thet it brung me any more business, because folks in Bushwhacker takes thet fer granted. Solving the biggest murder case ever happened in Bushwhacker — an' don't get the idee I'm braggin' — didn't begin to test my legal mind.

Whut say? It wasn't a murder, arter all? Why, son, be you daft? Sartainly it was a murder case. Sartainly.

Y'see, son, I follered Johnny Durvupp over to whur he'd hired a nigger to mend thet whiffletree. Johnny was a-settin' in the shade right well pleased with hisself.

"I shore do thank 'ee kindly, Jedge," says Johnny Durvupp, "fer pintin' out my duty ter tell the Sheriff the gospel truth —"

"Gospel truth, eh?" says I. "Why didn't yer tell Mitch thet all them nests was flat on the dirt floor of thet hen house, whilst thet shotgun was aimed high enough to hit a six-foot man in the middle of his back?"

Johnny Durvupp hangs his head sheepish.

"Jest didn't get around to thet, I reckon, Jedge," says he, "but I'm scot-free now, ain't I?"

"Yep," says I, "you be — jest as long as Sheriff Mitch Gullen don't find out thet you ain't kept no chickens in thet hen house fer at least six months. Reckon I know old chicken droppin's when I see 'em. An' I reckon a nose thet's sharp enough at seventy-one ter whiff wild onions can still smell moonshine licker — even if same is hid under the hen-house floor!"

What say? Did Johnny claim like Ross Murphy Murdock had come to steal his moonshine? Why, son, a feller don't ask questions like thet around Bushwhacker. Murder? Motive? Why, son, who'd believe Johnny Durvupp could plan a sure enough murder? He never was right bright. An' besides, sech matters ain't the consarn of an old man who never had G-man expeerience. Sech matters should be allowed to rest under the all-concealin' veil of Christian charity. Y'see, son, when it comes to thet — I was one of the fellers who threatened to kill Ross Murphy Murdock!"

There was no trail to the necklace that vanished,
so Ellery Queen *made one.*

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TREASURE HUNT

by ELLERY QUEEN

"DISMOUNT!" roared Major-General Barrett gaily, scrambling off his horse. "How's that for exercise before breakfast, Mr. Queen?"

"Oh, lovely," said Ellery, landing on *terra firma* somehow. The big bay tossed his head, visibly relieved. "I'm afraid my cavalry muscles are a little atrophied, General. We've been riding since six-thirty, remember." He limped to the cliff's edge and rested his racked body against the low stone parapet.

Harkness uncoiled himself from the roan and said: "You lead a life of armchair adventure, Queen? It must be embarrassing when you poke your nose out into the world of men." He laughed. Ellery eyed the man's yellow mane and nervy eyes with the unreasoning dislike of the chronic shut-in. That broad chest was untroubled after the gallop.

"Embarrassing to the horse," said Ellery. "Beautiful view, General. You couldn't have selected this site blindly. Must be a streak of poetry in your make-up."

"Poetry your foot, Mr. Queen! I'm a military man." The old gentleman waddled to Ellery's side and gazed down over the Hudson River, a blue-glass reflector under the young sun. The cliff was sheer; it fell cleanly to a splinter of beach far below, where Major-General Barrett had his boat-house. A zigzag of steep stone steps in the face of the cliff was the only means of descent.

An old man was seated on the edge of a little jetty below, fishing. He glanced up, and to Ellery's astonishment sprang to his feet and snapped his free hand up in a stiff salute. Then he very placidly sat down and resumed his fishing.

"Braun," said the General, beaming. "Old pensioner of mine. Served under me in Mexico. He and Magruder, the old chap at the caretaker's

cottage. You see? Discipline, that's it. . . . Poetry?" He snorted. "Not for me, Mr. Queen. I like this ledge for its military value. Commands the river. Miniature West Point, b'gad!"

Ellery turned and looked upward. The shelf of rock on which the General had built his home was surrounded on its other three sides by precipitous cliffs, quite unscalable, which towered so high that their crests were swimming in mist. A steep road had been blasted in the living rock of the rearmost cliff; it spiralled down from the top of the mountain, and Ellery still remembered with vertigo the automobile descent the evening before.

"You command the river," he said dryly, "but an enemy could shoot the hell out of you by commanding that road up there. Or are my tactics infantile?"

The old gentleman spluttered: "Why, I could hold that gateway to the road against an army, man!"

"And the artillery," murmured Ellery. "Heavens, General, you *are* prepared." He glanced with amusement at a small sleek cannon beside the nearby flagpole, its muzzle gaping over the parapet.

"General's getting ready for the revolution," said Harkness with a lazy laugh. "We live in parlous times."

"You sportsmen," snapped the General, "have no respect whatever for tradition. You know very well this is a sunset gun — you don't sneer at the one on the Point, do you? That's the only way Old Glory," he concluded in a parade-ground voice, "will ever come down on *my* property, Harkness — to the boom of a cannon salute!"

"I suppose," smiled the big-game hunter, "my elephant-gun wouldn't serve the same purpose? On *safari* I ——"

"Ignore the fellow, Mr. Queen," said the General testily. "We just tolerate him on these week-ends because he's a friend of Lieutenant Fiske. . . . Too bad you arrived too late last night to see the ceremony. Quite stirring! You'll see it again at sunset today. Must keep up the old traditions. Part of my life, Mr. Queen. . . . I guess I'm an old fool."

"Oh, indeed not," said Ellery hastily. "Traditions are the backbone of the nation; anybody knows that." Harkness chuckled, and the General looked pleased. Ellery knew the type — retired army man, too old for service, pining for the military life. From what Dick Fiske, the General's prospective son-in-law, had told him on the way down the night before, Barrett had been a passionate and single-tracked soldier; and he had taken

over with him into civilian life as many mementoes of the good old martial days as he could carry. Even his servants were old soldiers; and the house, which bristled with relics of three wars, was run like a regimental barracks.

A groom led their horses away, and they strolled back across the rolling lawns toward the house. Major-General Barrett, Ellery was thinking, must be crawling with money; he had already seen enough to convince him of that. There was a tiled swimming-pool outdoors; a magnificent solarium; a target-range; a gun-room with a variety of weapons that . . .

"General," said an agitated voice; and he looked up to see Lieutenant Fiske, his uniform unusually disordered, running toward them. "May I see you a moment alone, sir?"

"Of course, Richard. Excuse me, gentlemen?"

Harkness and Ellery hung back. The Lieutenant said something, his arms jerking nervously; and the old gentleman paled. Then, without another word, both men broke into a run, the General waddling like a startled grandfather gander toward the house.

"I wonder what's eating Dick," said Harkness, as he and Ellery followed more decorously.

"Leonie," ventured Ellery. "I've known Fiske for a long time. That ravishing daughter of the regiment is the only unsettling influence the boy's ever encountered. I hope there's nothing wrong."

"Pity if there is," shrugged the big man. "It promised to be a restful week-end. I had my fill of excitement on my last expedition."

"Ran into trouble?"

"My boys deserted, and a flood on the Niger did the rest. Lost everything. Lucky to have escaped with my life. . . . Ah, there, Mrs. Nixon. Is anything wrong with Miss Barrett?"

A tall pale woman with red hair and amber eyes looked up from the magazine she was reading. "Leonie? I haven't seen her this morning. Why?" She seemed not too interested. "Oh, Mr. Queen! That dreadful game we played last night kept me awake half the night. How *can* you sleep with all those murdered people haunting you?"

"My difficulty," grinned Ellery, "is not in sleeping too little, Mrs. Nixon, but in sleeping too much. The original sluggard. No more imagination than an amoeba. Nightmare? You must have something on your conscience."

"But was it necessary to take our *fingerprints*, Mr. Queen? I mean, a game's a game. . . ."

Ellery chuckled. "I promise to destroy my impromptu little Bureau of Identification at the very first opportunity. No thanks, Harkness; don't care for any this early in the day."

"Queen," said Lieutenant Fiske from the doorway. His brown cheeks were muddy and mottled, and he held himself very stiffly. "Would you mind ——?"

"What's wrong, Lieutenant?" demanded Harkness.

"Has something happened to Leonie?" asked Mrs. Nixon.

"Wrong? Why, nothing at all." The young officer smiled, took Ellery's arm, and steered him to the stairs. He was smiling no longer. "Something rotten's happened, Queen. We're — we don't quite know what to do. Lucky you're here. You might know. . . ."

"Now, now," said Ellery gently. "What's happened?"

"You remember that rope of pearls Leonie wore last night?"

"Oh," said Ellery.

"It was my engagement gift to her. Belonged to my mother." The Lieutenant bit his lip. "I'm not — well, a lieutenant in the United States Army can't buy pearls on his salary. I wanted to give Leonie something — expensive. Foolish of me, I suppose. Anyway, I treasured mother's pearls for sentimental reasons, too, and ——"

"You're trying to tell me," said Ellery as they reached the head of the stairs, "that the pearls are gone."

"Damn it, yes!"

"How much are they worth?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars. My father was wealthy — once."

Ellery sighed. In the workshop of the cosmos it had been decreed that he should stalk with open eyes among the lame, the halt, and the blind. He lit a cigaret and followed the officer into Leonie Barrett's bedroom.

There was nothing martial in Major-General Barrett's bearing now; he was simply a fat old man with sagging shoulders. As for Leonie, she had been crying; and Ellery thought irrelevantly that she had used the hem of her *peignoir* to stanch her tears. But there was also a set to her chin and a gleam in her eye; and she pounced upon Ellery so quickly that he almost threw his arm up to defend himself.

"Someone's stolen my necklace," she said fiercely. "Mr. Queen, you must get it back. You *must*, do you hear?"

"Leonie, my dear," began the General in a feeble voice.

"No, father! I don't care *who's* going to be hurt. That — that rope of pearls meant a lot to Dick, and it means a lot to me, and I don't propose to sit by and let some *thief* snatch it right from under my nose!"

"But darling," said the Lieutenant miserably. "After all, your guests. . . ."

"Hang my guests, and yours, too," said the young woman with a toss of her head. "I don't think there's anything in Mrs. Post's book which says a thief gathers immunity simply because he's present on an invitation."

"But it's certainly more reasonable to suspect that one of the servants —"

The General's head came up like a shot. "My dear Richard," he snorted, "put that notion out of your head. There isn't a man in my employ who hasn't been with me for at least twenty years. I'd trust any one of 'em with anything I have. I've had proof of their honesty and loyalty a hundred times."

"Since I'm one of the guests," said Ellery cheerfully, "I think I'm qualified to pass an opinion. Murder will out, but it was never hindered by a bit of judicious investigation, Lieutenant. Your *fiancée's* quite right. When did you discover the theft, Miss Barrett?"

"A half-hour ago, when I awoke." Leonie pointed to the dressing-table beside her four-posted bed. "Even before I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes I saw that the pearls were gone. Because the lid of my jewel-box was up, as you see."

"And the box was closed when you retired last night?"

"Better than that. I awoke at six this morning feeling thirsty. I got out of bed for a glass of water, and I distinctly remember that the box was closed at that time. Then I went back to sleep."

Ellery strolled over and glanced down at the box. Then he blew smoke and said: "Happy chance. It's a little after eight now. You discovered the theft, then, at a quarter of eight or so. Therefore the pearls were stolen between six and seven-forty-five. Didn't you hear anything, Miss Barrett?"

Leonie smiled ruefully. "I'm a disgustingly sound sleeper, Mr. Queen. That's something you'll learn, Dick. And then for years I've suspected that I snore, but nobody ever ——"

The Lieutenant blushed. The General said: "Leonie," not very convincingly, and Leonie made a face and began to weep again.

"What the deuce are we to do?" snarled the General. "We can't — well, hang it all, you just can't *search* people. Nasty business! If the pearls weren't so valuable I'd say forget the whole ruddy thing."

"A body search is scarcely necessary, General," said Ellery. "No thief would be so stupid as to carry the loot about on his person. He'd expect the police to be called; and the police, at least, are notoriously callous to the social niceties."

"Police," said Leonie in a damp voice, raising her head. "Oh, goodness. Can't we ——"

"I think," said Ellery, "we can struggle along without them for the proverbial nonce. On the other hand, a search of the premises. . . . Any objection to my prowling about?"

"None whatever," snapped Leonie. "Mr. Queen, you prowl!"

"I believe I shall. By the way, who besides the four of us — and the thief — knows about this?"

"Not another soul."

"Very good. Now, discretion is our shibboleth today. Please pretend nothing's happened. The thief will know we're acting, but he'll be constrained to act, too, and perhaps. . . ." He smoked thoughtfully. "Suppose you dress and join your guests downstairs, Miss Barrett. Come, come, get that Wimpole Street expression off your face, my dear!"

"Yes, sir," said Leonie, trying out a smile.

"You gentlemen might cooperate. Keep everyone away from this floor while I go into my prowling act. I shouldn't like to have Mrs. Nixon, for example, catch me red-handed among her *brassières*."

"Oh," said Leonie suddenly. And she stopped smiling.

"What's the matter?" asked the Lieutenant in an anxious voice.

"Well, Dorothy Nixon is up against it. Horribly short of funds. No, that's a — a rotten thing to say." Leonie flushed. "Goodness, I'm half-naked! Now, *please*, clear out."

"Nothing," said Ellery in an undertone to Lieutenant Fiske after breakfast. "It isn't anywhere in the house."

"Damnation," said the officer. "You're positive?"

"Quite. I've been through all the rooms. Kitchen. Solarium. Pantry. Armory. I've even visited the General's cellar."

Fiske gnawed his lower lip. Leonie called gaily: "Dorothy and Mr. Harkness and I are going into the pool for a plunge. Dick! Coming?"

"Please go," said Ellery softly; and he added: "And while you're plunging, Lieutenant, search that pool."

Fiske looked startled. Then he nodded grimly and followed the others.

"Nothing, eh?" said the General glumly. "I saw you talking to Richard."

"Not yet." Ellery glanced from the house, into which the others had gone to change into bathing costume, to the riverside. "Suppose we stroll down there, General. I want to ask your man Braun some questions."

They made their way cautiously down the stone steps in the cliff to the sliver of beach below, and found the old pensioner placidly engaged in polishing the brasswork of the General's launch.

"Mornin', sir," said Braun, snapping to attention.

"At ease," said the General moodily. "Braun, this gentleman wants to ask you some questions."

"Very simple ones," smiled Ellery. "I saw you fishing, Braun, at about eight this morning. How long had you been sitting on the jetty?"

"Well, sir," replied the old man, scratching his left arm, "on and off since ha'-past five. Bitin' early, they are. Got a fine mess."

"Did you have the stairs there in view all the time?"

"Sure thing, sir."

"Has anyone come down this morning?" Braun shook his gray thatch. "Has anyone approached from the river?"

"Not a one, sir."

"Did anyone drop or throw anything down here or into the water from the cliff up there?"

"If they'd had, I'd 'a' heard the splash, sir. No, sir."

"Thank you. Oh, by the way, Braun, you're here all day?"

"Well, only till early afternoon, unless someone's usin' the launch, sir."

"Keep your eyes open, then. General Barrett is especially anxious to know if anyone comes down this afternoon. If someone does, watch closely and report."

"General's orders, sir?" asked Braun, cocking a shrewd eye.

"That's right, Braun," sighed the General. "Dismissed."

"And now," said Ellery, as they climbed to the top of the cliff, "let's see what friend Magruder has to say."

Magruder was a gigantic old Irishman with leathery cheeks and the eyes of a top-sergeant. He occupied a rambling little cottage at the only gateway to the estate.

"No, sir," he said emphatically, "ain't been a soul near here all mornin'. Nob'dy, in or out."

"But how can you be sure, Magruder?"

The Irishman stiffened. "From a quarter to six till seven-thirty I was a-settin' right there in full view o' the gate a-cleanin' some o' the Gin'ral's guns, sir. And afther I was trimmin' the privets."

"You may take Magruder's word as gospel," snapped the General.

"I do, I do," said Ellery soothingly. "This is the only vehicular exit from the estate, of course, sir?"

"As you see."

"Yes, yes. And the cliffside. . . . Only a lizard could scale those rocky side-walls. Very interesting. Thanks, Magruder."

"Well, what now?" demanded the General, as they walked back toward the house.

Ellery frowned. "The essence of any investigation, General, is the question of how many possibilities you can eliminate. This little hunt grows enchanting on that score. You say you trust your servants implicitly?"

"With anything."

"Then round up as many as you can spare and have them go over every inch of the grounds with a fine comb. Fortunately your estate isn't extensive, and the job shouldn't take long."

"Hmm." The General's nostrils quivered. "B'gad, there's an idea! I see, I see. Splendid, Mr. Queen. You may trust my lads. Old soldiers, every one of 'em; they'll love it. And the trees?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"The trees, man, the trees! Crotches of 'em; good hiding-places."

"Oh," said Ellery gravely, "the trees. By all means search them."

"Leave that to me," said the General fiercely; and he trotted off breathing fire.

Ellery sauntered over to the pool, which churned with vigorous bodies, and sat down on a bench to watch. Mrs. Nixon waved a shapely arm and dived under, pursued by a bronzed giant who turned out to be Harkness when his dripping curls reappeared. A slim slick figure shot out of the water almost at Ellery's feet and in the same motion scaled the edge of the pool.

"I've done it," murmured Leonie, smiling and preening as if to invite Ellery's admiration.

"Done what?" mumbled Ellery, grinning back.

"Searched them."

"Searched —! I don't understand."

"Oh, are *all* men fundamentally stupid?" Leonie leaned back and shook out her hair. "Why d'ye think I suggested the pool? So that everyone would have to take his clothes off! All I did was slip into a bedroom or two before going down myself. I searched *all* our clothes. It was possible the — the thief had slipped the pearls into some unsuspecting pocket, you see. Well . . . nothing."

Ellery looked at her. "My dear young woman, *I'd* like to play Browning to your Ba, come to think of it. . . . But their bathing-suits ——"

Leonie colored. Then she said firmly: "That was a long, six-stranded rope. If you think Dorothy Nixon has it on her person *now*, in *that* bathing-suit . . ." Ellery glanced at Mrs. Nixon.

"I can't say," he chuckled, "that any of you in your present costumes could conceal an object larger than a fly's wing. Ah, there, Leftenant! How's the water?"

"No good," said Fiske, thrusting his chin over the pool's edge.

"Why, Dick!" exclaimed Leonie. "I thought you liked ——"

"Your *fiancé*," murmured Ellery, "has just informed me that your pearls are nowhere in the pool, Miss Barrett."

Mrs. Nixon slapped Harkness's face, brought up her naked leg, set her rosy heel against the man's wide chin, and shoved. Harkness laughed and went under.

"Swine," said Mrs. Nixon pleasantly, climbing out.

"It's your own fault," said Leonie. "I *told* you not to wear that bathing-suit."

"Look," said the Lieutenant darkly, "who's talking."

"If you *will* invite Tarzan for a week-end," began Mrs. Nixon, and she stopped. "What on earth are those men doing out there? They're crawling!"

Everybody looked. Ellery sighed. "I believe the General is tired of our company and is directing some sort of wargame with his veterans. Does he often get that way, Miss Barrett?"

"Infantry manœuvres," said the Lieutenant quickly.

"That's a silly game," said Mrs. Nixon with spirit, taking off her cap. 'What's on for this afternoon, Leonie? Let's do something exciting!"

"I think," grinned Harkness, clambering out of the pool like a great monkey,"I'd like to play an exciting game, Mrs. Nixon, if you're going to be in it." The sun gleamed on his wet torso.

"Animal," said Mrs. Nixon. "What shall it be, Mr. Queen?"

"Lord," said Ellery. "*I* don't know. Treasure hunt? It's a little *passé*, but at least it isn't too taxing on the brain."

"That," said Leonie, "has all the earmarks of a nasty crack. But I think it's a glorious idea. You arrange things, Mr. Queen."

"Treasure hunt?" Mrs. Nixon considered it. "Mmm. Sounds nice. Make the treasure something worth while, won't you? I'm stony."

Ellery paused in the act of lighting a cigaret. Then he threw his match away. "If I'm elected. . . . When shall it be — after luncheon?" He grinned. "May as well do it up brown. I'll fix the clues and things. Keep in the house, the lot of you. I don't want any spying. Agreed?"

"We're in your hands," said Mrs. Nixon gaily.

"Lucky dog," sighed Harkness.

"See you later, then." Ellery strolled off toward the river. He heard Leonie's fresh voice exhorting her guests to hurry into the house to dress for luncheon.

Major-General Barrett found him at noon standing by the parapet and gazing absently at the opposite shore, half a mile away. The old gentleman's cheeks were bursting with blood and perspiration, and he looked angry and tired.

"Damn all thieves for black-hearted scoundrels!" he exploded, mopping his bald spot. Then he said inconsistently: "I'm beginning to think Leonie simply mislaid it."

"You haven't found it?"

"No sign of it."

"Then where did she mislay it?"

"Oh, thunderation, I suppose you're right. I'm sick of the whole blasted business. To think that a guest under my roof ——"

"Who said," sighed Ellery, "anything about a guest, General?"

The old gentleman glared. "Eh? What's that? What d'ye mean?"

"Nothing at all. You don't know. *I* don't know. Nobody but the thief knows. Shouldn't jump to conclusions, sir. Now, tell me. The search has been thorough?" Major-General Barrett groaned. "You've gone through Magruder's cottage, too?"

"Certainly, certainly."

"The stables?"

"My dear sir ——"

"The trees?"

"*And* the trees," snapped the General. "Every last place."

"Good!"

"What's good about it?"

Ellery looked astonished. "My dear General, it's superb! I'm prepared for it. In fact, I anticipated it. Because we're dealing with a very clever person."

"You know —" gasped the General.

"Very little concretely. But I see a glimmer. Now will you go back to the house, sir, and freshen up? You're fatigued, and you'll need your energies for this afternoon. We're to play a game."

"Oh, heavens," said the General; and he trudged off toward the house, shaking his head. Ellery watched him until he disappeared.

Then he squatted on the parapet and gave himself over to thought.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," began Ellery after they had assembled on the veranda at two o'clock, "I have spent the last two hours hard at work — a personal sacrifice which I gladly contribute to the gaiety of nations, and in return for which I ask only your lusty cooperation."

"Hear," said the General gloomily.

"Come, come, General, don't be anti-social. Of course, you all understand the game?" Ellery lit a cigaret. "I have hidden the 'treasure' somewhere. I've left a trail to it — a winding trail, you understand, which you must follow step by step. At each step I've dropped a clue which, correctly interpreted, leads to the next step. The race is, naturally, to the mentally swift. This game puts a premium on brains."

"That," said Mrs. Nixon ruefully, "lets me out." She was dressed in tight sweater and tighter slacks, with a blue ribbon in her hair.

"Poor Dick," groaned Leonie. "I'm sure I shall have to pair up with him. He wouldn't get to first base by himself."

Fiske grinned, and Harkness drawled: "As long as we're splitting up, I choose Mrs. N. Looks as if you'll have to go it alone, General."

"Perhaps, said the General hopefully, "you young people would like to play by yourselves. . . ."

"By the way," said Ellery, "all the clues are in the form of quotations, you know."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Nixon. "You mean such things as 'first in war, first in peace'?"

"Ah — yes. Yes. Don't worry about the source; it's only the words themselves that concern you. Ready?"

"Wait a minute," said Harkness. "What's the treasure?"

Ellery threw his cigaret, which had gone out, into an ashtray. "Mustn't tell. Get set, now! Let me quote you the first clue. It comes from the barbed quill of our old friend, Dean Swift — but disregard that. The quotation is —" he paused, and they leaned forward eagerly —"*'first (a fish) should swim in the sea.'*"

The General said: "Hrrumph! Damned silly," and settled in his chair. But Mrs. Nixon's amber eyes shone and she jumped up.

"Is *that* all?" she cried. "Goodness, that isn't the least bit difficult, Mr. Queen. Come on, Tarzan," and she sped away over the lawns, followed by Harkness, who was grinning. They made for the parapet.

"Poor Dorothy," sighed Leonie. "She means well, but she isn't exactly blessed with brains. She's taking the wrong tack, of course."

"You'd put her hard a-port, I suppose?" murmured Ellery.

"*Mr.* Queen! You obviously didn't mean us to search the entire Hudson River. Consequently it's a more restricted body of water you had in mind." She sprang off the veranda.

"The pool!" cried Lieutenant Fiske, scrambling after her.

"Remarkable woman, your daughter, sir," said Ellery, following the pair with his eyes. "I'm beginning to think Dick Fiske is an extraordinarily fortunate young man."

"Mother's brain," said the General, beaming suddenly. "B'gad, *I am* interested." He waddled rapidly off the porch.

They found Leonie complacently deflating a large rubber fish which was still dripping from its immersion in the pool.

"Here it is," she said. "Come on, Dick, pay attention. *Not* now, silly! Mr. Queen's looking. What's this? '*Then it should swim in butter.*' Butter, butter. . . . Pantry, of course!" And she was off like the wind.

Ellery replaced the note in the rubber fish, inflated it, stoppered the hole, and tossed the thing back into the pool.

"The others will be here soon enough. There they are! I think they've caught on already. Come along, General."

Leonie was on her knees in the pantry, before the huge refrigerator, digging a scrap of paper out of a butter-tub. "Goo," she said, wrinkling her nose. "Did you have to use butter? Read it, Dick. I'm filthy."

Lieutenant Fiske declaimed: " '*And at last, sirrah, it should swim in good claret.*' "

"Mr. Queen! I'm ashamed of you. This is too easy."

"It gets harder," said Ellery dryly, "as it goes along." He watched the young couple dash through the doorway to the cellar, and then replaced the note in the tub. As he and the General closed the cellar-door behind them, they heard the clatter of Mrs. Nixon's feet in the pantry.

"Damned if Leonie hasn't forgotten all about that necklace of hers," muttered the General as they watched from the stairs. "Just like a woman!"

"I doubt very much if she has," murmured Ellery.

"Whee!" cried Leonie. "Here it is. . . . What's this, Mr. Queen — Shakespeare?" She had pried a note from between two dusty bottles in the wine-cellar and was frowning over it.

"What's it say, Leonie?" asked Lieutenant Fiske.

" '*Under the greenwood tree*' . . . Greenwood tree." She replaced the note slowly. "It *is* getting harder. Have we any greenwood trees, father?"

The General said wearily: "Blessed if I know. Never heard of 'em. You, Richard?" The Lieutenant looked dubious.

"All I know about the greenwood tree," frowned Leonie, "is that it's something in *As You Like It* and a novel by Thomas Hardy. But ——"

"Come *on*, Tarzan!" shrieked Mrs. Nixon from above them. "They're still here. Out of the way, you two men! No fair setting up hazards."

Leonie scowled. Mrs. Nixon came flying down the cellar stairs followed by Harkness, who was still grinning, and snatched the note from the shelf. Her face fell. "Greek to me."

"Let me see it." Harkness scanned the note, and laughed aloud. "Good boy, Queen," he chuckled. "*Chlorosplenium æruginosum.* You need a little botany in jungle work. I've seen that tree any number of times on the estate." He bounded up the stairs, grinned once more at Ellery and Major-General Barrett, and vanished.

"Damn!" said Leonie, and she led the charge after Harkness.

When they came up with him, the big man was leaning against the bark of an ancient and enormous shade-tree, reading a scrap of paper. The bole of the tree was a vivid green which looked fungoid in origin.

"Green wood!" exclaimed Mrs. Nixon. "That *was* clever, Mr. Queen."

Leonie looked chagrined. "A man would take the honors. I'd never have thought it of you, Mr. Harkness. What's in the note?"

Harkness read aloud: "'*And . . . seeks that which he lately threw away. . . .*'"

"Which who lately threw away?" complained the Lieutenant. "That's ambiguous."

"Obviously," said Harkness, "the pronoun couldn't refer to the finder of the note. Queen couldn't possibly have known who would track it down. Consequently . . . Of course!" And he sped off in the direction of the house, thumbing his nose.

"I don't *like* that man," said Leonie. "Dickie, haven't you any brains at all? And now we have to follow him again. I think you're mean, Mr. Queen."

"I leave it to you, General," said Ellery. "Did *I* want to play games?" But they were all streaming after Harkness, and Mrs. Nixon was in the van, her red hair flowing behind her like a pennon.

Ellery reached the veranda, the General puffing behind him, to find Harkness holding something aloft out of reach of Mrs. Nixon's clutching fingers. "No, you don't. To the victor ——"

"But how did you know, you nasty man?" cried Leonie.

Harkness lowered his arm; he was holding a half-consumed cigaret. "Stood to reason. The quotation had to refer to Queen himself. And the only thing I'd seen him 'lately' throw away was this cigaret-butt just before we started." He took the cigaret apart; imbedded in the tobacco near the tip there was a tiny twist of paper. He smoothed it out and read its message.

Then he read it again, slowly.

"Well, for pity's sake!" snapped Mrs. Nixon. "Don't be a *pig*, Tarzan. If you don't know the answer, give the rest of us a chance." She snatched the paper from him and read it. "'*Seeking . . . even in the cannon's mouth.*'"

"Cannon's mouth?" panted the General. "Why ——"

"Why, that's *pie!*" giggled the red-haired woman, and ran.

She was seated defensively astride the sunset gun overlooking the river when they reached her. "This is a fine how-d'ye-do," she complained. "Cannon's mouth! How the deuce can you look into the cannon's mouth when the cannon's mouth is situated in thin air seventy-five feet over the Hudson River? Pull this foul thing back a bit, Lieutenant!"

Leonie was helpless with laughter. "You *idiot!* How do you think Magruder loads this gun — through the muzzle? There's a chamber in the back."

Lieutenant Fiske did something expertly to the mechanism at the rear of the sunset gun, and in a twinkling had swung back the safe-like little door of the breech-block and revealed a round orifice. He thrust his hand in, and his jaw dropped. "It's the treasure!" he shouted. "By George, Dorothy, you've won!"

Mrs. Nixon slid off the cannon, gurgling: "Gimme, gimme!" like an excited *gamine*. She bumped him rudely aside and pulled out a wad of oily cotton batting.

"What is it?" cried Leonie, crowding in.

"I . . . Why, Leonie, you *darling!*" Mrs. Nixon's face fell. "I knew it was too good to be true. Treasure! I should say so."

"*My pearls!*" screamed Leonie. She snatched the rope of snowy gems from Mrs. Nixon, hugging them to her bosom; and then she turned to Ellery with the oddest look of inquiry.

"Well, I'll be — be blasted," said the General feebly. "Did *you* take 'em, Queen?"

"Not exactly," said Ellery. "Stand still, please. That means everybody. We have Mrs. Nixon and Mr. Harkness possibly at a disadvantage. You see, Miss Barrett's pearls were stolen this morning."

"Stolen?" Harkness lifted an eyebrow.

"Stolen!" gasped Mrs. Nixon. "So that's why ——"

"Yes," said Ellery. "Now, perceive. Someone filches a valuable necklace. Problem: to get it away. Was the necklace still on the premises? It was; it had to be. There are only two physical means of egress from the estate: by the cliff-road yonder, at the entrance to which is Magruder's cottage; and by the river below. Everywhere else there are perpendicular cliffs impossible to climb. And their crests are so high that it was scarcely feasible for an accomplice, say, to let a rope down and haul the loot up. . . . Now, since before six Magruder had the land exit under observation and Braun the river exit. Neither had seen a soul; and Braun said that nothing had been thrown over the parapet to the beach or water, or he would have heard the impact or splash. Since the thief had made no attempt to dispose of the pearls by the only two possible routes, it was clear then that the pearls were still on the estate."

Leonie's face was pinched and pale now, and she kept her eyes steadfastly on Ellery. The General looked embarrassed.

"But the thief," said Ellery, "must have had a plan of disposal, a plan

that would circumvent all normal contingencies. Knowing that the theft might be discovered at once, he would expect an early arrival of the police and plan accordingly; people don't take the loss of a twenty-five-thousand-dollar necklace without a fight. If he expected police, he expected a search; and if he expected a search, he could not have planned to hide his loot in an obvious place — such as on his person, in his luggage, in the house, or in the usual places on the estate. Of course, he might have meant to dig a hole somewhere and bury the pearls; but I didn't think so, because he would in that case still have the problem of disposal, with the estate guarded.

"As a matter of fact, I myself searched every inch of the house; and the General's servants searched every inch of the grounds and outbuildings . . . just to make sure. We called no police, but acted as police ourselves. And the pearls weren't found."

"But —" began Lieutenant Fiske in a puzzled way.

"Please, Lieutenant. It was plain, then, that the thief, whatever his plan, had discarded any *normal* use of either the land or water route. As a means of getting the pearls off the estate. Had he intended to walk off with them himself, or mail them to an accomplice? Hardly, if he anticipated a police investigation and surveillance. Besides, remember that he deliberately planned and committed his theft with the foreknowledge that a detective was in the house. And while I lay no claim to exceptional formidability, you must admit it took a daring, clever thief to concoct and carry out a theft under the circumstances. I felt justified in assuming that, whatever his plan was, it was itself daring and clever; not stupid and commonplace.

"But if he had discarded the *normal* means of disposal, he must have had in mind an extraordinary means, still using one of the only two possible routes. And then I recalled that there was one way the river route could be utilized to that end which was so innocent in appearance that it would probably be successful even if a whole regiment of infantry were on guard. And I knew that must be the answer."

"The sunset gun," said Leonie in a low voice.

"Precisely, Miss Barrett, the sunset gun. By preparing a package with the pearls inside, opening the breech-block of the gun and thrusting the package into the chamber and walking away, he disposed very simply of the bothersome problem of getting the pearls away. You see, anyone with a knowledge of ordnance and ballistics would know that this gun, like all guns which fire salutes, uses 'blank' ammunition. That is, there is no ex-

plosive shell; merely a charge of powder which goes off with a loud noise and a burst of smoke.

"Now, while this powder is a noise-maker purely, it still possesses a certain propulsive power — not much, but enough for the thief's purpose. Consequently Magruder would come along at sundown today, slip the blank into the breech, pull the firing-cord, and — boom! away go the pearls in a puff of concealing smoke, to be hurled the scant twenty feet or so necessary to make it clear the little beach below and fall into the water."

"But how —" spluttered the General, red as a cherry.

"Obviously, the container would have to float. Aluminum, probably, or something equally strong yet light. Then an accomplice must be in the scheme — someone to idle along in the Hudson below in a boat at sunset, pick up the container, and cheerfully sail away. At that time Braun is not on duty, as he told me; but even if he were, I doubt if he would have noticed anything in the noise and smoke of the gun."

"Accomplice, eh?" roared the General. "I'll 'phone ——"

Ellery sighed. "Already done, General. I telephoned the local police at one o'clock to be on the lookout. Our man will be waiting at sundown, and if you stick to schedule with your salute to the dying sun, they'll nab him red-handed."

"But where's this container, or can?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Oh, safely hidden away," said Ellery dryly. "Very safely."

"You hid it? But why?"

Ellery smoked peacefully for a moment. "You know, there's a fat-bellied little god who watches over such as me. Last night we played a murder-game. To make it realistic, and to illustrate a point, I took everyone's fingerprints with the aid of that handy little kit I carry about. I neglected to destroy the exhibits. This afternoon, before our treasure hunt, I found the container in the gun here — naturally, having reasoned out the hiding-place, I went straight to it for confirmation. And what do you think I found on the can? Fingerprints!" Ellery grimaced. "Disappointing, isn't it? But then our clever thief was so sure of himself he never dreamed anyone would uncover his cache before the gun was fired. And so he was careless. It was child's-play, of course, to compare the prints on the can with the master sets from last night's game." He paused. "*Well?*" he said.

There was silence for as long as one can hold a breath; and in the silence they heard the flapping of the flag overhead.

Then, his hands unclenching, Harkness said lightly: "You've got me, pal."

"Ah," said Ellery. "So good of you, Mr. Harkness."

They stood about the gun at sunset, and old Magruder yanked the cord, and the gun roared as the flag came down, and Major-General Barrett and Lieutenant Fiske stood rigidly at attention. The report echoed and re-echoed, filling the air with hollow thunder.

"Look at the creature," gurgled Mrs. Nixon a moment later, leaning over the parapet and staring down. "He looks like a bug running around in circles."

They joined her silently. The Hudson below was a steel mirror reflecting the last copper rays of the sun. Except for a small boat with an outboard motor the river was free of craft; and the man was hurling his boat this way and that in puzzled parabolas, scanning the surface of the river anxiously. Suddenly he looked up and saw the faces watching him; and with ludicrous haste frantically swept his boat about and shot it for the opposite shore.

"I still don't understand," complained Mrs. Nixon, "why you called the law off that person, Mr. Queen. He's a criminal, isn't he?"

Ellery sighed. "Only in intent. And then it was Miss Barrett's idea, not mine. I can't say I'm sorry. While I hold no brief for Harkness and his accomplice, who's probably some poor devil seduced by our dashing friend into doing the work of disposal, I'm rather relieved Miss Barrett hasn't been vindictive. Harkness has been touched and spoiled by the life he leads; it's really not his fault. When you spend half your life in jungles, the civilized moralities lose their edge. He needed the money, and so he took the pearls."

"He's punished enough," said Leonie gently. "Almost as much as if we'd turned him over to the police instead of sending him packing. He's through socially. And since I've my pearls back ——"

"Interesting problem," said Ellery dreamily. "I suppose you all saw the significance of the treasure hunt?"

Lieutenant Fiske looked blank. "I guess I'm thick. *I* don't."

"Pshaw! At the time I suggested the game I had no ulterior motive. But when the reports came in, and I deduced that the pearls were in the sunset gun, I saw a way to use the game to trap the thief." He smiled at Leonie, who grinned back. "Miss Barrett was my accomplice. I asked her privately

to start brilliantly — in order to lull suspicion — and slow up as she went along. The mere use of the gun had made me suspect Harkness, who knows guns; I wanted to test him.

"Well, Harkness came through. As Miss Barrett slowed up he forged ahead; and he displayed cleverness in detecting the clue of the 'greenwood' tree. He displayed acute observation in spotting the clue of the cigaret. Two rather difficult clues, mind you. Then, at the easiest of all, he becomes puzzled! He didn't 'know' what was meant by the cannon's mouth! Even Mrs. Nixon — forgive me — spotted that one. Why had Harkness been reluctant to go to the gun? It could only have been because he knew what was in it."

"But it all seems so unnecessary," objected the Lieutenant. "If you had the fingerprints, the case was solved. Why the rigmarole?"

Ellery flipped his butt over the parapet. "My boy," he said, "have you ever played poker?"

"Of course I have."

Leonie cried: "You fox! Don't tell me ——"

"Bluff," said Ellery sadly. "Sheer bluff. There *weren't* any fingerprints on the can."

'Q'