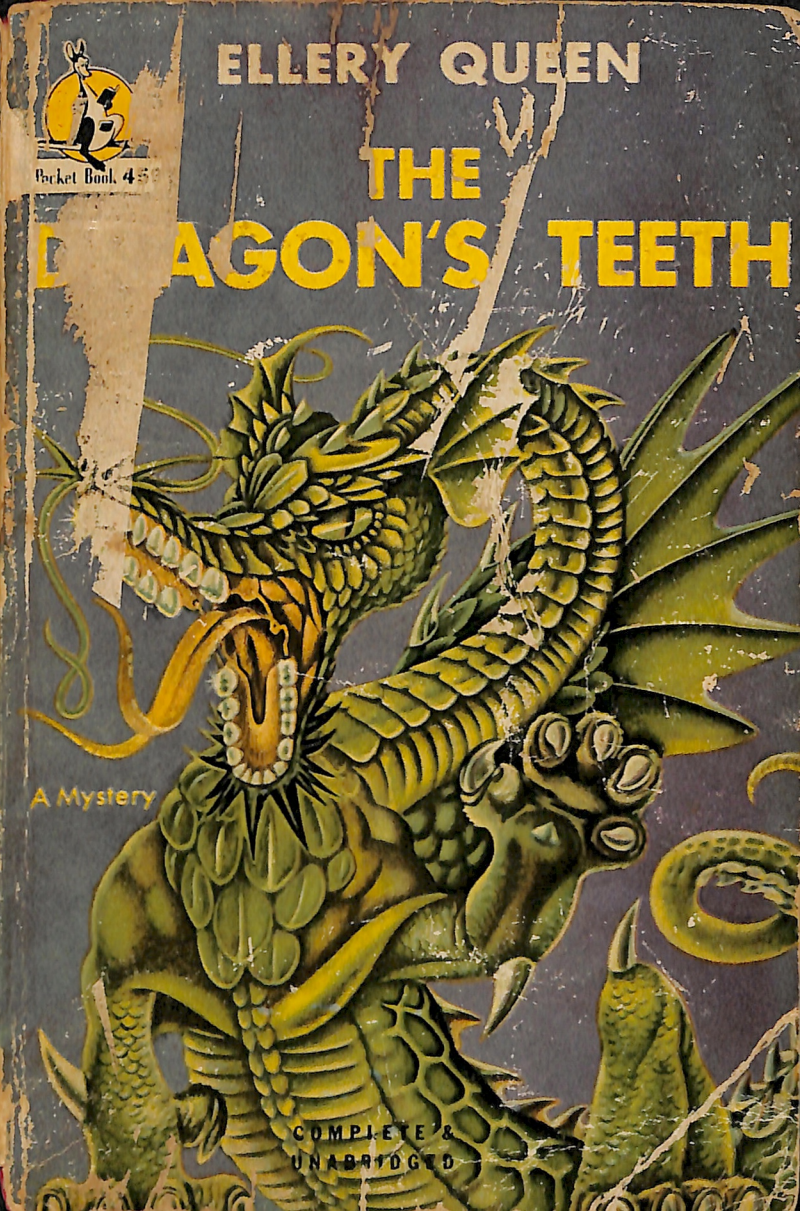
ELLERY QUEEN
Pocket Book 45
THE
D AGON'S TEETH
A Mystery
COMPLETE &
UNABRIDGED

THE DRAGON'S TEETH

ELLERY QUEEN

THE DRAGON'S TEETH

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

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Ellery Queen, his partner in crime, who played justice of the peace with anything but peaceful intent 2

Inspector Queen, bewildered by his unpredictable son and an embarrassing case of double identity 2

Cadmus Cole, a gold plated sailor-recluse who sowed the dragon's teeth of confusion and tragedy 5

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I. The Vanishing American

Meet Beau Rummell.

No, not Beau Brummell; he was a London gentleman of fashion born in the year 1778 . . . Beau *Rummell.* Beau Rummell was born in Cherry Street, New York City, in the year 1914.

Never think that Beau took his name meekly. From boyhood he was ready to fight the human race, one wit at a time, in defense of his self-respect. He even tried subterfuge. He would change his name to Buck, or Butch, or something equally manly. But it was no use.

"Rummell? *Rummell?* Say, ya know what? Your first name oughta be Beau. *Beau Rummell.* Haw, haw, haw!"

Beau's personality was moulded in the crucible of that bitter name. At the age of twelve, learning by investigation that his namesake had been London's *arbiter elegantiarum,* first fop of his time, Beau became a passionate sartorial rebel; and to this day, if you meet a large young man with scarred knuckles who looks as if he had slept in all his clothing for two months consecutively, you may be sure he is no hungry derelict, but Beau Rummell.

To the despair of his father, Inspector Johnny Rummell of the Narcotic Squad, Beau was always running away. He ran away from the intelligent humorists of Columbia Law School three times—first to shovel sand in a river-tunnel operation, only to be driven back into the arms of Contracts when a brawny Lithuanian sandhog discovered the secret of his shame; then to become press-agent for a third-rate circus, an episode terminat-

ing in a bloody brawl with Bongo the Strong Man, who thought he could lick any one named Beau and discovered on being revived that he had been laboring, as the phrase goes, under a misapprehension; the third time to sling rivets high above Sixth Avenue. That was the time he almost fell forty stories scrambling angrily after a tormentor; thereafter he chose refuges nearer Mother Earth.

He fled during his summer vacations, too—once to Hollywood, once to Alaska, once to the beckoning southern spheres by way of a freighter Rio-bound. This last was a bad mistake of judgment, for the supercargo was an educated man who delightedly passed the good word around to the crew, so that it became necessary for young Mr. Rummell to punish aspersions upon his Christian name with a whole ocean as his battleground, and no escape except by swimming.

Mr. Ellery Queen heard of him when Inspector Johnny died.

Inspector Queen took the death of his old friend hardly; he wanted to do something for the son.

"The boy's at loose ends," the Inspector told Ellery. "Graduate lawyer, but he's quit and, conditions being what they are, I can't say I blame him. Besides, he wasn't made to grow soft in a swivel-chair. He's a restless sprout, tough as hardtack. Done everything—been to sea, slung rivets, bummed his way around the country, picked oranges in California, dug ditches on WPA projects . . . everything, that is, except find himself. And now, with John gone, he's worse off than ever. Cocky sonofagun, Beau is; thinks he knows everything. Darned near does, too."

"What did you say the name was?" asked Ellery.

The Inspector said: "Beau."

"Beau Rummell?" Ellery began to smile.

"I knew you would. Everybody does. That's Beau's

cross. Only don't make fun of it to his face—he goes berserk."

"Why don't you make a cop of him?"

"He'd make a good one at that, except for his blamed restlessness. Matter of fact, he's got a notion he'd like to open a detective agency." The Inspector grinned. "I guess he's been reading some of your terrible detective stories."

"This Peregrine Pickle of yours," said Mr. Queen hastily, "interests me. Let's hunt him up."

They found Mr. Rummell consuming corned-beef sandwiches in *Louie's Grill*, two blocks west of Centre Street.

"Hello, Beau," said the Inspector.

"'Lo, Pop. How's crime?"

"Still with us. Beau, I'd like to have you meet my son, Ellery."

"Hi, Beau," said Mr. Queen.

The young man set down his sandwich and examined Mr. Queen with minute attention, concentrating on the eyes and mouth, as suspicious as a hound on the scratch for fleas. But when he found no trace of mirth, but only grave amiability, Beau extended his strife-scarred paw, and bellowed for the bartender, and after a while the Inspector went away smiling—sensibly—in the concealing thicket of his mustache.

That was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. For Mr. Queen found himself drawn irresistibly to this vast, cynical-eyed young man with the air of self-confidence and the broad span of shoulder draped in wrinkled cloth.

Later, when *Ellery Queen, Inc., Confidential Investigations* was born, Mr. Queen often wondered exactly how it had come to pass. The conversation in *Louie's Grill* involved the rotten state of the universe, man's inhumanity to man, Beau's personal ambitions, and

suddenly, by a sort of magic, they were talking over an enterprise.

Mr. Queen was astonished to discover that he was about to become Mr. Rummell's partner in a detective agency.

"I've got a few thousand dollars," said Beau, "left by my old man, and I'm lapping 'em up. They'd be better invested in my future."

"I know, but—"

Oh, but he was young, willing, and able. He had legal training, physical courage, the ability to use firearms, a knowledge of the sinkholes of New York and of police methods.

"After all," he grinned, "you can't be a cop's son without getting all that. You ought to know!"—and so, how about it?

"But why me?" asked Mr. Queen in dismay.

"Because you've got a rep. Everybody knows the name of Queen in this town. It's synonymous with detective. I want to cash in on your rep."

"Oh, you do?" asked Mr. Queen feebly.

"Look, Ellery, you won't have to do a lick of work. I'll do it all. I'll run my legs off. I'll work twenty hours a day. I'll sink all my dough. Hell, there's nothing to this detective racket!"

"No?" asked Mr. Queen.

"All I want's your name on the door—I'll do the rest!"

Mr. Queen found himself saying he would think about it.

The next day Mr. Rummell called up and invited him to visit a certain suite in a Times Square office-building.

When Mr. Queen got there he saw his name already gilt-lettered on the front door.

Mr. Rummell, freshly shaved for the occasion, bowed him into a three-room suite. "Some stuff, huh? Meet our new secretary!" And he presented an aged virgin

named Miss Hecuba Penny who already, after only an hour's association, was regarding Mr. Beau Rummell with a furtive, prim, but powerful passion.

Mr. Queen surrendered, feeling a little as if he had run several miles. But he liked the feeling, too.

ONE bright day in May Beau telephoned Ellery, demanding his partner's presence immediately. There was such excitement in his voice that even the unemotional Mr. Queen was stirred.

He found Beau rearranging office furniture with one hand and with the other adjusting his disreputable necktie, so he knew that an event of unusual importance had occurred.

"What d'ye think?" Beau roared. "*No* divorce. *No* find-our-dear-runaway-Nellie. *No* insurance fraud. It's a real case this time, my friend!"

"What kind of case?"

"Who knows? Who cares? He wouldn't say. But it's bound to be something big, because he's got all the money there is!"

"Who's 'he'?"

"The Man Nobody Knows. The Ghost of Wall Street. The Vanishing American. Cadmus Cole—in person!"

The great man himself, it appeared, had telephoned for an appointment. He had specifically asked for Mr. Queen—Mr. Queen, and no other. Mr. Rummell had promised to produce Mr. Queen; he would have promised to produce the equestrian statue of General Grant.

"He'll be here in fifteen minutes," said Beau, jubilantly. "What a break! Now keep me out of it. He insisted on you. What d'ye know about him? I buzzed Tom Creevich of the *Herald* and he dug some dope on Cole out of the morgue for me."

They put their heads together. Cole had been born in Windsor, Vermont, in 1873, eldest son in a moder-

ately prosperous family. He had inherited his father's ironworks. He was married in 1901, there had been a scandal involving his wife's fidelity, and he had divorced her in 1903. She married four times more before being shot to death in Italy by a stickler of a husband some years later.

Cole expanded his ironworks. In 1912 he went into South American nitrates. When the World War broke out, he began manufacturing munitions. He made millions. After the War he quadrupled his fortune in Wall Street. It was at this time that he sold out all his holdings and bought the colossal chateau at Tarrytown on the Hudson which he rarely used.

In 1921 the multimillionaire retired and, with his confidential agent, Edmund De Carlos, who had represented him for many years, took to the sea. He had lived aboard his yacht *Argonaut* ever since.

"The *Argonaut* rarely visits the big ports," said Beau. "Puts in only for refueling, supplies, and cash. And when the yacht does drop anchor, Cole sulks in his cabin and this fellow De Carlos—he's still with Cole—manages everything.

"Sort of plutocratic marine hobo," remarked Ellery. "What's the matter with him?"

"He's wacky as hell," said Beau happily.

"If what you say is true, this must be his first personal appearance in New York City in eighteen years."

"I'm honored," said Beau. "Yes, sir, I'm sorry I didn't put on my other suit!"

Since *millionairus Americanus* is a rare and fine species, it is important to study Mr. Cadmus Cole while we have the opportunity. For Mr. Cole is doomed to an early extinction . . . perhaps earlier than he thinks.

Observe, ladies and gentlemen, that his first act in entering the inner office of *Ellery Queen, Inc.* is to bump into the door-jamb. A curious fact, which it will be instructive to bear in mind. No, he is not drunk.

He then advances to the focus of the beige rug, and pauses. His gait is not so much a walk as a stumping lurch, each foot raised deliberately from the floor and planted wide, as if feeling its way on an insubstantial terrain.

He stares at Messrs. Queen and Rummell with an oddly squinty sharpness. The squint, enmeshed in radial wrinkles, has surely been caused by years of gazing upon the shifting planes of sunstruck seas; but the sharpness, let us suspect, has a deeper root.

The ancient mariner's complexion is redbrown. The shallow pale plinths of pupil visible behind his squint are clear and youthful, if intently focussed. His face is a mask, smooth, hollowy, and mummiferous. He is paunchless, erect.

His cranium is innocent of hair; it bulges broadly, a brown and naked bone. And, his pale lips being parted a little, we see that he is as toothless as an embryo.

Clad in a blue, brass-buttoned yachting suit of great age, the millionaire squints from Mr. Rummell to Mr. Queen and back again with all the animation of a tailor's dummy.

"Great pleasure, great pleasure," said Mr. Queen hastily. "Won't you have a chair, Mr. Cole?"

"You Queen?" demanded the great man. He spoke in a strangulated mumble that was difficult to make out. His lack of teeth also caused him to drool and spit slightly when he spoke.

Mr. Queen closed his eyes. "I am."

"Talk to you alone," said Mr. Cole testily.

Beau kowtowed and vanished. Mr. Queen knew he was listening, observing, and engaging in other Rummellian activities from a peephole in the combination laboratory and darkroom adjoining the office.

"Not much time," announced the great man. "Sailing tonight. West Indies. Want to clear up this busi-

ness. I've just come from Lloyd Goossens's law-office. Know young Goossens?"

"By reputation only, Mr. Cole. His father died about five years ago and he heads the firm now. It's an old, respectable outfit specializing in the liquidation and trusteeship of large estates. Are you—er—liquidating your estate, Mr. Cole?"

"No, no. Just left Goossens my sealed will. Used to know his father. Good man. But since his father's dead, I've appointed Goossens co-executor and co-trustee of my estate."

"Co-?" asked Mr. Queen politely.

"My friend Edmund De Carlos will share the administrative duties with Goossens. Can't say this concerns you at all!"

"Naturally not," Mr. Queen assured the nabob.

"Come to you on a confidential matter. Understand you know your business, Queen. Want your promise to handle this case personally. No assistants!"

"What case, if you please?" asked Mr. Queen.

"Shan't tell you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Shan't tell you. The case hasn't happened yet."

Mr. Queen looked indulgent. "But, my dear sir, you can't expect me to investigate a case of which I know nothing! I'm a detective, not a clairvoyant."

"Don't expect you to," mumbled the great man. "Engaging your future services. You'll know what it's about when the proper time comes."

"I can't refrain from asking," observed Mr. Queen, "why, if that is the case, Mr. Cole, you don't engage me at the proper time."

It seemed to him that a certain slyness crept over the brown mask of the millionaire. "You're a detective. You tell *me*."

"There's only one reason that comes directly to mind," murmured Mr. Queen, rising to the challenge,

"but it seems so indelicate I hesitate to mention it."

"The devil! What's the reason?" And Mr. Cole's nostrils betrayed an oscillant curiosity.

"If you didn't decide to do the normal thing, which would have been to hire an investigator at the time an investigation became necessary, then it must be because you don't expect to be *able* to hire an investigator at that time, Mr. Cole."

"Fiddle-faddle! Talk sense."

"Simply that you think you may be dead."

The great man sucked in a long, snorkly breath. "Ah!" he said. "Well, well!" as if he had not heard anything so astounding in all his sixty-six years.

"Then you do expect an attack on your life?" asked Mr. Queen, leaning forward. "You have an active enemy? Perhaps some one has tried to kill you already?"

Mr. Cadmus Cole was silent. His lids slid closed, like the segmented roof of an observatory. Then he opened his eyes and said: "Money's no object. Always buy the best. Don't haggle. Will you take the case, Queen?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Queen promptly.

"I'll send a registered letter to Goossens as soon as I get back to the boat, with an enclosure to be filed with my will in Goossens's possession. It will specify that I've retained you to perform certain services at the stipulated fee. Which is?"

Mr. Queen could sense the mental vibrations of Mr. Beau Rummell imploring him to name an astronomical number. "Since I don't know what or how much work is involved, I can scarcely set a fee, Mr. Cole. I'll set it when, as you say, the time comes. Meanwhile, may I suggest a retainer?"

"How much?" Cole reached into his breast-pocket.

"Shall we say," Mr. Queen hesitated, but only for an instant, "ten thousand dollars?"

"Make it fifteen," said the great man, and he drew

out a checkbook and a fountain-pen. "Expenses to be paid. Let me sit down there, young man."

The millionaire heeled round the desk like a clipper in a squall, dropped into Mr. Queen's chair and, sucking in his cheeks, rapidly wrote out a check.

"I'll give you a receipt, Mr. Cole—"

"Not necessary. I've marked it 'retainer against future services.' Good day."

And, rising, the old gentleman set his yachting cap firmly on his naked dome and staggered towards the office door. Mr. Queen hurried forward, just too late to steer his extraordinary client clear of the jamb. Mr. Cole bumped. There was an absent look on his face, almost a majestically absent look, as if he could not be bothered about mere doorways when there were so many important things to think about.

He bounced off the jamb and chuckled: "By the way, just what d'ye suppose I *am* hiring you for, Queen?"

Mr. Queen searched his brain for a reply. The question made no sense. No sense whatever.

But Mr. Cadmus Cole mumbled: "Never mind," and trundled across the reception room and out of Mr. Queen's life.

When Mr. Queen returned, the check was missing from the desk. Rubbing his eyes, he said: "Abracadabra!" but Beau came running in from the laboratory with the slip of paper and said: "I made a photostat of it—just in case. No hairless monkey's passing me a phony check for fifteen grand and getting away with it!"

"You don't seem pleased," said Mr. Queen, alarmed. He sat down at the desk and quickly endorsed the check, as if he expected it to fly away.

"He's either an escaped lunatic," said Beau with disgust, "or else he's one of those eccentric tycoons

you read about who like to play. This is a joke. Wait and see. Screwball will stop the check."

The mere possibility agonized Mr. Queen. He rang. "Miss Penny, do you see this scrap of paper?"

"I do," said Hecuba, gazing with love at Mr. Rummell.

"Take it down to the bank on which it's drawn first thing in the morning; too late today. If the signature's authentic, deposit the check in our bank."

"Optimist," growled Beau.

Miss Penny made off with the precious cargo of paper. Beau flung himself on the leather sofa and began angrily to chew on a mashed chocolate bar.

"What did you make of friend Cole?" asked Ellery with a remote look. "Didn't anything about him seem —well, peculiar?"

Beau said: "He's hiding something. Like hell."

Ellery sprang from the chair. "But the other thing! His pesky, unreasonable *curiosity*. Why should he be so anxious to find out what *I* think he's hiring me for?"

"He's a nut, I tell you."

Ellery perched on the desk and stared out at Times Square's crenellated skyline. Suddenly he grimaced; he had sat down on something long and hard. He turned round.

"He forgot his fountain-pen."

"Then we're in that much, anyway." Beau scowled at his chocolated fingers and began to lick them clean, like a cat.

Ellery examined the pen. Beau lit a cigaret. After a while he said indifferently: "What ho!"

"What do you make of this, Beau?" Ellery brought the pen to the sofa.

Beau squinted at it curiously through the smoke. It was a large fat pen, its cap considerably scratched and nicked in a sort of arced pattern. Some of the dents

were deep, and the whole pen had a look of age and hard use.

Beau glanced at Ellery's face, puzzled. Then he unscrewed the cap and examined the gold nib.

"I make out an old-fashioned black gold-trimmed fountain-pen that's seen plenty of use by somebody that likes a smooth, broad stroke. It's exactly like millions of other pens."

"I have an idea," said Ellery, "that it's exactly like no other pen in the world."

Beau stared at him.

"Well, no doubt all these little mysteries will clarify in time. Meanwhile, Beau, I suggest you take microphotographs of the thing. From every angle and position. I want exact measurements, too. Then we'll send the pen back to the *Argonaut* by messenger. . . . I wish I were sure," he mumbled.

"Sure?"

"That the check's good."

"Amen!"

A glorious morrow it proved to be. The sun beamed; their messenger reported that the previous evening he had delivered the pen to the yacht, in its berth in the Hudson, and had not been arrested as a suspicious character; and Miss Hecuba Penny appeared late for work but triumphant with the announcement that the bank on which the fifteen thousand dollar check was drawn had authenticated, promptly and beyond any doubt whatever, the signature of Cadmus Cole.

That left only the possibility that Mr. Cole had been playful and meant to stop the check.

They waited three days. The check cleared.

Beau salaamed thrice to the agency bankbook and sallied forth to drown the fatted calf.

II. Last Voyage of the *Argonaut*

The mortality rate among sixty-six-year-old millionaires who make out sudden wills and engage detectives for undisclosed reasons is bound to be high.

Mr. Cadmus Cole died.

Mr. Ellery Queen expected Mr. Cadmus Cole to die; to die, that is, under suspicious circumstances. He did not foresee that he himself would come perilously near to preceding his client through the pearly gates.

The blow fell the afternoon of the day the check cleared. Mr. Queen had taken up his telephone to call Lloyd Goossens, the attorney, for a conference of mutual enlightenment. Just as Goossens's secretary told him that the lawyer had left the previous night for London on an emergency business trip, Mr. Queen experienced a pang.

He set down the telephone. The pain stabbed deeply. He said: "Everything happens to me," and rang weakly for Miss Penny.

Within ninety minutes Mr. Queen lay on an operating table unaware that a famous surgeon was removing an appendix which had treacherously burst. Afterwards, the surgeon looked grave. Peritonitis.

Inspector Queen and Beau paced the corridor outside Ellery's room all night, silent. They could hear the Queen voice raised in a querulous delirium. He was haranguing an invisible entity, demanding the answer to various secrets. The words "Cole" and "fountain-pen" ran through his monologue, accompanied by mutterings, groans, and occasional wild laughter.

With the sun emerged the surgeon, and the House Physician, and various others. Mr. Queen, it appeared, had a chance. There was something on his mind, said the surgeon, and it was making the patient cling, per-

versely, to his life. It had something to do with a fountain-pen and a person named Cole.

"How," said Beau hoarsely, "can you kill a guy like that?"

MR. QUEEN merely lingered in this vale of tears, swinging recklessly on the pearly gate, sometimes in, sometimes out. But when the news came that Cadmus Cole had died, he stopped teetering and set about the business of recuperation with such a grimness that even the doctors were awed.

"Beau, for heaven's sake," implored the patient, "talk!"

Beau talked. The yacht *Argonaut*, Captain Herrold Angus, master, had cleared New York Harbor the night of the day Cole had visited *Ellery Queen, Inc.* She carried her owner, his friend and companion Edmund De Carlos, her master, and a crew of twelve.

"Nobody else?" asked Mr. Queen instantly.

"That's all we know about."

On 13 June the *Argonaut* anchored in the Gulf of Paria, off Port of Spain, and, taking on fresh water and fuel, then sailed north and west into the Caribbean.

On 21 June she spoke a passing cruise liner 100 miles northwest of Port Gallinas. Captain Angus exchanged the usual courtesies of the sea with the liner's master.

At eight bells on the night of 30 June, during a squall, the *Argonaut's* wireless sputtered a general distress call directed to any vessel carrying a medical officer. The message stated that Cadmus Cole had suffered a severe heart-attack and that while Captain Angus had medical equipment in his locker and was capable of administering simple treatment, he felt the serious condition of his owner demanded immediate professional advice.

White Lady, lying some 200 miles northeast, prompt-

ly responded. Her chief medical officer radioed for details of pulse, respiration, blood-pressure, and superficial symptoms. This information was supplied him via wireless.

White Lady's physician then advised digitalis injections, applications of ice, and other emergency measures. Captain Angus kept him informed by five-minute radio exchanges of the sick man's condition. Meanwhile, the liner steamed towards the *Argonaut* at full speed.

But she was too late. An hour and fifty minutes after the original distress call, a radio message signed by Captain Angus and Edmund De Carlos announced that Cadmus Cole had passed away. The message concluded with thanks for *White Lady's* assistance and the information that the millionaire's last wish before expiring had been to be buried at sea.

"No, no!" shrieked Mr. Queen. "Stop them!"

"Whoa, Silver," said Beau soothingly. "Cole's been lying at the bottom of the Caribbean in a canvas shroud for a week."

"A whole week!" groaned Ellery. "Is it July already?"

"Wednesday, July fifth."

"Then we've got to speak to De Carlos, to Angus, to the radio operator, the crew! Where are they now?"

"The *Argonaut* showed up at Santiago de Cuba two days after Cole kicked in—that was last Sunday. By Monday Captain Angus and the crew were paid off and discharged."

"De Carlos?" asked Ellery after a profound silence.

"Yeah. De Carlos then put the *Argonaut* in drydock down there, shipping Cole's personal effects to the States, and hopped a plane. He ought to be here tonight or tomorrow morning."

Mr. Queen was ominously quiet. Then he said: "Fee-fi-fo-fum."

"What?"

"A heart-attack in the middle of the Caribbean during a convenient storm, death before a certified medical officer can examine the dying man, sea-burial before an autopsy can be performed—and now the Captain and crew dispersed before they can be questioned!"

"Look at it this way, Master-Mind," said Beau, "because this is the way it's going to be looked at by John Q. Public. Cole's ticker gave out? He was sixty-six. Died at sea? Funny if he hadn't, since he spent his last eighteen years aboard a yacht. Buried fathoms deep? Natural request of a dying man who loved the sea."

"And De Carlos's discharging Captain Angus and the crew in Cuba?" asked Mr. Queen dryly.

"Sure, he could have had them sail the *Argonaut* back north. But a plane is faster, and it would be natural for De Carlos to want to get back to New York as quickly as possible. No, son, the set-up is as smooth as a baby's—"

"Don't like it," said Ellery irritably. "Cole makes out a will, hires us, acts mysterious, dies—some people would use a nasty word, Beau . . . murder!"

"There's an ol' debbil in de law," said Beau dryly, "and his name is *corpus delicti*. I'll be squashed if I see how we'd do it, but suppose we could prove murder. We'd have to produce a body, wouldn't we? And where's the body? Making fish-food at the bottom of the Caribbean. No, sir, all we can have is suspicions, and they don't pay off on those in this racket."

"Just the same," muttered Mr. Queen, "we've got fifteen thousand dollars of Cole's money that say somebody's not going to get away with Cole's murder!"

"We've got it, but not for long. I meant to save the bad news till you were well enough to stand the shock. El, we've got to pay that dough back to the Cole estate."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Queen. "Why?"

"Because Cole hired *you*, and you won't be able to investigate whatever it is he wanted you to investigate.

The doc tells me you've got to go away for at least six weeks."

"Don't be an ass," snapped Ellery. "You're *Ellery Queen, Inc.*, not I. You'll investigate."

"No can do." Beau was glum. "Cole hired you personally, and you accepted. That constitutes a contract for personal services. A contract for personal services can't be assigned. We're out fifteen thousand bucks and the prospect of being filthy rich."

"The hell you say," scowled Mr. Queen, and he fell into an aggressive reverie. After a time he smiled diabolically. "Beau, whom did Cole say he was appointing executor-trustees of his estate?"

"Lloyd Goossens and this De Carlos."

"Do they know you?"

"No, and the ignorance is mutual. So what?"

"They don't know me either." Ellery grinned. "You see?"

"Why, you two-timing pretzel, you!" shouted Beau. "Talk about confidence men!"

"When Goossens asks for Ellery Queen, you answer."

"I stand in for you! And neither Goossens nor De Carlos will know the difference." Beau pounced. "Let me shake the hand of a genius!"

"Please, my operation. Of course, you know we're conspiring to commit a crime?"

"Are we?" Beau scratched his head. "Let's see. Well, I guess we are, although I'll be a frosted chocolate if I know what the crime is. And what's more, I don't give a rooty-toot. *Adios*, Mr. Queen!" said Mr. Rummell.

"*Vaya con Dios*, Mr. Queen!" said Mr. Queen.

Lloyd Goossens telephoned the next morning.

Mr. Rummell, alias Mr. Queen, made the subway journey downtown to Park Row in record time.

Goossens was a big, pleasant man in his late thirties, dressed as for the salon. He had a gray and sleepless look. Beau, who read Winchell, knew that Goossens al-

ternated socially between Park Avenue and 52nd Street, with and without his society wife, as suited the occasion. As they shook hands, Beau sighed; it must be swell to be rich, he thought.

"De Carlos just got in on the Florida plane," said the lawyer, waving his fuming pipe towards an inner office. "I suppose you know who he is, Mr. Queen?"

"Mr. Queen" looked around to see where Mr. Queen was, but then, realizing that he was Mr. Queen, said: "Lord Chamberlain, wasn't he? By the way, why all the mystery, Goossens?"

Goossens frowned. "Mystery?"

"Cole wouldn't disclose the nature of the case. He made quite a secret of it."

"I don't see why," said the lawyer, puzzled. "His registered letter to me, in which he outlined the terms of your employment, made it perfectly clear. And then it's down in his will in black and white."

"You mean there's nothing sensational about it?"

Goossens grinned. "It has its points. Come in and meet the Grand Vizier, and we'll go over the whole business."

A moment later Beau was shaking hands with a medium-sized man browned by years of exposure to salt wind and windy sun. De Carlos's hair was a wavy black fur, and he wore a piratical-looking black beard. The eyes behind his silver-rimmed spectacles were widely open, naive—much too naive, Beau thought.

Beau was preoccupied when he left the two executors. At the hospital he told Ellery, who was in a fever of impatience, exactly what had happened, and all about De Carlos.

"He looks like a pirate. Just off the Spanish Main, too!"

"Yes, yes. But how about the case?"

"Oh, the case." Beau stared out the window. "That mysterious case we were all hopped up about. Well,

prepare for a shock. Either old man Cole was as nutty as a chocolate bar, or we're up against a real baffler."

"What's the assignment, you aggravating sea-lawyer?"

"Merely to find a couple of missing heirs!"

"Oh, no," groaned Ellery. "That's too much. It can't be. How about the will itself? Did you see it?"

"Yes, and it has its screwy angles." Beau explained Cole's will to Ellery.

"But how is it that Cole didn't know where his heirs were?" demanded Ellery when Beau had finished.

Beau shrugged. Cadmus Cole's unfortunate marital experience in Windsor at the turn of the century had embittered him against the whole institution of marriage. He had had a younger brother, Huntley, whom he had sent to New York to study art. In 1906, in New York, Huntley Cole secretly married his model, a woman named Nadine Malloy. In 1907 a child, Margo, was born; and Cadmus, for the first time learning of his younger brother's marriage, became enraged at what he considered Huntley's ingratitude.

Cadmus stopped sending Huntley money and swore he should never speak to his brother again. Huntley took his wife and infant daughter to Paris, where he painted futilely for two years, living in poverty, his only means of support his wife's meager earnings as a model.

"This Huntley," Beau explained, "was too proud to write to his rich brother. But his wife wasn't, because her brat was starving, and so she wrote to Cadmus pleading for help. Cadmus replied—that's how we know about the Parisian episode of the Huntley branch —saying that his brother had made his bed, and so on —the usual sanctimonious tripe.

"Anyway, Cadmus turned his sister-in-law down cold. Huntley found out about it, apparently, because right after Cadmus's letter arrived he committed suicide. There's absolutely no record of what happened to

Nadine and little Margo. So one of our jobs is to pick up that thirty-year-old trail."

"That makes Margo Cole one heiress—if she's found and if she qualifies under the will. How about the other?"

"Well, Cadmus and Huntley had a younger sister, Monica. Reading between the lines it seems that, hearing about Huntley's suicide in Paris, Monica blamed Cadmus for it and just upped and quit her sourpuss brother cold. Walked out on Cadmus and the Windsor ancestral mansion and disappeared. That was not long after Huntley's death in 1909.

"We know sketchily what happened to her, too, after leaving Vermont. She had a lot of tough luck supporting herself until 1911, when she met a man named Shawn, an accountant or something, in Chicago. Shawn married her. A daughter, Kerrie, was born to Monica in 1918— just about the time her husband died of spinal meningitis in a Chicago hospital.

"Monica was left without a cent. Desperate, she wrote to her brother Cadmus, explaining what had happened and asking for help, just as Huntley's wife had written nine years before. Well, Monica received practically the same answer: she'd put herself outside the reservation by marrying, and she could go take a flying jump at the moon. That's the last record Cadmus had of his sister's—and little Kerrie's—whereabouts. Monica's letter was postmarked Chicago, September eighth, 1918."

"Nothing for Monica, eh?" mused Mr. Queen.

"Not a jit. Of course, she may be dead. Cole left the bulk of his estate, as I said, to his two nieces, Margo Cole and Kerrie Shawn . . . when, as, and if."

"How about insanity?" asked Mr. Queen hopefully.

"No dice. Goossens has already consulted psychiatrists. From the picture, they agree Cole was medically sane. Legally, of course, he had a right to put any

cockeyed conditions he pleased on the passing of his estate. De Carlos, who's in the best position to know, pooh-poohs the whole idea, of course. He ought to, since Cole's left him a million bucks in cash and a home for life if he wants it in the Tarrytown mansion!"

"Did you question De Carlos about the circumstances of Cole's death?"

Beau nodded. "But he's a cool customer, and he stuck to his yarn. I bawled him out for not holding on to Captain Angus and the radio operator when he scattered the crew of the yacht all over creation."

"What's the point?"

"The witnesses who attested the validity of Cole's signature at the bottom of the will were Angus, the radio operator, and De Carlos."

"What of that?"

"Before a will may be probated, two of the subscribing witnesses must be produced and examined, if they're within the State and are competent and able to testify. In the absence of any witness, the Surrogate at his discretion may dispense with his testimony and admit the will to probate on the testimony of the other. So that in the absence of Captain Angus and the radio operator, we'll have to rely completely on the testimony of De Carlos."

Mr. Queen frowned. "I don't care for that."

"Well, we'll have a check-up, because the Surrogate undoubtedly will insist on better proof of signature than the mere word of a single witness. He'll want proof of the testator's handwriting, and of Angus's, and so on. There must be hundreds of Cole's autographs extant, and they'll all be examined."

"And I have to go to the mountains!" groaned Mr. Queen. "Blast my vermiform appendix!"

BEAU armed two operatives with the names and descriptions of Captain Angus and the *Argonaut's* crew

and sent them down to Santiago de Cuba to begin a discreet inquiry. He also set a reliable French agency on the trail of Nadine and Margo Cole, advertised extensively in the French and American papers, and then set off on the Kerrie Shawn trail.

Wrathfully, Mr. Queen departed for the Adirondacks. From this Elba he followed the fortunes of Mr. Edmund De Carlos through the New York gossip columnists and society tattlers. De Carlos, as co-executor of the Cole estate and co-trustee-to-be, had granted permission to himself, as beneficiary, to take up residence at the Tarrytown mansion even before probate of the will.

The house and grounds had been under the supervision of a caretaker until the man died early in 1937. Apparently Cole had never quite got round to hiring another, for the place had been left boarded up and untended. Now De Carlos moved in, hired decorators and servants, and established himself in lone grandeur as lord of the manor.

He promptly set off on a fierce hunt for pleasure. The man's bearded face, menacing teeth, and bushy hair began to appear in newspaper photographs with regularity. Overnight he became New York's premier *bon vivant*, leading benefactor of various lonely ladies of the chorus, lavish spender and frequenter of notorious night clubs and gambling rooms.

"If he keeps up this pace," thought Mr. Queen grimly, "that million-dollar legacy will collapse under the weight of its own mortgages!"

Edmund De Carlos was the son of a Brazilian father and an English mother, born in the Brazilian interior on a coffee plantation in the year 1889. That made him fifty years old, ruminated Mr. Queen from his lofty exile; in his pictures the pirate seemed younger.

Mr. Queen decided suddenly that Mr. De Carlos would bear watching.

Meanwhile, Beau was scampering along a cold spoor.

Beginning with a clue twenty-one years old—the knowledge that Monica Cole Shawn's husband had died in a Chicago hospital—Beau followed a trail that led to a Chicago tenement, then to a secretarial school, where, apparently, the young widow had enrolled to learn a practical means of sustaining her life and her daughter's when Cadmus Cole refused financial assistance.

St. Louis, Minneapolis, New York—cheap rooming houses, small apartments, a draughty theatrical hotel, a dancing and "dramatic" school for children. Eagerly Beau haunted Broadway. Finally, in the curling files of a theatrical agency, he unearthed an old photograph of a beautiful girl-child named Kerrie Shawn. But then he lost the trail.

During his New York investigation Beau learned from Lloyd Goossens that the Surrogate had been satisfied with the proofs of Cadmus Cole's testamentary signature. There were plentiful examples of Cole's handwriting for comparison purposes—on checks, on legal documents, on records in foreign and American banks dating back almost twenty years. Captain Angus's signature was likewise authenticated through the *Argonaut's* log (in which, Mr. Rummell was interested to learn, the details of Cole's last illness and death were meticulously recorded, agreeing to the letter with the verbal account given by De Carlos).

"Almost ready," Goossens told Beau. "Assets, for the size of the estate, are in a very fluid condition. The fourth citation is to be published in a few days, Queen —so where do you stand with the hunt for those two girls?"

Beau dug in again. He found a new clue which led westward. But in Cincinnati he came up against a dead end.

"I can't understand why this femme Kerrie Shawn hasn't answered the personals I've published," Beau complained to Ellery over the long-distance telephone. "Unless she's left the United States, or is dead. As far as that's concerned, there's been enough newspaper publicity to call her back from Africa, or from the dead."

Mr. Queen pondered. "There's a clear record that Monica Shawn was giving her child dancing and dramatic lessons, isn't there? So, working from the professional angle—"

"Listen, Big Brain," snarled Beau, "I've badgered agents and managers in New York so much they're threatening to have me pinched if I so much as show my pan again. That theatrical lead is strictly from hunger, I tell you!"

"Where," inquired Mr. Queen mildly, "does every aspiring American mama with a beautiful child of real or fancied talent eventually, and inevitably, wind up?"

"Am I a dope!" roared Beau. "Goodbye!"

Ten days later Ellery received a wire from Hollywood:

"HAVE FOUND KERRIE WOO WOO EXCLAMATION POINT BEAU"

III. Mr. Santa Claus

At the Central Casting Bureau in Hollywood Beau had found no Shawns, but three Kerries. He examined their portraits. Kerrie Acres was a Negro. Kerrie St. Alban was an aged character actress. Kerrie Land was a young girl.

Her face was nice. Light-colored eyes looked straight at him; they fizzed, like champagne. A chin-cleft, a turned-up nose, soft dark rolls of hair . . . nice, nice.

Beau compared Kerrie Land's face with the photograph in his possession of Kerrie Shawn as a child. There was an unmistakable resemblance. But he had to be sure.

He wormed an Argyle Avenue address and telephone number out of a Bureau attendant and called the number.

A woman answered. He identified himself in a raspy voice as "Central Casting" and asked for Kerrie Land. The woman said Kerrie Land had been on location somewhere for two months, and how come? She was expected back within a few days. She slammed the receiver.

Beau returned to his hotel, looked himself over, decided his clothes were shabby enough to lull the suspicions of even a Hollywood landlady, checked out and, carrying one ragged handbag, walked to the Argyle Avenue address.

It was a stucco rooming house which had long since burst its seams—discolored, down at the heel, one of a row of similar dreary, dowdy dwellings.

Beau began to feel like Santa Claus.

He rang the front doorbell and was admitted by a shapeless woman wearing an ancient dinner-gown and carpet-slippers.

"I want a room," he said.

"Extra?" She looked him over without friendliness.

"I'm looking for a job in the movies," Beau admitted.

"Six dollars in advance. Your own soap and towels." The landlady did not stir until he let her inspect the bulging interior of his wallet. "Oh, new in town. Well, I'll show you what I got. Throw parties?"

"I don't know anyone in Hollywood," said Beau.

"With that roll, you'll know plenty soon enough."

"I'm respectable, if that's what you mean, beautiful," grinned Beau.

"See you don't forget it. I run a decent house. Name?"

"Queen. Ellery Queen."

She shrugged and shuffled upstairs. Beau was very critical of the rooms she indifferently displayed. He watched the little cardboard name-plates on the doors. When he saw one that said: KERRIE LAND—VIOLET DAY, he chose the nearest room on the same floor, paid a week's rent in advance, and then settled down to await the return of Cadmus Cole's niece.

That night he stole into the dark bedroom shared by Kerrie "Land" and Violet Day and callously explored it.

It was a mean room, like his own: a rickety dressing table covered by a cheap linen runner smeared in one corner with lipstick and powder; an open closet hung with a faded calico curtain, and inside dozens of flimsy wire hangers; a lame bureau; walls hung with unframed 8 x 10 "still" photographs of Kerrie and a grim blonde with long shanks and an air of world-weariness; two low, lumpy, iron beds.

One bed exhaled strong perfume: Violet Day, Beau decided unchivalrously. The other gave out a sweet, clean odor—obviously Kerrie's.

Poor kid.

Beau mumbled angrily to himself. Getting soft about a perky little brunette with delusions of stardom and come-hither eyes! Why, she stood in line for more dough than he'd see in his whole lifetime!

And he began to look forward to his first sight of Kerrie Shawn with a fierce, insatiable excitement.

He saw her four days later. He heard a taxi pull up outside, a merry voice, light footsteps. Instantly he was out of his room and at the head of the stairs, his heart racing.

The tall grim blonde appeared downstairs, handling two huge pieces of luggage like a stevedore. She was followed by the brunette, who was laughing as she

lugged a suitcase. And suddenly there was warmth and happiness in those dingy halls.

"Come on, Vi!" cried Kerrie, flying up the stairs.

At the top there was Beau, staring.

"Oh," said Kerrie, bumping into him in the semi-darkness. "Hello!"

"Yourself."

"You're new, aren't you?"

"Absolutely reborn!"

"What? Vi, it's a funny man! My name's Kerrie Sh—I mean, Kerrie Land. This is my roomie, Violet Day."

"Do. Queen. Ellery Queen." Beau stared and stared.

"It talks," said the blonde, peering at him. "Next thing you know it'll touch you for five bucks. Kerrie, come on. My feet are yelling bloody murder."

"It's nice, though," said Kerrie, smiling at him. "What lovely hair, Vi! Looks like Bob Taylor, don't you think?" And they left Beau grinning in the gloom.

Ten minutes later he rapped on their door.

"Come in!" called Kerrie.

She was in a house-coat. Red flowers and a zipper. Her small feet were bare. Tousled hair—nice. The suitcase lay open on the bed—the sweet-smelling bed, Beau noted with an obscure satisfaction—and she was stowing black panties away in a bureau drawer.

"It's in again," said Violet Day, asprawl on the perfumed bed, her naked toes wiggling with ecstasy. "Kerrie, have you no shame? Giving away all your girlish secrets."

"Hi," said Beau, still grinning. He felt good, he didn't know why. As if he had had five drinks.

"Go away," said the blonde. "This gal here was born with the soul of a Girl Scout, and I was placed on earth just to protect her from hungry-looking hombres who think they look like the Taylor man."

"Vi, shut up," said Kerrie. "Come in, Queen—we won't bite you! Got any Scotch?"

"No, but I know where to find some," said Beau.

"Make mine apple. Say! I take it all back," said Vi, sitting up in bed. "Where?"

"I'm sort of new in Hollywood," said Beau. "You know. Lonesome."

"It's lonesome!" giggled the blonde. "But it knows where the Scotch is. Kerrie, it does look like Taylor, you know that?"

Beau ignored her. "Miss Land, how about joining me in a little supper with that Scotch?"

Vi shrugged her knees. "Lonesome—supper—Scotch! What is this, *The Merry Widow*? I bet he'll have you feeling his muscle before the night's over, Kerrie."

"We'd love to," said Kerrie, stressing the "we" the least bit. "I know just how you feel, Queen. It's a date! —the three of us."

"The three of us?" said "Mr. Queen" damply.

"But we pay our own way."

"Utsnay! What do you take me for?"

"Dutch, or you eat by yourself," said Kerrie positively. "Your bankroll won't last forever—Ellery, was it?—and we've just had two months of steady extra work being Hawaiians. Wasn't it Hawaiians, Vi?"

"I dunno," said Vi.

"So give us a half-hour to shower and change," said Kerrie, and as she said it a dimple appeared from nowhere and transfixed Mr. Rummell like an arrow, "and we're your gals, Ellery." And she came and stood close to him at the door, smiling.

Something happened to him. As if he had a sudden heart-attack. What the hell? He found himself in the dark hall leaning against the wall.

He stood there for several minutes, wiping the sweat from his forehead. Whew! Then he ran downstairs to the pay-telephone and sent the telegram to Mr. Queen which ended with EXCLAMATION POINT.

They dined—at Mr. "Queen's" expense—in the Cocoanut Grove at the *Ambassador*.

Beau took turns dancing with Kerrie and Vi. Vi just danced. Kerrie floated. She made herself part of him. He actually enjoyed dancing for the first time in his life.

Suddenly Violet Day developed a headache and, over Kerrie's protests, left them.

Kerrie laughed. "You're accepted, Mister. Did you know that?"

"How come?"

"Vi turns her headaches on and off like a faucet. Since she left me to your mercies, it's because she thinks you're a regular guy."

"How about you?" Beau leaned forward hungrily.

"I'm not so naive. You're a nice-looking cover, but what's in the book? I'll know better when you take me home."

Beau looked disappointed. "Tell me about yourself."

"There isn't much to tell."

"Have you and Vi been friends long?"

"I met her in Hollywood." Kerrie turned the glass of vermouth slowly in her long fingers. "Vi took me under her wing when my mother died last year. Just like a hen. And I guess I was a pretty hopeless sort of egg."

"Say, I'm sorry. Your mother, huh?"

"She died of pleurisy-pneumonia. No resistance. She burned herself out trying to make a Garbo out of a cluck." Kerrie said abruptly: "Let's talk about something else."

"You seem to have led a pretty tough life."

"It hasn't been all honey-and-almond cream. Monica—"

"Monica?"

"My mother. Monica Cole Shawn. My real name's Shawn. Monica slaved all her life to see me become somebody, and I'm a little bitter about . . . How did we

ever get on this subject, anyway? You see, I have an uncle who's a first-class rat. He's really responsible for my mother's suffering and hardships. But I don't see why you—"

"Monica Cole Shawn," said Beau. "You know, that's funny. Was your uncle's name Cole?"

"Yes, Cadmus Cole. Why?"

"His name's been in the papers. So you're his niece!"

"Papers? I haven't seen a paper in two months. What's he done now—turned a machine-gun on the Marriage License Bureau?"

Beau looked straight at her. "Then you didn't know your uncle just died?"

She was silent for some time, a little paler. "No, I didn't know. I'm sorry, of course, but he treated my mother abominably, and I'm afraid I can't shed any tears. I never even saw him." She frowned. "How did he die?"

"Heart-attack on a Caribbean cruise. He was buried at sea. His own yacht, you know."

"Yes, I read about him occasionally. He was supposed to be a rich man." Kerrie's lip curled. "And all the while he was spending his money on yachts and mansions, my mother was slaving to death, living in hall bedrooms, cooking Sunday breakfasts over gas-burners—if there was anything to cook. . . . I took a job when I was sixteen because I couldn't bear seeing her work her life away for me. But she did, just the same, and when she died last year at fifty-two she was an old woman. Dear Uncle Cadmus could have saved her all that—if he hadn't been a lunatic on the subject of marriage. When Mother married, and my father died, she wrote Cadmus—and I still have his reply." Kerrie's mouth quivered. "Now, look here, Mr. Snoop, that's quite enough. I'll be crying on your shoulder, next thing I know."

"Can you guarantee that?" said Beau. "Kerrie, I've got a confession to make."

"This seems to be Aching Hearts night!"

"I'm a heel."

"*Mister* Queen! Thanks for the warning."

"I mean I'm a phony. I'm not an extra. I'm not in Hollywood looking for a job. I'm here for only one purpose—to find you."

She was puzzled. "To find *me*?"

"I'm a private detective."

She said: "Oh."

"The Queen agency was employed by your uncle before his death. Our job was to find his heirs when he died."

"His . . . heirs? You mean he died and left—me—money?"

"That's the size of it, Kerrie."

Kerrie gripped the table. "Did he think he could buy me off—pay me conscience-money for having killed my mother?"

"I know how you feel." Beau put one of his paws over her icy hands, and squeezed. "But don't do anything foolish. What's done is done. He's dead, and he's left a lot of money—to you and to a cousin of yours, Margo Cole, your uncle Huntley's daughter, if she can be found. That money belongs to the two of you."

She was silent.

"Part of the money should have been your mother's while she was alive, anyway. Then what's wrong in taking it now? You can't bring her back, but you can enjoy your own life. Do you like Hollywood?"

"I hate it," she said in a low voice. "Because this is a place where only talent counts, and I haven't any. I might work my way up to talking bits, but I'm not an actress. I'm not kidding myself. I face a life like Vi's—cheap boarding houses, a starvation diet, mending the

runs in my stockings because I can't afford new ones. . . ." She shivered.

"Do you want to hear more?" asked Beau.

She smiled all at once and withdrew her hand. "All right, Dick Tracy—shoot the works."

"Kerrie, your uncle Cadmus died a multimillionaire."

"A—what?" she shrieked.

"Didn't you know how rich he was?"

"Well, but I thought—"

"His estate is estimated at fifty million dollars."

"Fifty mil—" Her tongue and lips grew stiff.

It was like watching a kid open a Christmas box. Her breath was coming in quick little gusts.

"Take another drink. Waiter! Rye, or Scotch?"

"Oh, Scotch, and lots of it! Tell me more. Did I hear you say fifty million? That's not a slip of the tongue? You don't mean fifty thousand. Fifty MILLION?"

"Whoa! Let's go easy. You're not getting any fifty million dollars."

"But I thought you said— Oh, I don't care! Nobody could spend that much money, anyway. How much *is* it?"

"Let's figure it out." Beau began scribbling on the cloth. "The estate comes to about fifty millions. Your uncle didn't use the cute dodges by which rich men usually cheat the constituted authorities of their death-shares. So inheritance taxes are going to eat up about thirty-five millions."

Kerrie closed her eyes. "Go on. What do I care how I spend money?"

"Fees and expenses will probably come to a half-million. That leaves fourteen million and a half. Invested in safe securities at, say, four percent—that makes an income annually of five hundred and eighty thousand dollars."

"What?" said Kerrie, opening her eyes.

"You don't get the principal. I'll explain why later.

Now, there are two of you sharing this income—your cousin Margo and you."

"How do you do, Margo," said Kerrie with a wriggle of delight. "Will you buy a gold-lined tub with me?"

"You mean—? But sure, you never even saw her. Anyway, your half-share annually comes to two hundred and ninety thousand. Income taxes should take a hundred and sixty thousand of that, so you'll have a hundred and thirty thousand a year."

"How much does that come to per week?" murmured Kerrie. "That's the figure I want. I was always rotten in arithmetic."

"It comes," said Beau, scribbling the last figure, "to twenty-five hundred smackers a week."

"Twenty-five hun— Every week? Week in, week out?"

"Yes."

"Why, that's better than being a star!" cried Kerrie. "Twenty-five hundred a week clear! I suppose I'm dreaming. It's a mean one, all right. Pinch me and wake me up."

"It's true. But—"

"Oh," said Kerrie lightly. Then she sighed. "There's a catch in it."

"Well . . . certain conditions. By the way, I'm empowered to finance you—all you want—until you reach New York. Sort of drawing account against that twenty-five hundred per. That is, if you accept the conditions."

"Let's have them," said Kerrie crisply. "I may as well know the worst."

"First," said Beau, "have you ever been married?"

"No, but I'm eligible. Were you considering snaring an heiress this season? What's the point?"

"Never mind me." Beau reddened. "Is there any chance of your being married in the near future? That is, are you engaged, or have you a boy-friend?"

"I'm free, white, and just twenty-one."

"Then you've merely to accept your uncle's conditions and at least half the estate is yours. Now, for the conditions. The first is this: that you agree to live with the other heiress—we're sure now, from the evidence available, that there are only two of you—in your uncle's Tarrytown mansion on the Hudson. The house will be maintained by the estate for one year. You must live there exclusively for that year; after that you're free to live anywhere you like."

"Wow," said Kerrie. "I was really worried. Why, that's not a condition—it's a blessing! Beautiful house, cars, all the clothes in the world, a maid to do my hair, three squares a day and a couple of cooks to prepare them . . . Mister, that's heaven. Bring on your other condition!"

Beau fished a paper out of his pocket. "Let me read you," he said slowly, "a copy of a paragraph from your uncle's will." He read:

"In imposing this second condition upon my heirs, I feel it necessary to warn them against that insidious, degrading, and fatal institution in human relations known as marriage. I was married, and I know. At its best, it is a dull, confining prison. At its worst, it is hell. Since my divorce, I have lived, and I shall die, a bachelor. My only friend, Edmund De Carlos, to whom I have in this testament willed one million dollars and a home for life if he so wishes, is now and has always been a bachelor. We have discussed the subject many times and agree that most of the ills of the world can be traced to marriage, or rather to its effect upon individuals. It has caused men and women to become greedy, it has inspired horrible crimes, it has, historically, bred wars and international treacheries. I am an old man; my heirs, if they still live, will be young. I feel I must impose my experience of life upon them. They

are free to reject my advice, of course, but only at the expense of the worldly goods I am in a position to bestow upon them. . . ."

Beau put the paper back in his pocket. "There's more of the same. But I think you get the idea."

Kerrie looked astonished. "He was mad!"

"No," said Beau dryly, "he was perfectly sane—in the legal sense, and we have reason to believe in the medical, too. He was just abnormally bitter and intense on this one subject. I suppose it all dates from the dirty deal his wife gave him 'way back in 1902 or so. Anyway, he felt so strongly about marriage that upon it depends your inheritance."

"I don't quite—"

"The will stipulates that the income payable to any heir shall cease automatically, and that heir from then on forfeits all claim to her share of the estate, *if and when she marries.*"

"You mean," cried Kerrie, "if I accept this legacy I shan't ever be able to get married?"

"Not if you want to keep pocketing twenty-five hundred a week."

"And if I turn the whole thing down now, or accept and then marry?"

"Your cousin Margo, if she's eligible, would become the sole heiress. Your share would go to her. Or if you both become ineligible, the will provides that the income from the estate be donated by the trustees to such organized charities as they may see fit to select, and they continue to be trustees for the estate. Or if the heirs remain eligible, then at the death of one the income goes to the survivor. At the death of the survivor, the income goes to the charities. You see, your uncle Cadmus considered death and marriage practically the same thing."

Kerrie was silent for a long time. The orchestra was

playing, and people were dancing under colored lights; her face lay in trombone shadows.

Beau waited for her decision with a curious eagerness. She couldn't turn it down. She wouldn't be human if she did. She was human, all right—he could testify to that, because he had held her in his arms when they danced.

Cole's conditions might have been easy for another girl. But Kerrie wasn't the sort who could take, and give, love except the right way. With her it would be one or the other—the money or her happiness.

He knew what she was thinking. She wasn't in love with any one now. Perhaps she'd never been in love. With her figure, with her face, there must have been men, though—plenty of men, and all the wrong kind. She would be a little cynical about men. So what was she throwing away? Something that didn't exist, probably, for something that you could turn instantly into the delicious good things of life, which she had never had.

Kerrie laughed—a funny, quaking little laugh. "All right, Uncle Cadmus, you win. I die a virgin. Other women have. Maybe I'll become a saint. Wouldn't that be a scream, Ellery? Saint Kerrie. And all the other virgins would put up candles for me, and pray at my shrine!"

Beau was silent.

Kerrie said fiercely: "I can't turn all that money down. I can't! No one could. Could you?"

"It wouldn't be a problem with me," said Beau gruffly.

She looked him in the eye. "It won't be with me, either. But I think we're talking about different things."

"Congratulations," said Beau.

It had to be. And of course she was right. He knew what it meant to go hungry, to be pushed around, to peer up at life from under the eight-ball.

Kerrie smiled and got out of her chair suddenly and

came around the table. She leaned over him, so close he smelled her skin. It smelled like clover—Beau had smelled a clover once.

"Mind if I kiss you for being such a swell Santa?"

She kissed his lips. Lightly, in the shadows. He kept his lips deliberately tight, cold, hard.

But his voice was thick. "You shouldn't have done that, Kerrie. Damn it, you shouldn't!"

"Oh, then you're the keeper of my conscience, too?" She kissed him again, laughing. "Don't worry, Grandpa. I shan't fall in love with you!"

Beau got up from the chair so suddenly it fell over with a clatter and Kerrie stared at him with startled eyes.

"Come on, Miss Millionbucks," he growled. "Let's go tell the good news to your girl friend. I bet she'll die."

IV. Goodbye to All That

Kerrie and Vi wound their arms about each other in the dingy bedroom and cried and cried and cried, while Beau sat gloomily in the one good chair and helped himself freely to the contents of a brandy bottle he had thought to buy on the way home.

Kerrie acted like a hysterical child. She threw her wardrobe, one poor dress at a time, all over the room as if they were confetti. Several times she ran over and kissed Beau, and he grinned back at her and offered her a drink.

But she refused. "I'm drunk on good luck. Vi, I'm rich!"

The landlady came up to investigate the noise, but Kerrie poured out the news in a burst, rattling on like a machine-gun, and a cunning look came into the landlady's faded eyes.

"Imagine that!" she said, smacking her lips. "Imagine that—a real heiress! My!"

Beau got rid of her.

"She'll have every reporter in town here by morning," he said. "Kerrie, pipe down. They'll tear you to pieces."

"Let 'em! I love 'em all! I love the whole world!"

"Wet blanket!" shrieked Vi. "Kerrie, he's just jealous!"

"Ellery, you aren't!"

"I guess I am," said Beau. "That's it—jealous. Of the income on half of fifteen million simoleons."

"Oh, darling, don't be! You'll always be Santa Claus to me—isn't he a handsome Santa, Vi? Darling, I won't forget what you've—"

"Damn it," snarled Beau, "don't patronize me!"

"But I'm *not*. It's just that I want everybody to share my wonderful luck!"

That sobered Violet. "Kerrie, you're not going to be a fool? Queen, she'll just throw it away. I know she will. She'll be the softest touch in the universe. Every deadbeat in Hollywood—"

"I'll see her through the first pains," said Beau shortly. "It's my job to get her safely back to New York."

"Aren't you the darling?" Kerrie stretched. "Oh, I feel so *swell!* And, Vi, the first thing we're going to do is take your name off the list at Central Casting. No more extra work for you! You're coming East with me, as my —as my *companion*. That's what you're going to do—"

"Kerrie! No!"

"You *are*. At a salary of—of—no salary at all! You'll just share everything with me!"

"Oh, Kerrie." And the blonde laid her head on Kerrie's breast, and wept, and that started Kerrie off, too, and Beau disgustedly finished what was left in the bottle.

It was a mad night, and Kerrie was drunk with the wonderful madness of it. Surveying the disordered room as the sun came up and touched the faces of the two girls, exhaustedly asleep in each other's arms, Beau won-

dered just how Miss Kerrie Shawn, heiress to the Cole fortune, recipient of twenty-five hundred dollars a week just so long as she remained unmarried, would react to the inevitable hangover.

But it was destined to be a long debauch.

The landlady, true to Beau's prediction, did her joyous work. On the heels of daylight came a rush of reporters and photographers that engulfed the shabby little stucco house like a Pacific tidal wave. They yanked their copy out of Violet Day's arms and, scarcely permitting her to rub the sleep out of her eyes, overwhelmed her. In five minutes the floor was treacherous with blackened bulbs. Beau, roused by the bedlam, had to fight his way through an excited mass of roomers. He spent a busy half-hour then, careful to keep the press from photographing him, evicting them one at a time.

When the room was clear he said: "Well, Cinderella, how do you like it?"

"I'm . . . a little scared," said Kerrie, "but—I think I do!"

"Well, I'll have to tear you away. Get some sleep and then we'll talk about going to New York."

"Is there really a rush?" pleaded Kerrie. "There are so many things I've got to do! Clothes, hair, face—"

Vi winked at him, and he left. But only to nap for another hour, bathe, shave, dress, and sit down outside her locked door.

Vi awoke first. He had a long talk with her, in undertones. There were several things he must do. Establish credit through New York. Corral her proofs of identity, and so on. He would be back as soon as he could. Meanwhile, Vi was to guard Kerrie with her life.

Vi said fervently: "Thank heaven for a man! Queen, I had my doubts, but you're okay. Hurry back, will you?"

He left the house with the brim of his hat far down over his eyes.

He had a long talk with Lloyd Goossens by telephone. Then he called Ellery in the Adirondacks.

"I'm glad it turned out all right," said Ellery. "Get the girl back East, Beau, and go to work on Margo Cole."

"Have a heart," growled Beau. "The kid's in a fever. Give her time. I'll get her back as soon as I can."

"Well, don't bite my nose off," said Ellery. "What's the matter, Beau? You sound strange."

"Who, me?" said Beau, and he hung up. By the time he got round to the bank, Goossens had established an account there for Kerrie Shawn in the name of Ellery Queen.

When he returned to Argyle Avenue the narrow little street was black with people. Beau looked gloomy. He knew what lay ahead.

The next week was the hardest of his life. He was bodyguard, lawyer, big brother, and nuisance-fender all in one. Hollywood was excited. An unknown extra, Cinderella in rags, turned into a wealthy heiress overnight! All the studios wanted her—to sing, to dance, to act; for epics, newsreels, anything . . . but sign here, please, Miss Shawn! The newspaper syndicates offered fabulous sums for her life-story. An army of cameramen followed her wherever she went. Tradespeople sent representatives in all humility, offering their best for nothing—wouldn't Miss Shawn do them the honor of shopping in their establishment? Anything, anything her heart desired. As a gift of the management. If Miss Shawn would only . . . She was offered contracts, silver foxes, imported automobiles; she was deluged with invitations to premieres, to swanky parties, to the castles of Hollywood's great.

In all this madness Beau and Vi moved quietly by her side, hemming her in, Vi practical and cool, Beau silent and with his hatbrim shading his face.

Kerrie moved through events with a vague smile, as if she were floating in a dream. At the party she insisted

upon having, she walked among her friends like a shy and happy child. Every one she knew in Hollywood was there, and they were all the poor, the strugglers, the fringe, the people of the frayed and starched clothes and the starved fixed smiles. But many of them wore new clothes that night, and looked well-fed, and their laughter was real.

"Isn't she grand?" sighed Violet Day to Beau. "Just like Lady Bountiful. She told me today she thinks she ought to do something for Inez. Inez has the bugs, and Kerrie's going to send her to Arizona. And Kerrie's finacing Lew Malone's ulcer operation, and goodness knews what else!"

"She's drunk," smiled Beau.

"What? Say, Queen, I don't think you like Kerrie very much!"

"Who, me?" said Beau.

Kerrie refused to move from Argyle Avenue. "I'm going to be in Hollywood just a little while longer," she said firmly, "and I won't have my friends think I'm putting on the dog. Nothing doing, Vi; we stay here."

But they had to take two rooms more to hold all the clothes and trunks she bought. The landlady actually beamed. She raised her rents from six to eight dollars a week; but when Kerrie heard about it she threatened to move out, so back went the rents to six dollars.

It was like that for an incredible week—driving from shoppe to shoppe in the rented Isotta; exciting hours in the beauty emporia patronized by only the starriest of the stars; furs, evening gowns, sport clothes, wraps, jewels; the *Brown Derby*, the *Clover Club*, the *Beverly-Wilshire*; prevues and premieres, until Kerrie's conscience began to bother her.

"Aren't we spending too much money?" she asked Beau.

"There's more where that came from, kid."

"It's a wonderful dream! Like a fairy tale. Magic

money. The more you spend, the more you have. Well, maybe not quite . . . Ellery, did I tell you I heard from Walter Ruell? He's back home in Ohio and darned glad of it. Poor kid—"

"Kerrie, I've had three wires from Goossens." Beau did not mention the four from Ellery. "He can't understand what's holding us up here. I tried to explain—"

"Oh, darling, so soon!"

"And don't call me darling!"

"What?" Kerrie was surprised.

"It's a bad habit," muttered Beau. "For a gal who's promised not to tangle with men."

"Oh, but Ellery, I don't say 'darling' to any man but you! You wouldn't sue me for breach of promise, would you?" Kerrie laughed.

"Why pick on me?" said Beau sullenly.

"Because you're my own special darling, my—" And Kerrie stopped short. Very short. Then she said in a subdued voice, not looking at him: "All right, Ellery. We'll go whenever you say."

Kerrie was unusually quiet after that. The vagueness went out of her smile; everything sharpened in her face; most of the time she wore a serious expression. Beau was quiet, too. He bought the tickets and arranged for the luggage and took Kerrie's proofs of identity out of the bank vault and saw the bank manager and wired Goossens.

Then there was nothing to do but wait for the next day, which was to be Kerrie's farewell to Hollywood.

But while Beau was busy with the arrangements for their departure Kerrie shut herself up in one of the rooms and refused to come out, even for Vi.

Vi said worriedly to Beau that last night: "I can't understand her. She says she's all right, but . . ."

"Maybe it's the hangover."

"I guess it's the idea of leaving. After all, her mother's buried here, this is about the only home she's ever had,

and now she faces a whole new world. . . . I guess that's it."

"I guess."

"Why don't you take her out for a walk, or something? She's been cooped up here all day."

"I don't think—" began Beau, flushing.

But Vi went into Kerrie's room and remained there for a long time, while Beau fidgeted outside. Finally Kerrie came out dressed in black slacks covered by a long coat, and no hat, Hollywood fashion, and said with a rather pale smile: "Want to take me for a walk, Mister?"

"Okay," said Beau.

They strolled in silence to the corner and turned into Hollywood Boulevard. At the corner of Vine Street they stopped to watch the swirling traffic.

"Busy, all right," said Kerrie. "It's—hard to leave."

"Yeah," said Beau. "Must be."

They walked ahead into the forest of neon signs.

A little while later Beau said: "Nice night."

Kerrie said: "Yes, isn't it."

Then they were silent again. They passed Grauman's *Chinese* and soon were strolling through the darkness of the residential district beyond.

Kerrie paused finally and said: "My feet ache. Wouldn't you think shoes costing twenty-two fifty would fit?"

"The curse of gold," said Beau. "It has its advantages, too, though."

"Let's sit down for a while."

"On the curb?"

"Why not?"

They sat down side by side. Occasionally a car flashed by; once a ribald voice shouted at them.

"I really haven't thanked you," said Kerrie in a muffled voice, "for having been so grand this week. You've been like a—like a brother."

"Brother Rat," said Beau. "That's what they call me."

"Please, Ellery. I—"

"I'm getting paid for it," said Beau gruffly. "Fact, it's your dough that's paying. So don't thank me."

"Oh, money!" said Kerrie. "It isn't everything—" She stopped, appalled by what she was saying.

"No?" jeered Beau. "There are a million fluffs who'd give their right arms to be in your shoes—ache and all—this minute."

"I know, but . . . Oh, it's nice being able to do things for people, and to buy and buy without thinking of the price when you've had to watch all your life for basement sales and to make over old dresses, but . . ."

"No buts. It is wonderful, and you're a lucky squirt. Don't spoil it by being—restless."

"I'm not!" said Kerrie quickly. "It's just that I've been thinking about . . ." She stopped.

Beau laughed. "Don't tell me you been regretting that anti-marriage condition already!"

"Well . . . it might be awfully hard on a girl—under the circumstances—if she . . . fell in love."

She screamed, grabbing him. Something wet and cold had touched the back of her neck. But it was only a friendly, night-prowling Schnauzer investigating her scent.

Beau's arms tightened about her. She clung to him, her head falling back. Her lips were parted.

"Kerrie." Beau failed to recognize his own voice. "Don't leave Hollywood. Stay here. Give up the money."

Their lips almost touched as they stared into each other's eyes. He was going to propose. He was! He didn't want her to go East! That could only be because the money stood between him and her. Oh, she didn't care about it! She didn't. She just wanted him. Never to let go. If that was love, she was in love. He was going to propose . . . Oh, ask me, ask me!

He let go of her and got up so suddenly that she cried

out again and the Schnauzer whined in alarm and ran away.

"You'd throw away twenty-five hundred bucks a week?"

"Maybe," whispered Kerrie, "I would."

"Then you're an idiot!"

She closed her eyes, all jumpy and sick inside.

"If it happened to me," he shouted, "do you think I'd give it up? Like hell I would! You ought to be examined by Freud!"

"But—but you asked me—told me—"

Beau glared down at her as she crouched, hugging her knees, staring up at him. He was furious with himself, and with her for having made him lose his head. The plea had slipped out under the pressure of her arms, the warmth of her breathing, the joyful yearning and hope in her eyes. He saw her hungry, tramping from studio to studio, one of the thousands of starched, frayed, and fixedly smiling Hollywood job-hunters. . . .

So he sneered: "You dames are all alike. I thought maybe you were different. But you're a pushover like the rest of 'em!"

Kerrie jumped up and ran away.

Just before they left the rooming house for the station the next day, Beau received two telegrams.

One was from Lloyd Goossens.

"MARGO COLE FOUND IN FRANCE"

The other was from Mr. Ellery Queen, and it said:

"MARGO FOUND STOP MORE CONVINCED THAN EVER MURDER IN THIS CASE STOP JOB JUST BEGUN FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE GET BACK ON IT WILL YOU"

Beau glanced at Kerrie Shawn, his eyes a little red,

two deep lines running from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth.

But Kerrie sailed past him with Vi as if he didn't exist. He grinned wryly.

PART TWO

v. Fists Across the Sea

The instant Kerrie gazed into her cousin Margo's eyes, she knew they would be enemies.

In the midst of the hurly-burly of presenting her proofs of identity to Lloyd Goossens and Edmund De Carlos, whom Kerrie immediately disliked, of moving into and exploring the Tarrytown mansion and its broad acres, complete with woods and bridle-paths and hidden streams and unexpected arbors, of selecting personal servants and cars and of refurnishing her own suite of rooms, turning them from gloomy chambers into bright and chintzy places, of shopping and granting press interviews and the whole feverish process of settling down to her new life in the East . . . in the midst of all this, Kerrie had looked forward to her cousin's arrival from France.

It was a peculiar anticipation, touched with sadness, for Kerrie felt as if she had lost something, and she wanted to make up her loss in another way.

But when she saw Margo Cole, she knew she had wished for the moon.

They all went down the bay in a cutter to meet the *Normandie* in quarantine — Kerrie, Vi, Goossens, De Carlos, and Beau. Goossens, brief-case in hand, boarded the liner to meet Margo; they appeared a short time later and descended the ladder to the motor-launch, which ferried them to the cutter.

Margo Cole stepped aboard in a swirl of furs and

scent, followed by a pert French maid and a mountain of luggage. She kept chattering gaily with Goossens as her eyes flickered over Vi indifferently, paused on Kerrie, examined her briefly, tossed her aside, and traveled on to De Carlos and Beau. De Carlos's bearded cheeks and toothy grin she greeted with a smile; but her blue eyes, slant, almost Egyptian, narrowed when they came to Beau, and then swept over him from unkempt head to disreputable toe with an astounding relish.

That was when Kerrie decided they were born foes.

"Licking her chops," whispered Vi, pressing Kerrie's arm. "The flashy type. Don't let her step on you, hon. She'll try."

Margo Cole was a tall, strongly built woman—one of those splendid females who contrive to look vigorous even when they are lolling in a sun-chair. She was beautiful in a cold, majestic way, and she walked with a slow strutting poise that showed off her tightly draped hips.

"Either did a strip-tease or modeled," said Vi. "I don't like her. Do you?"

"No," said Kerrie.

"She's thirty, if she's a day."

"Thirty-two," said Kerrie, who had been absorbing a little family history.

"Look at the so-called men goggle! You'd think they never saw a hip before. It's disgusting!"

They murmured politely when Lloyd Goossens introduced them.

Then Margo slipped her arm through Beau's. "So you're the man who was supposed to find me. How nice he is, Mr. Goossens! If I had known, I should have ignored Mr. Queen's advertisements in the French papers and waited for him to come find me."

"I imagine," grinned Beau, "it would have been fun at that."

"Shall we go to my office?" asked Goossens. "Miss

Cole, there are certain formalities—naturally you'll put up at a hotel until we've—ah—checked your proofs of identity. Of course, if you'd rather—"

"No, no. Let's have the dismal scene," said Margo. "Mr. Queen, you'll come?"

"How could I resist a smile like that?"

"Cynic! And—oh, of course, you, dear Kerrie! I should feel lost without you. After all, though I was born here, I've lived all my life in France—"

"That was France's hard luck," mumbled Vi.

Kerrie smiled. "I'd be charmed to shield you from the shocks of this rude, new world."

"Ah, no, no," said Edmund De Carlos. "That shall be my special province, ladies." And he bowed first to Kerrie, and then to Margo, licking his bearded lips, meanwhile with the tip of his red tongue.

The cutter plowed up the bay.

Kerrie developed a headache on shore. She excused herself politely and drove off with Vi in her new roadster.

Margo waved gaily, watching with her cold Egyptian eyes.

Lloyd Goossens examined Margo Cole very sharply when they reached his office, but there could be no doubt of the validity of her proofs of identity.

She accepted a cigaret from the lawyer and a flame from De Carlos. "It seems odd to be called Miss Cole, or even Margo. You see, I've been calling myself Ann Strange ever since 1925."

"How is that?" asked Goossens, filling his pipe.

"Mother died that year. I don't recall my father, of course; we never ran across any one mother'd known in America; she hadn't even a family. We used to travel about from town to town in France—Dijon, Lyon, a few years in Montpellier in the South, buckets of places—while mother taught English to French children and earned enough to keep me in the convent schools.

"I knew nothing about my family; Mother never talked about them. But when she died I found letters, a diary, little mementoes, and they told me all about my Cole heritage. Especially," she laughed, "about dear Uncle Cadmus and how helpful he'd been when Mother, Father, and I had been starving in a Parisian garret. You know, one letter of Uncle Cadmus's drove my father to suicide. So I decided to change my name—wash out everything connected with the past."

"You've brought those letters and things, Miss Cole?"

She produced them from an alligator shopping bag. The handwriting of the diary checked with the handwriting of Nadine Malloy Cole, a sample of which Goossens had from Mrs. Cole's letter to Cadmus Cole in 1909, found among his effects.

There were also some faded old photographs of Huntley Cole and his wife, and one, dated Paris 1910, in which Margo was a chubby three-year-old with blonde hair and staring, frightened light eyes.

And there was Cole's typewritten letter to his sister-in-law, dated 1909, in which he refused financial aid. Goossens and Beau compared it with the typed letter Cole had sent his sister Monica in 1918, preserved by Kerrie. The style and tenor were much the same, and Cole had initialed both in his bold, simple, block-letter script.

"Of course, we'll have everything checked by experts, Miss Cole," said Goossens. "You understand—such a large estate. Matter of form—"

"I don't know what else I can say or do to prove I'm Margo Cole, but if you want to hear the story of my life—"

"We'd like to very much," said the lawyer politely; but he glanced at Beau, and Beau's left eyelid drooped. In Goossens's desk there was the copy of a compendious report submitted by the French agency Beau had engaged weeks before.

The report carried Margo Cole's history from infancy in Paris through the year 1925, where—they had been puzzled by this—the trail ended. But now the two men realized what had happened. Margo Cole's change of name in that year to Ann Strange had brought the French operatives up against the back wall of a blind alley. Margo described her life in detail from the time her mother took her from Paris as a baby until her mother's death. After that she had drifted back to Paris and become a mannequin.

Margo looked demure. "I earned enough, and had sufficiently kind and rich friends," she murmured, "to enable me to . . . retire, so to speak, in '32. Since then I've been drifting about—the Riviera, Cannes, Deauville, Monte Carlo, Capri, the usual dull places in Europe. It hasn't been too exciting."

"Then somebody missed a bet," said Beau. "Ever been married, Miss Cole?"

"Oh, no! It's so much more fun having your freedom, don't you agree, Mr. Queen?"

"Mr. Queen" grinned, and Goossens said: "Glad you think so, Miss Cole, because your uncle's will . . . Of course, to complete the check-up, we'll have to cable our French friends to verify your movements since 1925—make sure about your state of single blessedness . . ."

In two weeks everything was complete. The French agency reported that Margo Cole's account of her activities since 1925, under the name of Ann Strange, was true in every detail. She had never been married. The French report also went into corollary matters concerning Miss Strange-Cole's career in "the usual dull places in Europe," but Goossens discreetly ignored them; he was responsible for facts, not morals.

Miss Cole, upon hearing the conditions of her uncle's will, did not hesitate. She accepted, and to the accompaniment of an admiring press and public curiosity moved regally into the mansion at Tarrytown.

"Now that your work is done," she murmured to Beau, "you won't desert poor little me? I feel so lost in this strange, big country. You'll come to see me—often?"

And she squeezed his hand ever so lightly.

They were in one of the formal gardens on the estate. No one was about, but Beau had caught the flicker of a curtain in a window of Kerrie Shawn's bedroom.

He took the smiling woman in his arms suddenly and kissed her. She was still smiling when he released her.

"And what makes you think, Mr. Queen," said Margo, "that I wanted you to do that?"

"I'm psychic," said Beau. He watched the curtain. It fluttered violently and then was still.

"You clever man," murmured Kerrie's cousin. "And the dear little thing is so jealous. Do come again—soon."

IN the office of *Ellery Queen, Inc., Confidential Investigations*, Mr. Ellery Queen surveyed his partner sympathetically. Back from the Adirondacks, Mr. Queen, while leaner than usual, was browned and fit; but his partner was haggard, and two creases, like quotation marks, separated his gloomy eyes.

"I always knew you were mercenary," said Mr. Queen, "but I didn't think you were a quitter."

"It isn't the dough, I tell you! All right, it wasn't much of a job, and Goossens and De Carlos insist Cole's retainer of fifteen grand, plus expenses, was ample to cover it—"

"Princely," agreed Mr. Queen.

"But the job's over! Our agreement was that we'd find the two women. That's what we were hired to do, we've done it, and we're through. What more do you want?"

"I want," replied Mr. Queen calmly, "to know why Cadmus Cole was so mysterious about the nature of our assignment. I want to know why he didn't tell us the

simple truth. I want to know what was at the back of his head."

"Go see a medium!"

"Did he expect to be murdered? Was he murdered? And if so, who murdered him? And why? Cole may have hired us primarily to answer these questions, and for some obscure reason chose not to say so. But if that's the case, we're *not* through—"

"And fifteen grand doesn't begin to pay for the job," growled Beau, "and try to get more out of Goossens and De Carlos. You feeling like John D. these days?"

Mr. Queen said abruptly: "Beau, this isn't like you."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"There's a reason for your unwillingness to go on with this investigation, and I *don't* think it's money. What is it?"

Beau glared at him. "All right, Master-Mind. There's a reason, and it's not money, it's a dame. So what?"

"Ah," said Mr. Queen. "Miss Shawn?"

"I'm not saying!" shouted Beau. "Anyway, I think she—sort of took a shine to me, and I can't hang around and ball up her life, that's all! She—this girl can't afford to fall in love!"

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Queen. "Deplorable situation. Well, then, make it plain you're not in love with her—or are you?"

"None of your business," snapped Beau.

"Hmm. Well, sir, since you're in love with her, sooner or later you're going to crawl back, you know. So you may as well do it now. *I* can't take over, because you're supposed to be Queen, and exposing our little fraud would mean, for one thing, having to give back that fifteen thousand, for another possibly alarming some one who'd be better off unalarmed."

"But what excuse would I have to keep going back there?" Beau looked sullen. "Goossens and De Carlos

gave me the bum's rush yesterday, Kerrie's sore at me . . . Of course, there's Margo—"

"Of course there is," said Mr. Queen. "A female who apparently enjoys your society. There's no law against a young man calling on a female for social reasons. Just keep your eyes open. Hang around. Watch. I have a compelling feeling," said Mr. Queen reflectively, "that there's going to be trouble."

"Trouble? There's plenty now! Say . . ." Beau looked alarmed. "What d'ye mean—trouble?"

Mr. Queen smiled. "Beau, has it occurred to you that this whole thing arose out of a man named Cadmus?"

Beau stared. "Cadmus? Cadmus Cole? So what?"

"Don't you remember the legend of Cadmus, or Kadmos, King of Sidon, who founded Thebes and brought the sixteen-letter alphabet to Greece?"

"No," said Beau. "I don't."

"Where were you educated?" sighed Mr. Queen. "At any rate, mythology tells us that Cadmus went on a quest—those old mythological boys were always going on quests—and suffered many hardships and perils, and one of the silly things he had to do was sow the dragon's teeth."

"Look, friend," said Beau. "I've gotta amble on up—"

"The dragon's teeth," repeated Mr. Queen thoughtfully. "Quite. Quite. Cadmus sowed the dragon's teeth, and out of each tooth sprang—trouble. Trouble, Beau!"

"Oh," said Mr. Rummell quietly.

"Our own Cadmus sowed a few dragon's teeth himself when he wrote that will," said Mr. Queen. "So watch, Beau. Everybody—especially De Carlos."

"De Carlos!" Beau grew angry. "Yeah, De Carlos. I don't like the way that baboon looks at Kerrie. And living in the same house. . . . Maybe you're right. Maybe I ought to stick around."

Mr. Queen smiled. "And now that that's settled, what have you heard from Santiago de Cuba?"

"No progress so far. Angus and the *Argonaut's* crew have simply disappeared. . . . Excuse me," said Beau, preoccupied. "I think I'll mosey on up to Tarrytown to see—Margo."

"Send her my love," murmured Mr. Queen.

THE fairy princess, alias Cinderella, was unhappy. That was against all the rules, and Violet Day told her so emphatically. Vi was a tower of strength and comfort these days. Kerrie didn't know what she would have done without her.

For one thing, there was Margo. Margo had begun to loom large in Kerrie's life. She tried to dominate the house, even that part of it which was exclusively Kerrie's. When she had her own suite redecorated in French provincial, she insisted the whole house be done over in the same style and period. Kerrie defended her maple and chintzes bitterly, challenging Margo's authority. Margo said something in French which sounded unladylike, and Kerrie's eyes flashed fire, and more than feelings would have been wounded had Beau not arrived at that critical moment. Of course, Kerrie instantly withdrew.

"Let her *try*," said Kerrie passionately to Vi. "Just let her! I'll punch her in the nose."

Then there was Beau, or "Ellery," as he was known to that turbulent household. He seemed always to be there. Kerrie tried hard to be polite to him, but her good resolutions broke down and she turned frigid. For he seemed to have become completely infatuated with Margo; he was with her constantly, flattering her, fetching things like a puppy, taking her out.

And Margo's attitude, of course, was nearly impossible to endure. She was always glancing at Kerrie slyly, and then whispering to Beau, and the two of them would laugh as if they shared some secret, and Kerrie found them so hateful that when she saw Beau she would run away—to the stables for a furious canter, to swim in the

big outdoor pool with Vi, to go sailing on the river in the little skiff she had bought, or for a tramp through the woods surrounding the estate.

"If I could only go somewhere," she said fiercely to Vi. "Vi, she's deliberately humiliating me! She takes every opportunity to wave him in my face, like a—like a flag!"

"Then why don't you go away?" asked Vi practically.

"I can't! I've asked Mr. Goossens, but uncle's will calls for my remaining on the grounds a full year, and he says there's nothing he can do about it. Vi!" Kerrie clutched her friend. "You don't think she's trying to . . . *drive* me away?"

"I wouldn't put it past her," said Vi grimly. "She's the type. I s'pose if you lived somewhere else this year you'd be cut out of the will and she'd get your share?"

Kerrie's eyes snapped. "So that's what she's up to! Isn't satisfied with twenty-five hundred a week and wants mine, too!"

"Twenty-five hundred a week don't go very far when you're trying to corner the mink and sable markets, the way she's doing."

Well, she won't chase me away! I'll fight her!"

"Atta girl," said Vi enthusiastically. "Only let me get in a sock once in a while, will you, hon?"

After that, it was interesting. Kerrie no longer fled. She was careful to join them whenever they began to whisper. At other times she permitted herself to be cultivated by Mr. Edmund De Carlos, who had been quietly pursuing her ever since she had moved in. Mr. De Carlos began to glow with a hot, somehow sinister, light. He became insistent. She must go out with him—often. He had discovered New York. He would show it to her. They must be great friends. Once, she accepted—that was the night when Beau, squirming in tropical tails, escorted the beautiful Miss Cole to the summer theatre.

Everything went smoothly, and dully, until they were on their way home in De Carlos's limousine. Then

something happened. And after that Kerrie refused Mr. De Carlos's invitations. In fact, she tried to ignore him, finding herself beginning to be terrified.

But Mr. De Carlos's light glowed hotter and more sinister. His wild and reckless excursions into New York's night life almost ceased. He spent most of his time on the estate—watching Kerrie. When she went riding, he followed. When she went boating, he followed. When she swam, there he was on the edge of the pool, a little tense. She stopped tramping in the woods.

Kerrie was thoroughly frightened. Vi suggested slipping poison into his soup, but Kerrie was not to be cheered by jests.

"Then why don't you talk to Ellery about it?" asked Vi. "He's a man, and a detective, besides."

"I'd rather die! Oh, Vi, it isn't just the way De Carlos looks at me. I've handled men with that kind of look before. It's—something else." She shivered. "I don't quite know myself."

"It's your imagination. Why don't you make a few friends? You've been here weeks and weeks and you don't know a soul."

Kerrie nodded miserably.

Vi sought out Beau. "Listen, you. I don't like your taste in women, but I used to think you were a plenty decent guy once. If you're any part a man, you'll keep your eye on this bedbug De Carlos. He's got what they call 'designs' on Kerrie, and I don't mean the kind of designs they put on doilies."

"Seems to me," said Beau indifferently, "she's sort of egged him on."

"How quaint!" said Margo, slipping the strap of her bathing suit back over her magnificent shoulder.

"I wasn't talking to you, grandma!"

"Well," said Beau hastily, "I'll keep my eye peeled."

After that, Beau came even more frequently.

VI. The Knife and the Horseshoe

Some one struck. by night.

Kerrie lay in her four-poster. It was warm, and she was covered only to the hips by a thin silk quilt. She was reading Emily Dickinson, absorbed in the lovely, piercing cries of ecstasy.

Kerrie's suite lay in an ell of the mansion, one story above the terrace which encircled the house. There were strong vines and trellises of roses on the walls outside her windows.

The windows were open, and through the still curtains the gardens below sounded drowsy with the peaceful seething of crickets. There was an occasional river sound: a splash of oars, the stutter of an outboard motor, once the faint shouts of people being borne upstream by a Hudson River excursion boat.

It was quite late. Kerrie had heard Margo and Beau drive up two hours earlier, laughing intimately over some incident of their evening in town together. She had heard Margo invite Beau to stay the night, and Beau's booming acceptance. They had settled down on the terrace below Kerrie's windows with a portable bar, and after a clink of glasses there had been a silence.

Kerrie would have preferred noise. She had actually slipped out of bed and shut the windows to keep out that silence. But later, when she opened them again—it was so stuffy, she said to herself—and just happened to look down, the terrace was empty again.

Then she had heard De Carlos come home, lurching on the gravel driveway and cursing his chauffeur in a thick, liquorish voice. That was when she had got out of bed the third time and locked the door which led to the corridor.

But the house had settled into quiet since and Ker-

rie, intent upon the poet's verse, almost forgot she was unhappy. Her lids began to droop; the lines swam. She yawned, saw that it was past three by her bed clock, flung the book aside, and turned off the bed-lamp.

And instantly things changed. Instantly.

Instantly she quivered with wakefulness.

It was as if the light had been a thick bright gate, and that turning it off had opened the gate to something that had lain in wait outside, in the thicker darkness. Kerrie lay motionless, straining her ears. But there was nothing to be heard, unless it were the shrilling of the tireless crickets or that slight recurrent creak—like the creak of a slowly swinging shutter. The shutter! Of course.

But there was no wind. Not even a breeze.

Kerrie told herself indignantly she was a fool. She turned over on her right side, drawing her knees up to her chest and pulling the silk quilt up so that her nose and eyes were covered.

That creak.

Abruptly she sat upright in bed. In the darkness she concentrated all her forces of vision on the windows. The darkness was thin and soupy, as if it had been strained through a sieve. She could just make out the curtains.

They were stirring! . . . No. They were not.

There! Again!

This is ridiculous, she thought in panic. It's a sudden breeze that's sprung up on the river. It's a breeze moving the curtains. A breeze . . .

Well, there was a simple way to find out. Just get out of bed and march across the floor to the window, and poke your head out. That's all. Very simple. Then you would know it was a breeze, and that you'd been imagining things like a tot frightened by the dark, and you could go back to bed and sleep.

She slid under the quilt and curled up in a taut ball again, almost smothered.

She could hear her heart clamoring, as if it had slipped out of her chest and taken up a position just above her ear. Oh, this is childish! And she found her legs and arms shaking.

What should she do? Jump out of bed, race across the room to the door that led across the boudoir and into Vi's room . . .

Her heart stopped clamoring. It seemed to stop altogether.

There was something—something—in the room.

Kerrie knew it. She knew it. This wasn't imagination. This was knowledge.

She followed the steps that could not be heard with ears that could not hear . . . from the window, across the patch of hardwood floor to the edge of the hooked rug, on the rug . . . toward her bed, toward her, where she was lying in a ball under the quilt. . . .

Roll over.

She rolled over and off the bed. In the same instant something struck the bed where she had been lying. There was a hissing sound, like the sound of a snake.

Scream.

Kerrie screamed. Screamed and screamed.

Her nightgown crumpled, her eyes still red from sleep, Vi met Kerrie in the boudoir.

"Kerrie! What on earth—"

"Vi, Vi!" Kerrie lunged for her friend's high bosom and held on for dear life. "Something—somebody—in my bedroom—tried . . ."

"Kerrie, you had a nightmare."

"I was awake, I tell you! Somebody—climbed up the vines—I think—tried to—knife me—"

"Kerrie!"

"When I screamed, he—it jumped back through the window—I saw the flash of the curtains—"

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. I don't know. Oh, Vi—"

"You stay here," said Vi grimly. She grabbed an iron poker from the rack of firetools at the boudoir fireplace and ran into Kerrie's bedroom. She snapped on the light.

The room was empty.

Kerrie followed to the doorway, looking in, her teeth chattering. The curtains were still moving a little.

Vi looked at the bed; Kerrie looked at it. There was a fresh slash a foot long in the silk coverlet. Vi threw back the coverlet; the sheet and mattress were slashed, too.

She went to the windows and locked them.

"Got away clean. Kerrie, haven't you any idea—"

"N-n-no. I couldn't really s-see. It was too d-dark."

"Kerrie. Hon. You're—"

There was a sharp-and-soft rap on the corridor door.

The two women looked at each other.

Then Vi moved to the door and said: "Who—is it?"

"Queen. Did— Who screamed in there?"

"Don't let him in," whispered Kerrie. "You—I'm not dressed. . . ." She felt calm suddenly.

Vi unlocked the door and opened it to a space of two inches. She looked at Beau coldly. He was in pajamas and his hair was a tumbled log-jam.

"What's wrong?" he demanded in an undertone. "Where's Kerrie? It was Kerrie who screamed, wasn't it?"

"Somebody climbed in from the terrace just now and tried to knife her. She yelped, and whoever it was beat it."

"Knifed!" Beau was silent. Then he cried: "Kerrie!"

"What do you want?"

"Are you all right?"

"Perfectly all right."

Beau grunted with relief. "Who was it?"

"I don't know. I didn't see."

"Knifed, huh," muttered Beau. "Listen. Don't say anything about it. I'll—I'll keep my eyes open. And after this keep your doors and windows locked at night!"

"Yes," said Kerrie.

Vi shut and locked the door. With Kerrie following her closely, she shuffled on her bare soles to the boudoir door and locked that. Then she locked her own bedroom door.

"I guess we're safe now, hon."

"Vi," whispered Kerrie. "Are you—scared?"

"Not . . . much."

"Would you mind if I spent the rest of the night with you?"

"Oh, Kerrie!"

Kerrie fell asleep in Vi's bed, clutching Vi's big warm body desperately. Vi lay awake for a long time, staring into the darkness.

Beau did not sleep at all. He returned to his room, dressed, and began a noiseless tour of inspection. He found the place where the intruder had climbed into Kerrie's room—from the terrace directly under her windows. He climbed the vine like a cat, examining each foot of it in the light of an electric torch. But except for several bruises and, in one place, a snapped piece of trellis-work, there were no clues.

He sought out the night-watchman. But the watchman had seen and heard nothing.

In the house again, he stole into Edmund De Carlos's bedroom. In the heavy half-light the man's beard jutted toward the ceiling, his mouth open and his teeth palely visible as he snored. There was a smell of alcohol about his bed. He was sprawled on it fully clothed.

Beau listened to his snores, eyes on the motionless figure. The snores were regular, too regular. And there was a tension about the supine man which was not like the relaxation of sleep.

De Carlos was shamming.

Beau almost yanked him out of bed by the throat. But then he turned and quietly left the man's room. He spent the rest of the night patrolling the corridor outside Kerrie's suite.

De Carlos absented himself during the next three days. He was reported to be bucking an intimate little poker syndicate somewhere in town.

The morning he returned, livid under his beard and cursing his losses, Beau was not there; and Kerrie felt an overwhelming desire to get away from the house.

She dressed in a riding-habit and went down to the stables with Violet. A groom saddled two horses—*Panjandrum*, Kerrie's white Arabian mare, to which she was passionately attached, and *Gargantua*, the big roan stallion Vi rode.

They trotted into the cool of the woods side by side. The nightmare of three nights before seemed far away, as if it had happened in a world of dark dreams. The sun's rays seeped through the trees like sparkling water, splashing the bridle-path with drops of light.

Kerrie inhaled deeply. "This is the first time in ages I've felt really alive. Trees have an odor, Vi, did you know that? I never realized it before."

"So have horses," said Vi, wrinkling her nose. "Gee up, you plug!"

"You're so romantic! I'm going to run for it."

"Kerrie! Be careful!"

But Kerrie was gone, the little white mare skimming down the path, her fine neck extended, her slender legs contemptuous of the speckled earth. They vanished round a turn.

Vi kicked *Gargantua's* vast sides but, turning his massive head in mild inquiry, he continued his lumbering trot. "Come on, you! Shift into high!"

Gargantua stopped altogether, his big ears twitching. Somewhere ahead there had been a cry, a crash.

"Kerrie!" shrieked Vi. She began to belabor the stallion's ribs so violently that he bounded forward.

She thundered round the turn and there, a hundred yards ahead, made out two figures, one moving, the other still. The white mare's body sprawled on the bridle-path; she was thrashing about, kicking with three legs. The fourth, her right forelog, was crumpled under her like a snapped twig.

Kerrie lay beside the path in a heap.

Gargantua drummed up and began to nose *Panjandrum* as Vi scrambled off his back and flung herself on Kerrie.

"Kerrie! Open your eyes! Oh, Kerrie, please—"

Kerrie moaned. She sat up, dazed.

"Are you all right, Kerrie? You don't feel—as if—anything's bro . . ."

"I'm all right," and Kerrie in a sick voice. "I think I am, anyway."

"What happened, Kerrie? Tell me!"

"*Panjandrum* threw me. It wasn't her fault. She was galloping, and stumbled suddenly. I flew right over her head. Vi, it was a miracle. I mean, ordinarily I'd have broken my neck. But I happened to land in this heap of leaves, and they softened my fall. How is she? . . . Vi!"

She saw the mare, writhing in pain on the path.

"Vi! She's broken her leg!"

Kerrie ran over to the mare, sank to her knees, stroked the rigid neck, forced herself to look at the snapped foreleg. The steel shoe dangled from the motionless hoof.

"Vi," said Kerrie in a horrified voice. "Look—at—this."

"What's the matter?"

"The shoe on her broken leg. It's . . . But it can't be. I watched Jeff Crombie in the smithy only this morning. He shod her fresh—all four—a few hours ago!"

"I don't get you," said Vi slowly.

On hands and knees Kerrie began a feverish examination of the path, pushing leaves aside, flipping twigs away.

"Four of the nails are missing!"

"You mean some one—"

"Here!" Kerrie sat cross-legged on the path, fiercely examining two horseshoe nails. They were bent and scratched.

"Somebody," said Kerrie grimly, "loosened these nails and pried them partly out of *Panjandrum's* hoof with a pair of pliers." And she sat very still, staring at the nails.

"You mean some one loosened the shoe," said Vi, aghast, "so that it would flop free in a gallop and make *Panjandrum* stumble?"

"Except for the miracle of those leaves, Vi, I'd be lying over there with a broken neck this minute, and it would have been put down as an—accident."

Kerrie smoothed the corded, silken neck with her palm. The mare lay more quietly now, her big eyes on Kerrie's face.

Then Kerrie said in a hard voice: "Ride back to the stables and tell them to come for *Panjandrum*, Vi. I'll stay here with her."

"But, Kerrie, you can't! Suppose some one— I won't leave you alone here!"

"Please, Vi. And don't say anything about the nails."

There was something so coldly final in Kerrie's tone that Vi gulped and mounted *Gargantua* and lumbered off.

After dinner that evening Kerrie, on the plea of feeling ill after her accident, excused herself and glanced pointedly at her friend.

Vi followed several minutes later; and Kerrie locked all the doors of her rooms.

"Well, Kerrie? What do you think?"

Kerrie was pale. "I'm the only one who rides *Panjandrum*, and the horseshoe nails were loosened deliberately. Somebody tried to kill me today. The same one who tried to kill me the other night."

"Kerrie. Why don't you call the—police?"

"There'd be no way to prove our suspicions. We've got to prove . . . some one did it—the one who did."

"Or Ellery Queen. He's a detective. He—"

"No! He's . . . I just couldn't. I won't crawl to him for help, Vi." Kerrie sat down on her bed and smoothed the spread. "There's only one person in this world who would benefit from my death, Vi." Her voice trembled. "And that's Margo! She's so terribly extravagant. Her weekly checks are mortgaged for months ahead; Mr. Goossens told me yesterday when I—I asked. She wants my share, and if I died, she'd get it. And then—she hates me because of . . . *him*. It's Margo, Vi—Margo who climbed into my room the other night, Margo who loosened those nails this morning!"

"Let's get out of here," whispered her friend. "Give it up, Kerrie. You haven't been happy here, anyway, with all that money. Kerrie, let's go—go back to Hollywood."

Kerrie's mouth set stubbornly. "I won't be chased away."

"It's not the money!" cried Vi. "It's this big he-man of a chippy-chaser who looks like Bob Taylor! Don't tell me!"

Kerrie looked away.

"You're in love with him! And because you are, you're proposing to keep living in the same house with a—a blonde swivel-hips who's tried twice to kill you and won't stop till she has!"

"She won't drive me away," said Kerrie in a low voice.

VII. Encounter on a Siding

Before Vi awoke the next morning, Kerrie stole out of the house and hurried down to the stables.

Jeff Crombie, Tarrytown blacksmith, was just getting out of his runabout.

"Oh, Miss Shawn." He removed his hat, twisting it in his permanently blackened fingers. "I was just comin' up to see you. I hear you had a fall yesterday."

"It was nothing, Jeff," smiled Kerrie.

"I sorta feel responsible, Miss Shawn," said the smith. "Your groom told me on the phone the right foreshoe come almost off. I just shod the mare yesterday mornin' with my own hands, and I can't see how—"

"Now, Jeff, it wasn't your fault. Forget it."

"But I'd like to have a look at that shoe, Miss Shawn."

"Such a bother about a little accident! *Panjandrum* must have caught her right forefoot in the cleft of a buried rock, and at the speed she was making the shoe was wrenched almost completely away from the hoof."

"Oh," said the smith. "I didn't want you thinkin' it was any carelessness o' mine, Miss Shawn. You feeling all right?"

"Right as rain, Jeff."

"Sorry about the mare. She was a daisy—"

"Is, Jeff."

The blacksmith was astonished. "Ain't you shot her yet? I'd be thinkin' she'd be better off, poor thing, out of her misery—"

"Dr. Pickens told me about a certain veterinary in Canada who's supposed to be able to mend horses' broken legs. Some new method that gets them over the bad period and makes them good as new. So I'm shipping *Panjandrum* North today."

The smith touched his eyebrow with two soiled fingers and drove off, shaking his head.

Kerrie went into the stable. The mare lay in soft straw, a temporary splint holding her broken foreleg stiff. Dr. Pickens, the local veterinary, had also padded and swathed her other legs from hoof and pastern to above the knees. *Panjandrum*'s great moist eyes looked dull and unhappy.

"How is she?" Kerrie asked the groom.

"So-so, Miss. Hasn't done much kickin'. Doc Pickens was here again this mornin' and gave her somethin' to quiet her. But I don't know how long she'll stay that way."

"Poor darling." Kerrie knelt in the straw and stroked the glossy neck. "I'm having that stable car up from the New York yards just as quickly as possible. They'll have it on the Tarrytown siding at eleven o'clock."

"Doc says he's goin' along, Miss."

"Yes, and I want you to go, too, Henry. We've got to save her life."

"Yes, Miss." Henry did not seem too sanguine.

Kerrie rose, brushing her knees. She said casually: "By the way, Henry, have you seen Miss Cole this morning? I wanted to ask her—"

"Why, no, Miss. She told me yesterday, after she brought *Lord Barhurst* in, that she wouldn't ride today."

"Oh, Miss Cole rode yesterday?" murmured Kerrie. "About what time, Henry? I didn't see her on the path."

"She rode before you did, Miss Shawn. Reg'lar horsewoman, Miss Cole is. Even unsaddled *Lord Barhurst* herself when she came in—wouldn't let me touch him."

"Yes," smiled Kerrie, "she's quite an enthusiast. How is she as a groom—any good?"

Henry scratched his head. "To tell the truth, Miss, I didn't see. She sent me on down into town in her car

for something—a new kind of saddle soap. When I got back—that was just before you and Miss Day came down for *Panjandrum* and the stallion—*Lord Barhurst* was unsaddled, right proper, and Miss Cole was gone."

Kerrie's heart leaped. So Margo had been in the stable, alone, before . . . There were plenty of tools about, and she was a powerful woman. It wouldn't have been hard for her to loosen most of the nails in *Panjandrum's* shoe. . . . It *had* been Margo!

"Henry." Kerrie tried to keep her voice from betraying her. "I shouldn't want Miss Cole to think I'd been—well, you know, checking up on her. You know how women are about things like that." She smiled at him. "So don't mention that I've been asking you questions about her; eh?"

"No, Miss," said Henry, looking puzzled. "Not if you don't want me to. Only it's funny you should tell me that, just after Mr. Queen told me the same thing."

"Mr. Queen?" said Kerrie sharply. "He's been here this morning? Asking questions, too?"

"Yes, Miss, and about Miss Cole, too. He said not to say anything to her, or to—" Henry stopped, stricken.

"Or to me?"

"Well—yes, Miss. I didn't mean to, but it sort of slipped out." Henry's grip on the five-dollar bill Beau had given him tightened in the pocket of his jodhpurs.

"I'm sure you didn't. Where is Mr. Queen now?"

"He had me saddle *Duke* for him and rode up the path."

Kerrie sauntered out of the stables. She glanced casually over her shoulder after a few yards to see if the groom were watching her. When she saw he was not, she ran like a doe.

Kerrie sped up the bridlepath, her sports shoes making no sound in the soft earth.

So he was spying! He had heard about her accident! The only one who could have told him was Margo.

He hadn't been at the house yesterday, but just before dinner last evening Margo had had a telephone call, and from her dulcet tone and coy air the caller could only have been . . . Kerrie tried not to think his name. Margo had murmured something about calling him back—later. She must have told him then.

And here he was. Furtively.

When Kerrie came to the turn in the path beyond which she had been thrown the previous morning, she stopped, warned by *Duke*'s distinctive whinny.

She stole into the woods paralleling the bridle-path and noiselessly made her way to a screen of trees and bushes near the spot where *Panjandrum* had fallen. She peered out through the leaves of a clump of wild blueberry bushes.

Duke was moving slowly along, nosing in the grass and bushes beside the path for succulent tidbits.

And he . . . he was on his hands and knees in the path, nosing, too. Like a bloodhound. He was skimming the surface of the ground with his palms, brushing grains of dirt aside. He knelt sidewise to her, his eyes intent on the earth.

Was it possible he suspected? But how could he? Of course! He knew about the first attempt in her bedroom. That was it. And, learning about her "accident," he suspected at once that it might have been no accident at all. Or else . . . But Kerrie shut her mind to "or else." There was a horrid possibility—

He growled exultantly, startling her. He was hunched over the path now, examining two pieces of twisted metal. The other two horseshoe nails—he'd found them!

He jumped to his feet and glanced suspiciously around. Kerrie shrank. Then he slipped the two nails into his pocket, leaped onto *Duke*'s back, and galloped off toward the stables.

Or else . . .

Kerrie came slowly out of the bushes. Or else he knew it was no accident. Or else . . . he was Margo's confederate and had sneaked down here early in the morning to get hold of the telltale evidence of those wrenched nails, to dispose of . . . to dispose of the evidence!

Kerrie stood still in the path. It couldn't be. He just couldn't be that . . . But he and Margo were thick as—yes, thieves! Why not *murderers*? She had seen him kiss Margo that morning in the garden. They were always together. They were always whispering, running off into dark corners, hours of it. . . . And later, Margo would look like a tigress after a full meal. All purrs and claws. Her white cheeks pink with an inner excitement. That hateful glitter of triumph in her slanted Egyptian eyes. And *he* . . .

He thought money was everything. He had said so, in a moment of what must have been unusual honesty for him. Kerrie thought she understood. There had been a time when money seemed all-important to her, too. He didn't have much himself. Kerrie was sure of that. It wouldn't be so unusual for a poor man under the spell of a ruthless, beautiful woman like Margo to help her plan the—death—of . . .

Kerrie cried out: "No!"

The sound of her own voice brought her to her senses. She became conscious of the woods, and that she was alone in them.

She started back for the house at once. First she went slowly. Then her stride lengthened. Then she began to trot. And then to run. And finally she was sprinting along the path between the sentinel walls of the woods like a frightened rabbit pursued by a pack of hounds in full cry.

KERRIE drove her roadster up to the station at a few minutes past eleven. The stable car she had or-

dered was lying on the spur beyond the station. Henry, the groom, was on the platform talking to the agent.

"Is *Panjandrum* all right, Henry? Did you get her into the car without any trouble?"

"She's lyin' in there snug as a bug, Miss Shawn."

"Where's Dr. Pickens?"

"He'll be along in a few minutes. There's still plenty of time for the eleven-fifty. Don't worry about the mare, Miss."

"I think I'll sort of say goodbye to her," said Kerrie slowly. "No, don't bother, Henry."

She trudged along the track to the siding. Outside the stable car she stopped short, frowning. Some one was in the car.

She approached the open door quietly and looked in. Again!

She couldn't see his face; but his wide back was unmistakable. He was squatting on his heels before *Panjandrum*, doing something quickly and powerfully, as if haste were imperative, to the mare's left forefoot. Bandages and packing were strewn about the car's floor.

Kerrie watched in a storm of breathlessness. *What was he up to now?*

Beau grunted with satisfaction and straightened up, and she saw what he had been doing. He had removed the mare's left foreshoe.

He examined it hastily, then thrust shoe and loosened nails into the bulging pocket of his baggy sack-coat. And he bent over again to replace the packing and bandages. The mare lay still, and his big hands worked with rapidity.

Kerrie leaned against the side of the car, miserable. Of course. Margo must have loosened the nails of the left foreshoe as well as of the right. Just to make sure, she thought bitterly. No one had thought to examine it except . . . And how could he have known unless Margo had told him?

Removing the evidence of her guilt again!

Kerrie took command of herself. At least she had one card up her sleeve. He—she—they didn't know she knew. She had passed her fall off as an accident. They thought she didn't suspect. Let them! That was her only protection now.

She stole off a few yards and then approached the car noisily. And she called out in a voice she tried to make unconcerned: "Dr. Pickens! Is that you in the car?"

Beau appeared in the doorway instantly.

"Oh! Hello," said Kerrie. "I thought it was the veterinary in there. What are you doing?"

He jumped to the ground. "I heard about your accident and—"

"Came to pay your respects to the horse?"

He said abruptly: "You all right?"

"Never better, thank you."

"Well." He stood frowning at the ground. "I guess I'll amble along. Hope the mare can be saved."

He strode away. Kerrie did not look after him. She went into the stable car. From there, she looked. He was pacing up and down behind the station—near her car!

She said goodbye to *Panjandrum* a dozen times. Finally, Henry appeared, and Dr. Pickens. They seemed to think her expression of alarm was caused by anxiety over the mare, and kept reassuring her that *Panjandrum* would be all right.

And finally the eleven-fifty rolled in; and she had to get out of the stable car. But she remained to watch the coupling of the car to the northbound train.

When the train pulled out and there was no longer any excuse for lingering on the spur, she trudged back to the platform, trying to appear preoccupied.

"Oh, are you still here?" she said. "I thought—"

He seized her arms. "Kerrie! Listen to me—"

"You're hurting me!"

"You know what happened the other night," he said in a low, hurried voice. "You've got to be—"

"Let—me—go," panted Kerrie. She wriggled out of his grasp and slapped him, hard, on his blue-stubbled cheek. All the bitterness of weeks found expression in that pitiful act of violence. "You're used to manhandling females, I don't doubt," she cried, "but that doesn't mean you can manhandle me!"

His voice was oddly soft. "Kerrie, I just wanted to warn you to be careful. That's all."

"Careful?" Careful. He wanted her to be *careful!*

The miracle of his solicitude, after all her fears, filled Kerrie with joy. Then it wasn't true! He wasn't Margo's confederate after all!

"I mean," he went on, and something in his tone smothered her joy, killing it with a sort of contempt, "you've got one hell of a way of getting into trouble. You're a nuisance!"

Kerrie jumped into her roadster and drove off blindly. She did not therefore see how his shoulders sagged and the lines of his face deepened. She drove into the city.

When the police permit and revolver came, she felt grimly better. It was a pearl-handled .22 of beautiful workmanship, and the ammunition was slick and deadly-looking.

VIII. WOMAN-TRAP

THE GENUINE MR. ELLERY QUEEN SET DOWN THE horseshoe and the twisted nails gently.

"Kerrie's got the finger on her," said Beau.

The tone made Mr. Queen look up. Then Mr. Queen looked down, mercifully. He picked up a nail and turned it this way and that between his fingers.

"Deadly," he remarked. "And a little terrifying. A

woman in the grip of a homicidal mania, induced by jealousy and greed, doesn't usually try to commit murder so subtly. Loosening the shoes of a horse!"

"Damn her." Beau turned away.

"A murderess capable of that kind of plot can't be reached through the customary channels. She's probably immune to fear, because she's too far gone in pure cussedness. I'd rather she had tried poison. There's something realistic about poison. This—it's fantastic." He stared at the nail and then flung it aside.

"Just the same," said Beau in his lifeless voice, "I'm not taking that chance, either. I've got an ex-policewoman in the kitchen as assistant to the chef."

"You're convinced it's Margo Cole?"

"I found out from the groom that Margo had managed to be alone in the stable with the mare before Kerrie went riding. It was Margo, all right."

Beau lay down on the sofa and turned his face to the wall.

"How about the other night?" Mr. Queen regarded him with pity. Really an impossible position, he thought. And the girl—

"We'd been in town, the beautiful Miss Cole and I," said Beau without turning. "Having fun. You know, just a couple of innocent kids out on a tear?"

He sat up suddenly. Mr. Queen let him talk.

"We sat on the terrace and hoisted a few, and she got very, very chummy. I guess I wasn't feeling so palsy that night. I tried not to show it, but she's . . . smart."

His eyes were bloodshot, Mr. Queen remarked. And he had a habit these days of working his jaws, as if he were hungry.

"I knew from the way she looked at me that she spotted my trouble. She knew Kerrie was bothering me. From the way she smiled . . . she gave me the shivers," Beau said hoarsely. "I should have known then. But I never thought . . . She said good night as if everything

was all right. I sat up a while and then went to bed. I couldn't sleep. When the poor kid let out that awful yell—"

"Yes?" said Mr. Queen gently.

Beau smiled, and there was something cruel and naked in his smile. "De Carlos could hardly have climbed that wall. He was faking when I went in to look him over. Wasn't asleep at all. But he was potted, too. He'd have tumbled to the terrace and broken his damn' neck if he'd tried to climb to Kerrie's room.

"But Margo . . ." He jumped off the sofa and began walking around. "She sleeps in the opposite wing, but it gives out on the terrace, too, and it would have been a cinch for her to slip down at that time of night and climb the vines and trellis. She's an athletic bitch. . . . Maybe what she saw in my eyes that night made up her mind."

Mr. Queen sighed. "How does it feel to be fifty percent of the motive in an attempted homicide?"

"That's not the worst of it, although God knows it's a lousy enough spot for a man to be in!" cried Beau. "It's what I'm forced to do to Kerrie that hurts. Every time I show a spark of interest, her eyes start shining like electric bulbs. She looks like a kid under a Christmas tree. She . . . And then I've got to douse the lights by deliberately acting like a heel. She'll wind up hating my guts, if she doesn't hate 'em already."

"That's what you want, isn't it?" queried Mr. Queen. But he was thinking of something else.

"Yes," said Beau quietly. "That's what I want," he burst out, "but it's more than that, too! She thinks I'm signed up with Margo to put her out of the way!"

"Very natural. The appearance of requited passion, the attempt at murder . . . very natural for her to think so."

"It's easy for you to be calm about it," said Beau bitterly. "You're not in love with her."

"I'm sorry, Beau," said Mr. Queen in a gentle voice. "My specialty is murder, not romance."

"What the devil can I do? I've got to find a way out of this mess somehow!"

Mr. Queen was silent.

"Hell, you're not even paying attention!"

Mr. Queen looked up. "With half a brain. The other half is excogitating a great befuddlement. Beau, what's the connection between these attacks on Kerrie Shawn and the events that preceded and accompanied Cole's death?"

"All I know is that Margo Cole is out for Kerrie's blood. Kerrie's standing between her and me—she thinks—but, more important, Kerrie's death means doubling her income. Knowing Margo, I'd say the money motive was the stronger of the two. Not that it makes any difference to a corpse why he's been bumped off."

"You think the root of these attempts goes back into the past? The development of a plan made months ago?"

"I think," said Beau savagely, "Margo was responsible for Cole's death!"

Mr. Queen raised his eyebrows. "You believe she was on the *Argonaut*?"

"Why not?" Then Beau growled: "Or she wasn't, and De Carlos did the dirty work for her. It's not impossible those two are working together. They keep away from each other—De Carlos is concentrating on Kerrie, the damn' chaser!—but that doesn't necessarily mean anything. It might be a cover-up."

Mr. Queen looked dissatisfied. "There's so much we don't *know*," he complained. "Heard anything on the crew and Angus?"

"I had a report this morning. One of my men picked up the trail of three of the crew and the wireless operator. They shipped on a freighter, and they're on the

other side of the world by now. Nothing on the others, nothing on Angus. It's just as if—"

"Just as if?" echoed Mr. Queen.

Their eyes met.

"They were dead," said Beau.

Mr. Queen picked up his hat. "Keep watching your light-o'-love. And don't let your suspicions of Margo make you blind to . . . other possibilities."

"What's that supposed to mean?" snapped Beau.

"Merely what it said. There's only one thing about this case I feel sure of. And that is that it's far less simple than it seems. In fact, I've the feeling it's a case of complicated and subtle cross-purposes. You'll have to be very careful, Beau, and I'll help all I can from under cover. Keep your eyes open—to the four points of the compass. The break may come from the least-expected quarter."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"That's not strange," said Mr. Queen with a shrug, "since I scarcely know myself."

VI pleaded with Kerrie to run away. "If that she-devil doesn't kill you," she cried, "the suspense will. Kerrie, you're such a—a fool I could shake you. Do you really love him that much? Or this money? A fat lot of good it's doing you! You look like God's wrath. Give it up and let's get out of here—while we can!"

"No," said Kerrie stiffly. "I won't. I won't. They won't drive me away. I won't give in. They'll have to kill me first."

"They will!"

Kerrie trembled. "It's something stronger than I am. It won't let me go. Maybe it's plain stubbornness. I'm scared too—I'm scared, Vi, but I'm more scared of what I don't know. I've got to find out. I've got to."

Vi looked at her with a sort of horror.

"I suppose you think I've gone dotty," said Kerrie with a weak smile. "Maybe I have . . . I *hate* him!"

So it was that. Vi shook her head.

And then the enemy struck a third time.

It was a Sunday, and when Kerrie opened her eyes that morning she saw it would be a day of sun and cloudless skies.

"Vi, let's have an old-fashioned picnic, just the two of us!" she cried. "We'll drive into the country somewhere, and camp, and eat pickles and shoo bugs away and swim raw if we can find a stream!"

They found their stream, and gorged themselves on the good things the chef had packed in the bursting hamper, and for the first time in weeks Vi heard her friend's unclouded laughter.

By the time they drove through the gateway to the estate it was dusk, and rapidly growing dark.

Vi yawned. "It's the fresh air. Kerrie, I'm flopping right into bed."

"Sleepy? With such beautiful stars beginning to come out? Here, I'll let you out at the house and you can flop into your old bed if you want to. I'll put the car away."

Vi got out under the porte-cochere and Sir Scram, as she called the butler, opened the front door for her. She disappeared. The butler took the hamper from the car and went back into the house.

Kerrie sat still behind the wheel for a while, mooning up at the darkening sky, her thoughts dream-woven, afloat in a great peace. But soon the brightening stars made her think of what a lovely night it was, and the loveliness of the night led naturally to thoughts of romance, and romance . . .

She drove off abruptly, headed for the garage.

The garage, located behind the stables, was really six garages under one roof. It was a wide shallow brick building with six double-doors, and each car-compart-

ment was separated from its neighbors by brick and plaster walls, making the individual sections complete in themselves.

Kerrie housed her roadster in the second compartment from the right, between the one where the station-wagon was kept and the one reserved for De Carlos's powerful limousine.

In the glare of the roadster's headlights the four double-doors to the left were closed; the two on the right stood open.

Kerrie noticed that the station-wagon was in its garage and wondered why the doors were not closed. But it was the wispiest kind of thought. She drove into her garage, raced her motor, turned off the ignition, withdrew the key, and reached over to switch off her headlights.

Her hand paused in midair. She thought she had heard the slam of a door.

Kerrie twisted in her seat and looked back. The doors of her garage were shut.

"There wasn't any wind," she thought, puzzled. "I guess they just swung shut by themselves after I drove in." And, without turning off her lights, she got out of the roadster and snapped the switch on the wall which operated the ceiling-light.

Then she went to the double-door, pressed down the latch, and pushed. And as she pushed, she heard the click of the lock which was attached to the hook-and-staple on the outside of the door.

Kerrie stood still.

The thought seeped into her mind that, while doors may swing shut of themselves, locks cannot. Her lock required a human hand to slip it through the ring. A human hand to slip the ring through the slit in the staple. A human hand to snap the lock shut.

"You out there!" she called. "You've locked me in! I was just about to—"

There was no answer.

And Kerrie did not finish. She knew it was useless to cry out, and why it was useless to cry out. And her heart catapulted into her throat.

But it was so stupid. To lock her in. Sooner or later some one would come to release her. Even if she had to stay all night. . . .

But another attack, a voice whispered. Vi's gone to bed. The butler won't remember. No one else knows you're here—no one that cares. Another attack. . . .

Kerrie laughed aloud, nervously. That was absurd. For whoever had locked her in had locked himself—or herself, she thought darkly—out at the same time. There was no opening in these walls large enough to admit a mouse. Not even a window. High in the right-hand wall of the compartment there was a radiator-grille; it ran through to the next garage, the one for the station-wagon. But the coils of the radiator were between the two garages, behind the grilles; only a fly or a bug could go from one garage to the other by that route.

"Let me out!" She pounded on the heavy doors. They did not even shake. "Let me out!"

She pounded until her hands were raw.

And then she became conscious of an undertone, a peculiar roaring hum, which seemed to come from the garage on the right . . . where the station-wagon stood.

She stopped pounding to listen.

It was the motor of the station-wagon. Some one had turned it on. And pulled out the throttle. It was roaring away. The penetrating stench of its exhaust came to her nose, floating through the grilles.

"Help!" cried Kerrie. "Whoever's in there!" She raced back and shouted up into the grille. "I'm locked in the next garage! Help!"

There was an answer, but it was not in human accents. The doors of the adjacent garage slammed shut.

And over the roar of the racing motor Kerrie heard retreating footsteps.

And now she knew. Now she remembered death, when it was too late.

Some one had imprisoned her in the garage, turned on the motor of the car in the next compartment, locked the doors, and fled—leaving her to die slowly as the odorless fumes of the deadly carbon monoxide gas being generated next door seeped through the radiator-grilles.

Now that death showed its face again, openly, Kerrie stopped shouting, stopped pounding the door, collected her thoughts with a cold deliberation that astonished the vague, fluttering, helpless part of her that was wilting and crumpling inside.

The garage was far from the house, from the servants' quarters. The sole building within hailing distance was the stable, and only the horses would be there at this time of night. It was useless, then, to scream.

As a matter of fact, she thought, sitting down suddenly on the running-board of the roadster, she had better save her breath. She had better conserve the air in the garage. Mustn't exert herself in the slightest. It would probably help to remain as close to the floor as possible. Didn't gas rise? Or maybe carbon monoxide was heavier than air. If it was, it would sink to the ground. . . . Well, there was only one way to find out. . . .

Kerrie lay down and turned over, pressing her cheek and nose to the cold cement floor.

That wasn't any good. She'd merely live a little longer. Sooner or later the garage would fill with the gas, sooner or later her lungs would exhaust the oxygen supply, and then she would die.

Die!

She sat up, thinking furiously. What could she do? There must be something she could do!

Theoretically, there were two ways to save herself: to stop the flow of the gas, or to get out of the garage. Could she prevent the carbon monoxide from entering her compartment?

She glanced up and discarded that possibility at once. It was conceivable that by stuffing the openings in the grille up there with material torn from her clothing, she might prevent most of the gas from seeping through. But to do that she had to reach the grille. And the wall was so high, and the grille was so high in the high wall, that even if she put up the roadster's top and stood on it, she would still be unable to reach the grille.

Could she get out of the garage?

She couldn't break through the walls. She might scrape through the plaster, but inside there was a core of brick. No windows. The door. . . . She couldn't break through. It was too thick. If she had an ax, she might; but she had no ax.

Kerrie became aware suddenly of a tightness across her forehead, as if the skin were trying to stretch; of a throbbing at the temples, like the beginning of a bad headache.

So soon!

Think. Think!

She examined the door desperately. And then she laughed aloud. What a fool she'd been! The hinges!

All she had to do was get some tools from the roadster's kit—why, just a screw-driver would do it! Even if she couldn't reach the upper hinges, she could remove the lower ones, push the whole door outward from below, and crawl to the safety of the air outside!

She sprang to her feet and stumbled around the car. She lifted the front seat joyously. . . .

The tools were gone.

Sobbing, Kerrie hurled things out of the seat-compartment—match-packets, slips of paper, scraps of lint,

things, things, useless things . . . searching like a madwoman, getting splinters under her fingernails, scratching one finger so that the blood ran in a brilliant stream. Anything would do. A wrench. Anything. . . .

No tools.

Stolen.

She ran back and hurled herself against the door. Again. Again. No. Don't do that. That's silly. Think. Think. . . .

She sank back against the door, exhausted, a severe headache pounding at her temples, the beginning of a dizziness, the beginning of a nausea. . . .

Like a beacon in a foggy sea—the revolver. The revolver! She had slipped it into the side-pocket of the roadster very early this morning. Of course, she had left it for a short time. . . . No. It was there. It was there. She could shoot the hinges off—the lock, the hasp, shoot, shoot. . . .

Crying and laughing, she staggered back to the car, weakly opening the door, weakly thrusting her hand into the pocket on the inside of the door, ready to rejoice at the cold sensation of the metal on her palm, that blessed, loaded revolver. . . .

Every drop of blood in her body stopped flowing.

The little pearl-handled revolver had been stolen, too.

Her last chance, her last hope.

PART THREE

IX. BEAU'S GESTURE

LAST CHANCE. LAST CHANCE. LAST CHANCE.

The two words synchronized with the throb of her temples. A senseless hammering that gradually took meaning, digging through the muck of horror and panic.

Was it? Was it really? The very last?

Kerrie crawled over to the double-doors again, lay down on the floor, pressed her nose as close as she could to the thin line where floor and door met. And she lay still, simulating death in her stillness, struggling to breathe slowly, evenly, quietly, to conserve each precious bubble of oxygen in the garage, in her lungs . . . grudging each breath, doling breath out to her body like a man doling out his last drops of water as he lies dying of thirst in the burning desert.

The cement floor was cold, but she did not feel its cold. Only the taste of death in her mouth and the giant pulse at her temples. Last chance. Last chance.

Was it?

She went over in her mind each physical detail of the garage, taking inventory, a ghastly job of accountancy, before her vision, which already was blurring, should become a jumble of swimming, tumbling, senseless objects, before her head should vibrate like a huge drum, before the nausea should make her so sick that sickness would drive away even the desire to keep living, before she should succumb to unconsciousness and, unconscious, gasp the last bubbles of her life away.

Garage. Three walls—blank, solid. Only that sieve of an opening, the radiator-grille, which she could not reach. The fourth wall—the doors. No tools. Useless to hurl herself against the doors. She would give, her soft tissues, her slight weight, her small muscles. She would give, not the doors.

What else?

Herself. No. She had only her hands, her fingers, her nails. What use were they against brick, concrete, hard wood?

If only the butler hadn't removed the hamper from the car. There were knives, forks in the hamper. Tools. But he had. Hamper from the car.

Hamper from the car.

Car.

Car!

The car!

Kerrie clung to that conception with desperation, turning it over in her mind, searching the flaws in the thought, probing, exploring, testing.

The car. Tool. It was. It could be. Not a puny tool like a screw-driver. A ram. A battering-ram!

She sat up quickly, reckless now of the exertion, her accelerated breathing, staring wildly at the roadster, at the space between her body and the roadster. About four feet. Not much. But it might be enough. And the rear bumper. It was a fairly heavy span of steel. . . . But starting the car. That meant releasing more fumes. More carbon monoxide. It would cut short what remained of her life.

The drums in her head banged louder. She blinked, trying to bring the rear bumper into focus. Her eyes were giving way. Was that what happened? Oh, to die! Here. Don't. Think. Chance. Your last, last chance.

Take it!

She rolled feebly over, managed to steady herself on her hands and knees, crept the four long feet to the car. Around the car. Now. Up. Up into the car. *Up into the car.*

She bit her lower lip with the effort. The pain was remote. She tasted her own blood. Up. . . . The blood dripped from her lip, stained her dress. Up. . . .

How loud the drums were. What was she going to do? Car. Ram. Start the car.

Oh, yes. Key. Where was the key? Key. She had turned off the ignition. What had she done with the key?

Groggily Kerrie looked down at her left hand, felt for it with her right. Both hands swam in a sort of warm and swarming sea of shadow. Key. There it was. In her left hand. She had never let go of it.

She fell forward against the wheel, groping for the ignition keyhole with the point of the key, scratching, scraping, sliding, key in hole, key in hole. . . . She bit her lip again, deliberately, on the bleeding wound. The pain was sharp this time. Sharper. Bite. Again. She cried out. But her eyes cleared for an instant.

It was in. Now. Turn it. Turn it.

Slowly, slowly. There. It turned.

Now. The starter. Right foot. Bring it up. Drag it, push it up. Oh, it won't move. Damn you. . . . Kerrie took both hands and lifted her right leg from under the knee, carried it forward until the sole of her shoe lay on the starter.

Lean. Press.

The urgent rattle of the starter awakened her a little. She gulped, jerking in an abdominal spasm. The mutter of the motor filled her head. Quickly. Before it's too late. . . .

Left foot, clutch. Right foot, gas. Hand, shift. Shift. Shift!

Now!

The roadster leaped backward. Thud!

Forward. Backward. Thud!

Not hard enough. Stalled. Start again. Harder. Harder.

"Oh, the drums!" Thud! Forward. Crash! Forward. Crash! Stall. . . . Start. Forward. *Crash!*

Better. There had been a crackly, splintery sound on that last one. Don't look around. Hang on to yourself. Keep your stomach down. Hold your head up. Right foot, left foot, one going down as the other goes up. *Crash!* Now shift into first, forward, stop, reverse, right foot and left foot, one going down as the other goes up. *Crash!* It's going. Oh, it's going. Think of that. Never stop thinking of that. Maybe just once more. Maybe just. Forward. Reverse. *Crash!*

Her left and right feet were frozen to the clutch and

gas pedals as the roadster burst through the double-door, as she lay across the wheel fighting the world of falling shadows, the sickness in her body, the roaring in her head . . . burst through into the black night, rode over the door's defeated, splintered body, careened as the weight of her body shifted the wheel, crashed into a broad and ancient beech yards to the side of the low garage building . . . crashed, snarled, was silent.

As silent as Kerrie who, even as the roadster struck the tree and the shock of the impact jerked her from the driver's seat and threw her out of the car to lie crumpled on the cold grass, even as unconsciousness embraced her fluidly like the arms of the sea, was sucking the sweet clean breath of the world—sucking, frowning, her bleeding lips and throat and smudged nostrils greedy . . . sucking, gulping, savoring, breathing the blessed air.

WHEN Beau drove into the grounds of the Cole estate, it was already dark.

He stopped at the servants' quarters first. His operative, a large stout woman with eyes like steel nailheads, was rocking on the back porch.

"Well?"

"All okay." The woman squinted at him. "You're past due, Mr. Rummell. I was getting worried."

"What happened today?"

"Miss Shawn and Miss Day left early this mornin' on a picnic, just the two of them. Drove out in Miss Shawn's roadster. I handed the chef the eatables meself. No chance for a slip-up, Mr. Rummell."

"Driving off into the country alone!" Beau frowned. "How about Miss Cole? Mr. De Carlos?"

"Miss Cole didn't leave the grounds all day. She entertained a party of newspaper people on the lawn. They left before dark and she had dinner alone and went up to her room. She called your number in the City just after dinner."

"I know, I know. How about De Carlos?"

"Mr. De Carlos threw a water-party in the pool for Mr. and Mrs. Goossens and some free-gin lappers in the afternoon. He got drunk on absinthe at four-thirty and had to be helped to his quarters."

"When did the girls get back from their picnic?"

"Less than an hour ago. Miss Day went right to bed. Miss Shawn drove her roadster round to the garage; butler told me. I guess she's gone on up to her rooms."

Beau drove back to the house. He went upstairs and knocked on Kerrie's door.

He knocked again, listening; then he tried the door and found it unlocked. He pushed it open, went in, snapped on the light, and looked around.

Not there.

He was about to cross to the boudoir door when it opened and Violet Day, in a mauve satin négligé, her hair in two blonde braids down her back, her eyes half-closed in the light, as if she had been in darkness for some time, stood in the doorway.

There was a snub-nosed automatic in her left hand, and it was pointed at Beau's breast.

"Oh, it's you," said Vi. But she did not lower the automatic. "What do you think you're doing, pussy-footing around in Kerrie's bedroom?"

"Where is she?"

"Kerrie? Isn't she here?" A shadow passed over Vi's face; she looked quickly about. "But I thought—"

"Put that pea-shooter down before you hurt somebody!" Vi's arm sank. "Now where is she?"

"I came up here and she drove around to the garage to put the car away."

"When?"

"Almost an hour ago. I was just dozing off when you—"

But Beau was gone.

He drove towards the garage. As he approached, he

saw the unmoving shine of two headlights. He jumped out and ran over to Kerrie's roadster. It was backed against a big beech tree, and it was empty.

Puzzled, Beau followed the parallel lines of the roadster's headlights. Then he saw the broken door of the second garage compartment. He ran over and examined it. There was no lock on the fallen door. He rose, sniffing. Exhaust smell. But he could hear no sound of a running motor; and all five of the other garage stalls were closed and silent.

He sprinted back to the roadster. "Kerrie! Kerrie Shawn!"

There was no answer, and he began to circle the roadster. With a flashlight he examined the rear of the car; it was battered, its bumper hanging crazily. Then he went on and saw Kerrie lying still in the grass.

Flying feet made a noise behind him. "Kerrie! Is she —is she—*dead?*" Violet Day stood panting there. She had slipped a squirrel coat over her négligé. Her hair was disordered and her eyes big with fear.

"No. Breathing very fast. Heart's racing. Kerrie!" Beau shook the limp body.

"But—but what—"

"Looks as if she was caught in the garage and had to fight her way out. Kerrie!" He slapped her pale right cheek, his left arm supporting her head. "Kerrie! Wake up. It's—"

Her eyelids fluttered. Her eyes were dull, her brow furrowed, her mouth open to the night air.

"I'm—dizzy," she said with a groan. "Who—I can't see—well—"

"It's . . . Ellery Queen," said Beau, but Vi flung herself beside Kerrie and cried: "It's Vi, hon! What happened? What was it this time?"

"Garage—carbon monoxide—" Kerrie fainted again.

"Carbon monoxide!" Beau shouted: "Get a lot of black coffee!"

Vi flew off.

Beau turned Kerrie over in the grass and straddled her. Her mouth and nose were sucking in the air. His big hands gripped her ribs; his torso worked up and down in a slow rhythm.

She was just coming to again when Vi, accompanied by Margo Cole and half the household, ran up. Vi carried a pitcher of steaming coffee and a glass.

"Vi says—" cried Margo; she was half-dressed. "Vi says Kerrie— Monoxide poisoning—"

Beau did not look at her. He seized the pitcher, poured a glass of coffee, sat Kerrie up and forced her to swallow. She cried out weakly, shaking her head. His fingers clamped the back of her neck; he exerted pressure, and she drank, tears streaming down her dusty cheeks.

When she had swallowed one glassful, he forced her to swallow another. A trace of color began to show in her cheeks.

"Drink it. Breathe in—hard. And drink."

She drank and drank, while the silent group stood about.

"All right," said Beau. "It's as much as we can do now. Anybody call a doctor?"

"I did, sir," said the butler. "Dr. Murphy of Tarrytown.

"All we can do till the doctor comes is put her to bed. Kerrie!"

Her head was against his shoulder, resting heavily.

"Kerrie. Put your arm around my neck. Hang on, now."

"What?" said Kerrie. She raised her eyes; they were still dull with pain.

"Never mind." He picked her up; and after a moment her arm crept about his neck and clung.

Kerrie opened her eyes with a confused recollection of a nightmare. Garage—smell—fight—car—crash—a lot

of people and . . . him . . . holding on to him and feeling, through her nausea, through the fog . . . feeling at peace.

And then the scene shifted to her room, like a movie. Windows thrown wide, Vi undressing her and getting her into bed . . . she was sick then . . . and later he was telling her not to mind, not to mind, just close her eyes, breathe deeply, try to rest, to sleep . . . then a strange man injecting something that stung for an instant—the air, the fresh clean sweet air—sleep. . . .

Kerrie opened her eyes and in the hot light of morning saw Beau's face, inches from her own.

She pulled him down to her, sobbing.

"All right. It's all right now, Kerrie," Beau kept mumbling. "You're okay. There's nothing to be afraid of now."

"It was horrible," sobbed Kerrie. "The garage—some one locked me in—I couldn't get out—turned the motor on in the next garage—the fumes came through the radiator-grille—I got sick and dizzy—my tools were stolen, my revolver—I couldn't get out. . . ."

Beau's arms tightened about her. When he had found Kerrie last night the lock was gone from the broken garage door; the motor of the car in the next garage had been turned off. Whoever had tried to kill Kerrie had stolen back, removed the lock, turned off the engine of the station-wagon, and gone away. Had Kerrie not managed to escape from the garage, had she died there like a mouse in a trap, it would have looked like the usual garage accident: the running motor of her own car, the doctors might have said—she fainted and was overcome. There would have been no evidence of a crime. An accident—like the "accident" on the bridle-path.

Kerrie's tears were warm on his cheek. "I thought—you were in with her. Please. I was mad. I know you couldn't. Oh, I love you. I do. I've been so miserable. I couldn't leave here and let—her have you. I love you!"

"I know, funny-face. Me, too. . . ."

"Darling." She placed her palms on his cheeks and held his face off, smiling incredulously. Then she hugged him. "Oh, you do!"

The Tarrytown doctor came in and said: "I beg your pardon. Would you mind—?"

Beau stumbled out.

MARGO kept him waiting fifteen minutes. When her maid finally admitted him, Margo was lying graceful-armed on a chaise-longue, her body draped in a dramatic morning gown, every hair in place, and her dead-white cheeks carefully made up.

"How nice," she smiled at him, and then said rapidly to her maid: "*Betise! Va t'en!*" and the maid fled. As soon as the door closed Margo slipped off the couch and went to him.

He took her in his arms. She put her hands on his chest after a while. "Sit down here with me. You've kept me waiting so long."

"Couldn't get here sooner."

"Oh. Kerrie? It would be." She said it lightly. But she pushed him away a little.

"Sure it would be!"

"And how is the little mousy darling? I suppose you've sat up with her all night?"

"I had to put on an act, didn't I? Somebody had to." Beau made his tone annoyed, even truculent. But he was careful to draw her close to him again.

"You—it was you found her last night, wasn't it?" murmured Margo.

"Lucky for you I did, gorgeous."

"What do you mean?" She opened her Egyptian eyes wide, staring in the innocent-little-girl way she affected.

"You know what I mean."

"But I don't. I was shocked to hear about Kerrie's latest adventure with the fates. She has such foul luck with horses and garages, hasn't she? Is she all right this

morning?" Margo sat down on the chaise-longue and patted it invitingly.

"No thanks to you." Beau laughed, stretching out beside her. She leaned on him, chin propped on her long hands, eyes on his face. "Don't you think that was a little raw, baby?"

"Raw?" She looked blank.

"This last stunt of yours," His tone said he was amused.

"This last—" she wrinkled her nose in perplexity. Then she laughed. "You think *I* locked Kerrie in that garage and tried to kill her? I?"

"That's what I mean."

She stopped laughing. "I don't like that!"

"Neither do I. That's why I'm giving you a little friendly advice."

"That, *chéri*," she said softly, "is a very dangerous thing to say. I might sue you for slander—if I didn't like you so much."

"I wouldn't be wasting my time if I didn't have your interests at heart."

"Heart! What do you know about hearts? You're a lump, a stone!"

He grinned at her. "Yeah. Like coal. Hard and black and cold. Till you light a fire under it."

"You're a cinder!"

"Try me and see."

She rose suddenly and went to the window to stare out at the gardens.

"Come here," said Beau lazily.

She turned with reluctance. Then she went back to him, and sat down again, and he took her hands.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"In what way?"

He put his arms about her. "Don't you know, deep inside, that you're safe with me, baby?"

"Safe?"

"Don't you know you and I can go places together? The only thing is—you're a little foolish."

"What a charming compliment!"

"You're foolish because you take foolish chances. You've let yourself be swept away by your feelings. That's why women's crimes are so easy to spot. For one thing, you think I'm in love with Kerrie Shawn."

"Aren't you?" she asked through her strong white teeth.

"That skinny little thing? When I'm a sucker for your type?"

"Just my *type*?" She was growing arch now.

"For you, damn you! You know it, only you're too damn' suspicious. Does this feel phony?"

He pulled her over until she lay in his arms.

"Does it?" He kissed her.

She closed her eyes, responding slowly. But it was the creep of a rising flood.

"Wait. Wait," she gasped, pushing him away. "You say you don't love her. How do I know? The way you've looked at her. And last night—"

"I tell you she doesn't mean a thing to me!" snarled Beau. "But I'm smarter than you, baby. I put on an act. And you'd be a hell of a lot smarter to put on an act, too, instead of running your neck into a noose!"

"I don't—know what you mean."

"You want her dough, don't you?" said Beau in a brutal tone. "All right. How do you try to get your hands on it? By putting her out of the way. Dangerous, you fool! It takes finesse. You can get what you want a whole lot more safely."

She did not answer in words. She pulled him down to her and put her lips to his ear.

"You can get it, and me, too," growled Beau.

She whispered.

"But we split, see?"

She kissed a trail from his ear to his lips.

Later, when Beau left her, he went into a bathroom and spent three minutes rinsing his mouth.

Beau left the grounds early that morning; he was back by the afternoon.

Kerrie was waiting on the terrace. For him. He knew it was for him. By the way she started when she saw him. By the glad look in her eyes—glad, and anxious, too, as if she couldn't make up her mind whether what had happened was a dream or an actuality.

He stooped and kissed her. The book slipped off her lap. "Then it's true!" And she jumped up and kissed him fiercely. "Let's go somewhere!"

"Where's Vi?" asked Beau slowly.

"She had an appointment in town with the hairdresser. Darling. You do love me?"

He held her close.

"That's all I wanted to know." She shivered with joy. "I don't care about anything else."

"Let's take a walk," said Beau.

They strolled into the sweet-smelling woods, his arm about her.

There was something unreal about the afternoon; the sunlight filtering through the leaves had a red cast, so that they seemed to be walking in a place not of earth.

"It isn't," said Kerrie, "as if the future were altogether rosy. It isn't. There are so many thing I don't understand. About you, darling. And about the future. But I've made up my mind not to look ahead. . . . Isn't it lovely here?"

Beau sat down on a weatherbeaten stump. Kerrie sank to the ground and rested her cheek on his knee.

"What's the matter, dear? You look—funny."

Beau hurled a twig away. "Kerrie, we've got to face the facts. You're on the spot."

"Please. Let's not talk about that."

"We've got to. You're on the spot, and we've got to do something about it."

She was silent.

"Your uncle paid me to find his heirs. I should have bowed out when I located you and Margo showed up. I've only brought you a peck of trouble." He scowled.

"I'm glad you didn't bow out." She pressed his knee.

"I didn't because—well, I had reason to believe your uncle Cadmus was murdered. I still believe it."

The red light of the sky on her pallor gave her face an eerie violet cast.

She stammered: "But I don't—I don't understand."

"Neither do I." He pulled her up and sat her on his knee, staring at the sky. "Anyway, I've been hanging around trying to find out what it's all about. And who's behind it."

"Margo," whispered Kerrie. "Margo! She's tried to kill me, Ellery. But how could she— Uncle was at sea—"

"There's plenty we don't know. Anyway, funny-face, maybe now you'll realize why I've been paying so much attention to your cousin Margo."

"Darling, why didn't you tell me?" Kerrie sprang off his lap. "Can't we expose her?"

"No proof. She's cute as hell, Kerrie. She's covered her tracks too well. And if we force her hand now, she may become desperate." Beau paused, then said quietly: "Sooner or later, no matter how many precautions we take, one of these little 'accidents' won't fail."

"The police—"

"They'd laugh at you, and you won't have anything to offer them but suspicions. Then the cat will be out of the bag and you'll be worse off than now."

"What do you want me to do, Ellery?" asked Kerrie simply.

"Get married."

Kerrie was silent. And when she did speak, it was in an unsteady voice. "Who would marry me, even if I

should be silly enough to give up twenty-five hundred dollars a week for him?"

"I would," muttered Beau.

"Darling!" She flew to him. "If you'd said anything else I'd have killed myself!"

"You'll have to kiss the dough goodbye, Kerrie," he said gently.

"I don't care!"

"Funny kid." He stroked her hair. "I'd have asked you to marry me in Hollywood, but I couldn't bring myself to—not when it meant depriving you of everything money could give you. But now its different. It's no longer a choice between money and me . . . it's a choice between money and—" He drew her closer.

"The money doesn't mean a thing to me," cried Kerrie. "The only one I'm sorry for is Vi. Poor Vi will have to go back—"

"You would think of her," grinned Beau. "Think of yourself for a change! With you married, Margo gets your share of the income automatically. So she won't have to kill you, and you'll be safe."

"But, Ellery." She looked troubled. "She likes you. I know. She likes you a lot. If you marry me, she won't—I mean, a woman can act awfully nasty in a case like that."

"There won't be any trouble with Margo," said Beau quickly.

"But—"

"Kerrie, are you going to trust me, or aren't you?"

She laughed tremulously. "Yes—if you marry me now, today!"

She could hold him against any woman, she thought—once they were married. She had so much love to give. So much more than a woman like Margo could possibly offer, much less feel.

"Is this a proposal?"

"I couldn't make it any clearer, could I? Oh, but I'm

delirious, I guess, darling. How can you marry me today? We haven't even a license."

"Didn't I say to leave everything to me?" Beau grinned again. "I took out a Connecticut license last week."

"Ellery! You didn't!"

Kerrie ran all the way back to the house. Beau followed more slowly. Following, with her eyes no longer on him, he stopped grinning. In the deepening crimson light, his face was ghastly, too.

X. The Ring and the Book

Kerrie was furiously hurling things into three bags when Vi returned. Beau was pacing the terrace downstairs in the dusk; Kerrie could hear the slap of his steps. She was grateful for them, because they kept him near her. She felt the need for his nearness when Vi came in, and that was strange, for Kerrie had never required a defense against Vi before.

"Kerrie! What's up?"

"Darn it," said Kerrie. "Where are those new nighties?"

"In the bottom drawer. What are you packing for? Where are you going?"

"Away," said Kerrie, as if it were unimportant. She did not look at Vi. "This is a heck of a trousseau I'm getting together."

"Trousseau? Kerrie, are you gaga?"

"I'm going to marry Ellery Queen." From an irresistible compulsion Kerrie said it lightly.

She heard Vi's gasp and the creak of the box-spring as her friend sank onto the bed.

"Marry? *Him?*"

"What's the matter with him?" laughed Kerrie. "He's the most fascinating thing in pants I've ever met, and

I've decided to grab him before he changes his mind."

Vi did not laugh, however. "But, Kerrie— When?"

"Now. Tonight." Despite her best effort, a note of defiance crept into Kerrie's voice.

There was the most peculiar expression on Vi's face. But then she jumped up and hugged Kerrie. "All the luck, hon. You've got more guts than I'd have."

Kerrie clung. "Oh, Vi, I know what this means to you. Back to the old grind—"

"Easy come, easy go," said Vi gaily. "Don't fret yourself about *me*. It's twelve o'clock, and the coach turns into a pumpkin, and the glad rags become just rags. . . . Well, I had a few weeks in a fairy tale, anyway." She pressed Kerrie to her bosom convulsively. "Kerrie, you're sure?"

"What do you mean?" But Kerrie knew exactly what Vi meant. And because she herself had had similar suspicions, she felt herself go hard inside and slipped from Vi's embrace to resume her packing.

"And how about Sister Rat?" asked Vi dryly, after a long time.

"Who? Oh! I don't know. What's more, I don't care."

Vi looked at Kerrie; then she laughed. "So little Kerrie's been snagged by the tough lad who looks like Robert Taylor. . . . Quite a triumph. Epic, they'd call it in the movies. Giving up the old boodle for lo-o-ove. He must feel pretty snazzy, that man!"

"Vi. That's hateful," said Kerrie in a low voice.

Vi sat down on the bed again. "I'm sorry, Kerrie; I guess the shock . . . Tell me just how it happened. It's really too thrilling for words."

Kerrie looked her friend straight in the eye. Vi looked away. "Not so long ago, Vi, you were begging me to give all this up, to run away. And now, when I've decided to take your advice, you don't seem . . . well, pleased. Why?"

"*I'm* not pleased? But, Kerrie dear, aren't you a little mixed up? You're the one who has to be pleased, not I. Are you?"

"Very much!" Kerrie tossed her head.

"Then that's all that matters," laughed Vi. "Now are you going to stop being silly and tell me *everything?*"

Yes, Vi was acting peculiarly. Of course, it was natural for her to be—surprised . . . yes, and disappointed, too, over the prospect of Kerrie's marriage. It meant Vi's brief day of bliss was over and that she would have to go back to the old, mean, scraping life. And then for some time Kerrie had had the queerest feeling that Vi had come to distrust *him*. Oh, Vi liked him, all right; Kerrie was woman enough to be sure of that fundamental fact. . . . And, too, Kerrie's marriage meant the separation of the two friends. That much could be remedied!

"Of course, you'll take pot luck with us," said Kerrie quickly. "I couldn't think . . . We won't have much, because Ellery's not well off, and it will probably mean a small apartment in the city. But we'll manage beautifully, Vi—"

"Thanks, Kerrie," said Vi. "But I've been a millstone round your neck long enough."

Kerrie dropped an armful of stockings and ran to the bed. Vi! You're crying!"

"I'm doing no such thing," said Vi, springing up. "I'm going right back to Hollywood, where men are rats and all the rats are casting directors, and with the publicity I've had through this little racket of ours I'll get steady work—maybe. Well, I will!"

"Oh, Vi!" And it was Kerrie's turn to sniffle.

"Stop it," said Vi. She picked Kerrie up and deposited her on the bed. "Now you lie there while I finish packing for you. I'll see you through the execution, anyway, and then—"

They finished packing together, in silence.

Pink and blue—that was how Kerrie had always visual

ized her wedding. She would wear a pale pink satin gown with a short train and a swathing veil of pink tulle. The gown would be princess-lined, with leg-o'-mutton sleeves and a high neckline edged with a narrow pleated ruffle, and the gown would button down the back—one long row of twinkly little buttons from her neck to her waist. Pink satin slippers, long pale pink kid gloves, a wedding bouquet of pink camellias and baby's-breath . . .

There she would stand, a creation in pink among bridesmaids in baby blue, who would be wearing doll hats and little muffs made out of fresh flowers. Of course Vi, as maid-of-honor, would be in powder blue. . . .

That's the way it had always been, a vision of the future. But what was the actuality? Kerrie had hurriedly put on a simple two-piece tailored dress of navy-blue net, with a touch of white at the throat, and a navy-blue hat, white gloves, and navy patent leather shoes and bag. It was all right, but . . . And Vi. Vi had climbed into a white tailored sharkskin suit over a pink sweater.

An even aside from the clothes—just the three of them. That masterful individual who either scowled or grinned had insisted upon secrecy.

"When the papers get hold of this," he had said, "you'll be hounded to death. It's a big story."

"But, darling," Kerrie wailed, "something—anything—a few friends. A woman only gets married once! I mean—"

"So you see what you're getting," said Vi. "A woman only gets married once! Didn't you ever hear of Reno?"

"Lay off my wife," said Beau. "Heiress Gives Up Fortune for Love! They'll play it up bigger than the bundling party at Munich. If you want to enjoy your honeymoon, funny-face, you've got to outsmart the press."

"But how, darling?"

"Leave it to your Uncle Dudley." And he had telephoned a Justice of the Peace he said he knew in Con-

necticut, upon whose discretion he could rely, and had sworn Margo and De Carlos and the servants to a twenty-four hour conspiracy of silence, and had refused to tell even Kerrie where he was going to take her on their honeymoon.

And Margo—Margo was something of a surprise.

"You mean you're actually giving up Uncle's money?" she asked when she heard the news.

"Yes."

"But why?"

"We happen to be in love," said Kerrie shortly.

"Oh, I see." And Margo smiled slightly at the stiff face of the groom-to-be. "Well, I hope you'll be very happy."

"Thank you."

It was baffling. Margo acted almost *relieved*. Of course, as soon as Kerrie married, Margo's weekly income would be doubled. But Kerrie had been positive Margo was in love with "Ellery"—as much in love as a woman of that sort *could* be. Wasn't there a conflict? Or had Kerrie been altogether mistaken about Margo—in everything?

"You're being married immediately?" murmured Margo.

"We're leaving in ten minutes," said Beau abruptly. "We'll be married before the night's over."

"How romantic!" said Margo; and then she said politely: "Is there anything I can do, Kerrie?"

"No, thanks. Vi's going with me."

"But there must be things you aren't able to do at such short notice—arrangements about your belongings, your bank—"

"They can wait. Goodbye, Margo."

"Goodbye."

They eyed each other inscrutably.

Then Edmund De Carlos stumbled in, drunk as usual.

"What's this I hear?" he shouted jovially. "Getting

married to Queen, or some such nonsense, Kerrie?"

"But it's true, Mr. De Carlos."

"True!" He gaped at her. "But that means—"

"I know," snapped Kerrie. "It means I'm giving up twenty-five hundred a week for life in exchange for a big lug who'll probably beat me up for exercise on Saturday nights. Now that *that's clear*—goodbye, everybody."

And they drove off, leaving De Carlos goggling after them, and Margo on the drive in a long white gown which shimmered in the dying sunlight, smiling faintly.

Kerrie found herself thinking about her cousin's smile as Beau's car rattled toward Connecticut. It was a strange quarter-smile, a delicate and subtle exhibition of amusement, and it had persisted throughout their farewells to the silent household staff, the packing of Kerrie's and Vi's bags into Beau's runabout, throughout the exchange with De Carlos.

That smile of Margo's seemed to have cast a pall over all three of them. Beau drove in a shut-in silence, and in the back seat Vi was a mouse.

What's the matter with us? thought Kerrie in despair. This isn't an elopment; it's a funeral. Why is he so quiet? And Vi?

It was that woman back there, dominating the driveway, mistress of all she surveyed—ex-clothes-horse! Gloating over the fine rolling lawns, the big house, the view of the Hudson—visibly gloating over her triumph.

That was it—triumph. Why was she so *triumphant?* Did complete possession of the estate mean so much to her? Or was there something darker and deeper and more hateful in the secret pleasure of that smile?

Kerrie leaned on Beau's shoulder and touched the lobe of his ear with her lips. He grunted something.

"Give the gal a break, Mister," said Vi suddenly from the back seat. "You owe her *something* for making her lose that twenty-five hundred per."

"Vi!" said Kerrie angrily.

But Beau did not take his eyes from the unwinding tape of the road, and both women fell silent, and no other word was spoken until they crossed from Port Chester into Connecticut.

Kerrie burst out at last: "If you'd rather forget the whole thing, this is the time to say so!"

He started at that, looking at her out of the corner of his eye. "Kerrie! What makes you say a fool thing like that?"

"You don't seem very happy over the prospect of marrying me," retorted Kerrie in a small voice.

"Oh." He looked straight ahead again. "Maybe it's because I know what it means to you, Kerrie. What have I got to offer you to take the place of all that dough?"

"If you feel that way about it, then you don't know what getting married means to me!"

"I'm seven different kinds of heel," he said quietly.

"You're marrying me to keep me from being killed!" cried Kerrie. "Oh, I see it all now! You're not in love with me. You never have been! That's what she was smiling—"

"She?"

Kerrie bit her lip. "Never mind."

"Kerrie—"

"Oh, you're being fine and heroic!" said Kerrie scornfully. "Well, thanks, but I want a husband, not a lifeguard. Please turn the car around and take me back to Tarrytown."

And she crouched in her corner, her face turned away.

He drove onto the grass shoulder beside the road, stopped the car, said over his shoulder to Vi, "This woman takes a lot of convincing. Excuse us," and, seizing Kerrie by the waist, yanked her to him.

She gasped. After a moment she put her arms about him.

When he released her he said: "Any doubts now?"

Kerrie was breathing hard; her eyes were shining. She twisted about and said in confusion: "Never a dull moment, that's us. I think I *am* wacky. Oh, Vi, this is awful. Can you ever forgive us?"

But Vi was—or was pretending to be—asleep.

They pulled up in the yard of a disreputable clapboard house near Greenwich, on the sagging porch of which a mean sign announced:

MARRIAGES PERFORMED
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
W. A. JOHNSTON

A board was missing from the second step of the wooden stairs leading to the front porch, the plot before the house was a miniature wilderness of weeds and rubbish, and the once-white walls were encrusted with the dirt of decades.

"Cheerful little place to tie the knot," remarked Vi. "So elegant, so refined! What is this, Queen—a haunted house?"

"Johnston isn't very strong on soap and water. Ready, Miss Shawn?"

"Y-yes," said Kerrie.

"She's a little gun-shy," said Vi. "Buck up, darlin'. This is one form of execution that isn't permanent. You can rise from the grave any time you like, if you know the right judge."

"You're—you're sure you've got the license, Ellery?" stammered Kerrie, ignoring Vi's prattle.

"Right in my pocket."

"It's all right? I mean, I always thought the woman had to sign on the license, too, when it's taken out. But—"

"Pull," grinned Beau. "After all, my old man's a somebody in New York, isn't he?"

"Oh, Inspector Queen. And I haven't even *met* him!" Kerrie looked anxious. "But this is Connecticut, darling, not New York!"

"You find more things to worry about," grunted Beau, and he scooped Kerrie from the walk and carried her over the broken step, and Kerrie giggled something about Isn't that premature? and Beau set her down and set off a bell that jangled rustily.

A tall gaunt man wearing thick glasses and an ancient morning coat peered out through the dirty pane at the side of the front door. When he saw Beau his thin features cracked into smiles and he hastened to admit them.

"Come in!" he said heartily. "All ready for you, sir!"

"Mr. Johnston—Miss Shawn—Miss Day."

"So this is the blushing bride." The man beamed down on Kerrie. "This way, please!"

There was something fantastic about the thin, stooped figure that made Kerrie suppress another giggle. What a way to be married, in what a place, by what an agent of the State! The Justice had a head of bristly gray hair, and he wore a mustache of the untrimmed, thicket variety; he looked like a vaudeville comedian. And the house! The front hall was bare, and the parlor he led them into was a cold, dark, sparsely furnished room so full of dust that Kerrie began to sneeze.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Vi's nose wrinkle with disgust, and laughed aloud. Then Vi laughed, too, and they began to whisper together.

It certainly is a "different" sort of wedding! thought Kerrie as Beau conferred with the Justice at a desk in a corner over the marriage license. He *would* pick a place like this, and a funny man like that to marry them! Always doing the unexpected. "Never a dull moment," she had said to Vi in the car. No, there never would be with him. Perhaps that was why she loved him so much. It would be like being married to a ball of lightning.

Vi whispered: "Scared?"

"I should say not."

"How does it feel to be taking the fatal step, liar?"

"S-simply s-swell."

"No—regrets, Kerrie?"

Kerrie squeezed her friend's hand. "Not even a little one, Vi."

Then the two men came back, and the Justice took up a position in a certain formal way and cleared his throat importantly, and Kerrie was so surprised she said: "But aren't we supposed to have two witnesses, Mr. Johnston?"

"Of course, my dear," said the Justice hastily. "I was about to explain that Mrs. Johnston is unfortunately in Greenwich at the moment, and if you'd care to wait—"

"Miss Day is one," said Beau. "And I don't think we'd like to wait. How about it, funny-face?"

"Certainly not," said Kerrie firmly.

"Naturally, naturally!" said Mr. Johnston. "This occurs occasionally, of course. If you have no objection, Miss Shawn, the only other thing we can do is—er—flag a witness outside, so to speak."

"Pick somebody interesting," giggled Kerrie.

And the tall man hurried out, and they heard him shouting at passing cars, and finally he returned in triumph, like Pompey, towing an inebriated traveller who leered at Kerrie and at Vi and even at Beau, and Beau had to hold him up during the ceremony to avert the total collapse of his rubbery legs.

That was the last straw, and Kerrie was so busy trying to keep a straight face that she scarcely heard one mumbly word of the service. She was actually astonished when Vi giggled: "Wake up! You're a married woman!"

"I'm— Oh, Vi!" And she threw herself into Vi's arms while Beau helped the stranger to a rocker, and paid the Justice, and then approached to claim his bride.

He was actually pale.

"It was the nicest wedding," said Kerrie with a wavery smile. "Darling—aren't you even going to kiss Mrs. Queen?"

He took her in his arms without a word.

XI. VILLAINY AT THE *Villanoy*

"UP TO NOW," SAID VI WHEN THEY GOT BACK IN THE CAR, "I've been chief mourner. But now that the funeral's over, chickadees, take me to the New Haven and then be gone with the wind—and my blessing."

"No," protested Kerrie. "Ellery, don't you do it!"

"Wouldn't think of it," said Beau. "Where you bound, Blondie?"

"New York."

"Then we'll take you there."

"But that's out of your way!"

"Who told you?" chuckled Beau. "We're headed for the city, too."

"You mean—a honeymoon in New York?" gasped Kerrie.

"Sure. That's the one place the smart boys won't think of looking for us."

"Oh," said Kerrie. Then she said valiantly: "I think that's a gorgeous idea, don't you, Vi?"

"Yes, indeed," murmured Vi. "And just think of all the fun you'll have—a wedding dinner at the Chink's, and you can go roaming the primeval wilderness in Central Park, and all. Such a romantic place to honeymoon!"

"Well, it is!" said Kerrie.

"Sure it is, hon. Anyway, it's your honeymoon—and your husband, thank goodness!"

Kerrie and Vi argued all the way into New York. Kerrie wanted Vi to spend the rest of the evening with

them, and Vi insisted she was tired and sleepy and had to get settled and all. . . . Beau urged Vi to stick with them, too. Kerrie resented that—just a little. Then she felt ashamed of herself. But she was relieved when Vi remained adamant.

They dropped Vi at a genteel ladies' hotel in the East Sixties. The two women parted with tears and embraces.

"You'll keep in touch with me, Vi?" cried Kerrie.

"Of course, kid."

"Tomorrow—I'll ring you tomorrow."

Then Vi's tall figure was gone, and Kerrie was alone with her silent husband. He was kept busy driving through the midtown traffic, and Kerrie managed to occupy herself for a long time with her lipstick and powder-puff. But even the most careful make-up duty ends at last, and then there was nothing to do but stare straight ahead, feeling hot fires in her cheeks.

"You smell nice," he said in a growly voice.

She laid her head on his shoulder in a spasm of tenderness.

"Where are we stopping?" she whispered.

"The *Villanoy*. Right off Times Square. They won't find us there in a million years."

"Wherever you say, darling."

At the *Villanoy* a doorman took charge of the car, and two bellboys commandeered the luggage—Kerrie flushed when she noticed the initials *K S* on her bags—and Beau registered at the desk, writing "Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Queen" in a firm hand, and the desk-clerk didn't even blink.

Then there was the long ascent in the elevator under the scrutiny of a couple with remarkably inquisitive eyes. The woman whispered something to her escort, laughing, and Kerrie was sure they were whispering about newlyweds, but finally that ordeal was over, and they and their bags and the bellboy were marching down a long corridor to a door marked 1724, and they went in,

and the bellboy set down the bags and threw up the shades of the sitting room and opened the windows wide, so that New York flowed into the room in a nice, quiet, above-it-all way.

The boy repeated the chore in the bedroom. Twin beds, Kerrie noticed, recalling that downstairs her husband—husband!—had asked for twin beds. But then she supposed it was because he was accustomed to . . . The bellboy left noiselessly, pocketing a half-dollar with no surprise whatever, and they were alone at last.

"It's a darling suite," said Kerrie in the strained silence. She went to inspect the closets, glorying in the first official impulse of her housewifely existence.

Beau was planted in the center of the sitting room, his hat still on his curly hair, a cigaret forgotten in his fingers—looking rather silly, Kerrie thought with secret amusements as she poked in the closets.

"Aren't you going to stay a while, Mr. Queen?" she called.

"Kerrie." Something in his tone made her come out of the bedroom closet, take off her hat, put it on the bed, strip off her gloves, all slowly. There was that pain again, in her chest. It was a pain she felt through no one but . . . him.

"Yes?" she managed to keep her tone casual. But whatever he was about to say would be—catastrophic. She knew that. It had been coming all afternoon. "Yes, dear?" said Kerrie again in a light tone.

He kept staring at the tip of his cigaret. Kerrie's eyes burned on him. Oh, darling, darling, what is there between us? That comes up even at a time like this? Then he looked up and she was smiling.

"I've got something to do, Kerrie."

"Now?"

"Now. Hungry?"

"Not a bit. What do you have to do?" That was

wrong; she shouldn't have asked that. It would make him hate her.

"Business. In all the hurry—" She deserved that. Business! It was almost funny. "I'll send something up for you."

"Don't bother. If I want anything, I'll call Room Service." Kerrie turned her back toward him, stooping over one of her bags. "Will you be gone long?"

"Here, let me do that," he said. He took the bag from her, carried it into the bedroom, returned for the other bags, carried them into the bedroom. She followed slowly. He hadn't answered her question. "While you're waiting, you can unpack—you'd have to unpack, anyway, and you may as well do it now instead of . . ."

"Darling." She ran to him and put her arms about his neck. "Is anything wrong?" She couldn't help it. She couldn't.

He looked blustery, and she knew she had failed. "Wrong? Look, Kerrie. I've just got to go out—"

"Then you've got to," said Kerrie brightly, releasing him. "Don't make such funny faces! Any one would think you were about to leave me forever. You wouldn't desert your bride of an hour, would you, Mr. Queen?"

"Don't be a goop." He kissed first the tip of her nose, then the dimple in her chin, and finally the bow of her lips. "Be seeing you, funny-face." He strode out.

"Ellery! Come—"

She heard the slam of the front door.

Kerrie sat slowly down on one of the beds. Her brains ached. Blank. Void. Nothing. No thinking. Just sit. Or get up and do something. But don't think—

Flowers.

Of course! That's what had been bothering him! He'd forgotten to buy her flowers. He'd felt ashamed of himself. That made him act uncomfortable, and his uneasiness had communicated itself to her, and all the rest was her own imagining. . . . He'd gone downstairs

to buy her some. He'd probably be back with boxes of flowers and buckets of champagne, and they'd have a *tête-à-tête* supper high over the city. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Queen, in love and sitting on top of the world!

She flung herself backward on the bed and stretched luxuriously, yawning and smiling. But it was a yawn of excitement, not sleepiness.

Kerrie undressed quickly, washed in icy cold water, recombed her hair, made up again, and then put on a different dress—the one with the wide red leather belt and the pleasant blouse with blue stripes that flattered her eyes so, and heightened her complexion.

It was still early. Perhaps they'd take a walk on Broadway after supper, before returning to the hotel. She'd wear the little straight-brimed straw with the coque feather. . . .

She unpacked her bags. Her dresses were so wrinkled. But they'd hang out in the closet by morning. As she draped them on hangers she suddenly thought that he didn't have a bag at all. It had happened so quickly—their running away, their marriage . . .

She flushed and finished unpacking, stowing her powders and finishing creams and deodorants and perfumes and toilet waters in the bathroom cabinet. *Not* on the vanity. Women ought to keep the machinery of beauty hidden—especially married women. And he wouldn't see her—ever—with her face creamed up and her hair in an unsightly tight net. She'd always be fresh-looking . . . make him wonder . . . Silly. Childish. She wasn't really herself. What difference did it make? If he loved her. They said it did make a difference. She didn't really believe that. Never had. Then why these absurd defensive thoughts? Was it because, deep down, she wasn't absolutely certain he loved her?

When she was unpacked, and all her things had been laid away, and her most beautiful nightgown lay at the foot of one of the twin beds, with her nicest mules,

Kerrie realized that it was almost eleven o'clock. He'd been gone over two hours!

She lit a cigaret and sat down in the sitting room by one of the open windows, frowning. After a moment, she took up the telephone.

"This is Mrs. Queen," said Kerrie, thrilling despite herself to the shape of the name on her lips. "Has there been a call, or a message, for me in the past hour, from Mr. Queen?"

"No, Madam."

"Thank you."

She replaced the receiver softly and stared out the window.

The short lace curtains were fluttering in a breeze. Outside, there was a U-shaped court. Their two rooms lay along the right side of the U. The windows on the opposite side were dark. But the room nearest Kerrie's window on the connecting wall of the court was illuminated. The outer wall of that room and of Kerrie's sitting room met in one of the right angles of the court; the adjacent windows of the two rooms were only eight feet apart along the hypotenuse of vision.

Some one was in that room, Kerrie thought idly; the window was open and she could see on the drawn blind the formless shadow of some one crossing the room.

But then the light went out, and after an instant Kerrie noticed the blind flutter.

No use fooling herself longer. He hadn't gone for flowers. He could have bought a whole greenhouse in the time he'd been away. He was up to something else. But what could it be? That made sense? Oh, she could cheerfully strangle him!

But perhaps he was hurt. Perhaps he had gone down for flowers, or to arrange for a surprise blow-out, and had been struck by a cab, or had slipped and broken his leg, or—or—

No. That couldn't be it. She'd know if that had hap-

pened. Even if nobody notified her, she'd know. It wasn't that kind of accident. It wasn't *any* accident. He had gone away; he was staying away deliberately.

The truth was that he had proposed to her, rushed her to a crummy Justice of the Peace, married her like a —like a Saturday night binge, driven her secretly into New York for a "honeymoon," parked her in a hotel room as if she were a piece of—of luggage, and disappeared.

Kerrie caught up the lace curtains on both sides so that the night air might cool her hot face.

Vi . . . She could call Vi.

No. She'd rather die than do that. Not tonight. Not tonight. Not if she had to sit here by this window like a dressed-up dummy all night, alone! . . .

At midnight Kerrie telephoned the hotel desk. There was no message. She had known there would be none. But it was something to do.

She went into the bathroom to brush her teeth and rinse her mouth; it felt dry and tasted bitter.

As she was coming out of the bathroom there was a knock on the door.

Her heart jumped. He was back! What difference did it make why he had gone away, or where he had been, or to see whom? He was back!

She ran to the sitting-room and pulled it open.

Margo Cole smiled at her across the threshold.

"May I come in?"

Kerrie said: "Go away."

"Now is that nice, Mrs. Queen? Surely you wouldn't keep me out in the passage?"

"Go away, or I'll have the hotel people put you out!"

Margo crossed the threshold and gently closed the door behind her.

"I don't believe you'd fancy a scene just now."

"What do you want?"

"Are you really married?"

"Yes! Will you go now, please?"

"As soon as I've said my little piece."

"If you don't go," cried Kerrie, "I'll call my—my husband!"

"Do that," smiled Margo.

They faced each other in a keen, hostile silence.

Then Kerrie said: "You knew," in a shocked, faint voice.

"Of course I knew, darling! And since the groom isn't here, I thought I'd console the bride."

"Where is he?" whispered Kerrie.

Margo walked past her, stalking about the room, staring insolently at the stylized furniture, the cheap prints on the walls, the tinny decorations.

"How did you know he left me? How did you know we were in New York? How did you know we were at this hotel?"

"It was all arranged, my dear," drawled Margo.

Kerrie went over to the armchair by the window and sat down, fumbling for another cigaret.

"I suppose," she said calmly, "this is another of your little jokes." The room was whirling.

"Poor dear," sighed her cousin. "So brave. Such a good show. Just the same, darling, you're an ass! You *actually* married him. I didn't think even you would be ass enough to do that. But his plan worked!"

Kerrie choked over the smoke and flung her cigaret out the window. "His—plan?"

"Oh, you didn't know that. Such a pity. Why, yes, dear, it was. Do you recall last night? After your little accident in the garage? When he found you and took you to your room? He remained with you all night—he's so very clever. But this morning, when your doctor came, your husband-to-be came to see . . . me."

"That's not true!"

"Ask him. He came to see me, and it was his plan you've been following today." Margo laughed. "I knew

about your marriage and where you would stop on your 'honeymoon' before you did!"

"Get out of here!"

"Not yet, dearest." Margo rested her gloved hands on the back of Kerrie's chair. Kerrie could hear her breathing, but she did not look up and around. "Not until I've made you see just how *big* a fool you've been. That's my revenge, darling. You were willing to give up a fortune because you love him. And so you married him. But why do you think he married you? Because he loves *me!*"

"No," said Kerrie with a rising nausea. "No . . ."

"Then where is he on your wedding night?"

"He had to go out somewhere—he'll be back soon—"

"He didn't have to go out. I told him to. Men are weak," Margo smiled, "and I wasn't taking a chance on your husband's showing weakness at the wrong moment. You are attractive in a wishy-washy sort of way, you know. So I made him promise he'd marry you and ditch you—yes, the very first night; and he has, you see."

"I don't believe—a single word," whispered Kerrie.

"All the rest was his idea—to marry you so that you forfeited your share of Uncle Cadmus's estate and it would pass to me. As it has. So you've nothing at all, darling—no money, no husband. The money is his and mine now, and you may get a divorce if you like. Not that it will do you the least good—you've forfeited your inheritance by marrying! Don't you agree you've been a fool? Such an empty-headed, trusting, ridiculous fool?"

And Margo's voice sharpened until it hissed through the ache in Kerrie's head, and without looking up Kerrie knew that her cousin's white face and Egyptian eyes were hateful with triumph.

And Kerrie said: "I want you to stay here, Margo. I shan't let you go. You'll stay here until Ellery gets back—"

"He won't be back," drawled Margo. "You may as well pack up and get out."

"I want to see your face when he denies your lies. I want you to stay—"

"I'd be glad to, my dear, except that I've more important things to do, and it would all be so useless, wouldn't it?"

"If—that were—true," said Kerrie in a remote voice, "I think—I'd kill him."

"That *would* be gratitude!" laughed Margo. "Kill him! You ought to thank him. Don't you know you owe him your silly life?"

Kerrie barely heard the mocking words.

"You're a lucky miss. He's saved you that by marrying you. And if you hadn't been lucky, you'd have been a dead pigeon long before this. Or didn't you know that, either?"

What was she saying? thought Kerrie dully.

"Do you think that little visit to your room was a joke? Or that your mare stumbled by accident? Or that what happened in the garage last night happened by chance, or some one's blunder? Do you?"

"No!" cried Kerrie. "I knew! All along. I knew it was you. You. You!"

"You did?" Margo laughed again. "Clever girl! But it wasn't only I who planned those attacks. You didn't know that, did you? It was I—and somebody else."

"Somebody else!" cried Kerrie, sitting up straight in the armchair.

"I and—"

The world exploded over Kerrie's head. She fell back in the chair, half-deafened, half-blinded by three incredible flicks of fire.

Behind her she heard a gasp, a gurgling cry, and then the sound of a sliding, slipping body. And finally a hollow thud on the carpet.

Kerrie gripped the arms of the chair and blinked into

the moonlit court, and saw the flutter of the blind in that window diagonally across from where she was sitting, only eight feet away, and a hand . . . a hand, reaching out, holding something, making an odd tossing motion . . and something hurtled past her head and landed with another thud on the floor.

And Kerrie got out of the chair and stumbled over Margo's body lying still on the floor, and mechanically picked up the object, turning it over and over and over.

It was a little pearl-handled .22, and smoke was still curling from its muzzle.

Her revolver. Hers. The one that had been stolen from the pocket of her roadster. Smoking . . .

Only then did eyes and brain coördinate—only then, as she knelt beside Margo, holding the .22 in a cold clutch, holding it and staring down at the mushroomed splash of red at Margo's throat, at the red ruin of Margo's left eye, at the red crease across Margo's right cheek.

Margo was still. Margo was dead.

Some one had shot Margo three times across the angle of the court from that room with the fluttering blind.

Margo was dead.

There was a sound at the door. Kerrie turned, still on her knees, the revolver still in her hand.

Margo was dead.

And there was her husband in the doorway. So purple-eyed and haggard. Staring at the bloody dead woman on the floor. At the revolver in his wife's hand.

PART FOUR

XII. Silence, Please

But Kerrie did not see him. She was still blind from the brilliance of those three red flashes over her head into the throat and eye and cheek of Margo. Blind,

deaf, stunned with the three sounds of a world tumbling.

"She's dead," Kerrie said in a clear voice. "Margo's dead. Her eye is dead. Blood on her neck. She has one eye. See how funny she looks. See how funny—"

Beau stood in the doorway trying to speak.

"One moment she was alive. Then she was dead. She died over my head. I heard her gurgle her life away. I heard her die behind me." Kerrie began to laugh.

Beau stumbled in. "Kerrie!"

He dropped beside her. He could think of nothing to do but put his arms about her and press her face against his chest. He couldn't bear to look at her face. It was white, fixed, a plaster-of-Paris mask made by a crude workman. Her eyes were shiny with something not fear, not panic, not horror; something inscrutable and dead, like the eyes of a wax-works figure.

At his touch she stopped laughing. "She came to laugh at me. Said you and she had planned the whole thing. Our elopement. Marriage. She said you told her where you were taking me. That's how she knew where to find me. Your plan. You didn't love me, she said. You loved her, she said. This was your scheme to get hold of the money Uncle Cadmus left me. To share it with her. The two of you. . . ."

"Kerrie, stop."

"She began to talk about the attacks. She admitted she had made them. She and some one else—"

"Some one else!" muttered Beau. "Who?"

"She didn't get a chance to tell me. She began to. But then the three shots from the window . . ."

The window. Beau got to his feet, walked stiff-legged to the window by the armchair. Open. The blind blowing. Kerrie in the chair, Margo standing behind the chair—direct line of fire—in the throat, the eye . . . Revolver.

"Revolver," he said hoarsely. "What happened?"

"It's mine," said Kerrie, as in a dream. "Mine. I bought it. When you—warned me to be careful. It was stolen from the pocket of my car. Must have been some time yesterday, because I missed it when I was locked in the garage."

"Yours!" Beau took a forward step, and stopped. "But if it was stolen—"

She looked up at him in a dumb way. "Hand. Or fingers. Threw it from that window. In here. Right after the shots." She looked down at her own hand in the same way, the hand which still gripped the pearl-handled .22.

Beau jumped at her. Her head flapped on her shoulders as he shook her.

"Don't you see?" he cried. "It's a frame-up! Some one shot her and is trying to frame you with the gun! Get up! We're getting out of here."

"What?" she didn't understand. She was trying to, her face twisted with the effort.

He lifted her to her feet, slapped her cheeks hard. "Kerrie! For God's sake get a grip on yourself. I've got to get you out of here before—"

"Stand still."

Beau stood still, Kerrie limp in his arms, the revolver dangling from her fingers.

Hadn't even taken the gun out of her hand. Couldn't do anything now. Her gun-hand was in full view of the doorway. You dope. You damned dope. Hadn't even shut the door.

"I've got you covered."

They were blocking the doorway. One was the hotel manager—Beau recognized him by the tuxedo, the aster, and the half-moon sacs under his eyes. Suspicious-looking guy. Husky. The other was the house dick. Big boy with an iron hat and a .38 in his fist.

No dice. Think of something else. The windows. . . . Seventeen floors from the street. Escape. Screwy idea,

anyway. They were registered. Think. You've been a prize poop so far. Think this through.

The house detective came in on a straight line, his eyes on the revolver in Kerrie's hand. His right hand trained the cannon on them, his left went into his pocket and came out with a handkerchief.

He knew his business. He didn't try to take the gun from her himself.

"Drop that heater."

Kerrie looked blank.

"Drop it," said Beau in her ear. "The gun."

"Oh." She dropped it.

"You. Big guy." The detective shifted his eyes from Kerrie's hand to Beau's hands now. "Just push it with your toe. Gentle, Mister. In my direction."

Beau pushed it. It slid three feet across the rug and stopped by the detective's large feet. He stooped without looking at it and spread the handkerchief over it, fumbling.

Beau whispered in Kerrie's ear: "Kerrie, you listening?"

Her head against his breast stirred slightly. She held on to him.

"I'm going to make a break for it. Understand?"

Her arms tightened about him in a convulsive rebellion.

"Say nothing. Not a syllable. Whatever they ask you, say you don't know. The cops'll be here in a few minutes. But you don't know anything till I come back and say it's all right to talk. Savvy?"

He felt her head wag over his heart, faintly.

"What you two whisperin' about?" demanded the detective. He was on his feet again, the .22 swathed in his handkerchief.

"Is it all right to move now, Commissioner?" asked Beau. "I'm getting stiff standing still like this."

"Come here. Leggo the dame. Hold your hands up."

Shrugging, Beau obeyed. Kerrie stumbled over to the armchair and fell into it. The hotel manager moved over quickly and shut the window beside her; he stood there looking down at her.

The house detective slapped Beau all over, grunted. "Okay. Stand over there and be a good boy."

He dropped to his knees beside Margo's body and put his ear to her chest. "I guess she's dead, Mr. O'Brien. You better 'phone Police Headquarters while I—"

The door to the hall slammed. Both men whirled. Beau was gone.

The detective cursed and leaped for the door, while the manager put his hands on Kerrie's shoulders and held her down with all his strength, as if he expected her to try to escape, too.

"Please," said Kerrie. "You're hurting me."

The manager looked abashed. He grabbed the telephone and shouted a description of Beau to the hotel operator.

"Don't let that man get out of the hotel!"

Kerrie hugged herself. She felt cold and hungry.

Beau took the emergency stairway four steps at a stride, going up. They would expect him to go down.

He scaled his hat into a corner of the twentieth floor landing and slipped into the main corridor. No one in sight. He walked over to the nearest elevator and pressed the *Down* button. The operators coming down couldn't have heard the alarm.

An elevator stopped, and he got in. There were three passengers in the car, looking sleepy. The operator paid no attention to him.

He got off at the mezzanine floor.

From the balcony he could see the lobby seething. The house detective was down there yelling to a patrolman. The cop looked startled and ran out into the street.

Beau slipped into a telephone booth and dialed a number.

"Yes?" said a sleepy voice.

"Ellery! This is Beau."

"Well?" Mr. Queen's voice became alert.

"Can't talk. I'm at the *Villanoy*, with the whole hotel on my tail."

"Why? What's the trouble?"

"Murder—"

"Murder!"

"Margo's been shot to death."

"Margo?" Mr. Queen was speechless, but only for an instant. "But how did she— Who shot her?"

"Don't know." Tersely Beau recounted the story of the evening, and how he had found Kerrie, and what Kerrie had told him before they were interrupted by the manager and the detective.

Mr. Queen muttered: "Where's Kerrie now?"

"Upstairs in 1724. In a daze. El, you've got to come over."

"Of course."

"Nobody knows about that other room except you, Kerrie, me, and the killer. And I told Kerrie to keep her mouth shut. We've got to search that room before the cops!"

"What's the number of the room?"

"It's just around the corner of 1724, in the tranverse corridor. I think it's 1726. Can you get into the hotel without being collared?"

"I'll try."

"Step on it. I think they're searching the mezzanine now—"

"How are you and Kerrie registered?"

"As Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Queen."

Mr. Queen the First groaned. "Do you realize that an old gent by the name of Queen is going to have to take charge of this homicide?"

"My God," said Beau. He hung up slowly.

After a moment he stepped out of the booth and

strolled over to the marble railing, lighting a cigaret. The house detective and the patrolman Beau had seen dart out of the lobby were hurrying from writing desk to writing desk, scanning the startled features of the correspondents. They were on the opposite side of the mezzanine. Beau sauntered towards them and said: "Can I be of service, gentlemen?"

The detective's heavy jaw dropped. He screeched: "That's him, Fogarty!" and the two men jumped on Beau.

He stiff-armed the policeman and caught the house man's gun-hand at the wrist. "Why the rough stuff? I gave myself up, didn't I?"

They looked baffled. A crowd had collected and Beau stood there grinning at them in an apologetic way.

"All right, wise guy," panted the detective, shaking his hand free. "What was the idea of lamming?"

"Who, me?" said Beau. "Come on, boys. We mustn't keep the lady waiting."

"Who're you? What's your name?"

"Queen. Ellery Queen. Want to make something of it?"

"Queen!" The policeman gaped at him. "Did you say Ellery Queen?"

"That's the ticket, Officer."

Fogarty looked awed. "Sam, you know who this is? Son of Inspector Queen of the Homicide Squad!"

"Mistakes will happen, boys," said Beau grandly. "And now, shall we return to the scene of the crime?"

"Inspector Queen's your old man?" demanded Sam.

"You heard Fogarty."

"Well, I don't give a damn," said Sam doggedly. "Fogarty, this is the guy was in 1724 with the dame when O'Brien and me busted in. She was holdin' the rod, but how do we know he ain't a, now, accomplice?"

"Inspector Queen will identify me," said Beau.

"Suppose he does? Suppose he does?" said the house

detective hotly. "I don't care who you are, Mister; you were caught in that room—"

"What's the argument about?" asked Beau. "Sam, you're making a spectacle of yourself. Wow, look at those laws pour in! Come on upstairs before the press gives you the razz. Are you coming, or do I have to go up alone?"

"Don't worry," said Sam, taking a fresh grip on his .38. "I'm with you, baby."

They took a special elevator up to the seventeenth floor. Outside Room 1724 a policeman held back a crowd of pushing people. Inside, there were two radio-car officers and a detective from the West Forty-seventh Street precinct. They were all asking questions at the same time.

Kerrie was still seated in the armchair, in the same position.

"This him?" said the precinct man.

"Yeah," said Sam. "In person."

"Well, the girl gives him an out. She says he wasn't even here when the shots were fired. He came in right after."

"Kerrie," growled Beau. She had answered questions. He had told her not to.

She glanced at him in a calm, remote way.

"She admit givin' the other dame the business?" asked Sam eagerly.

"She don't admit nothin'."

Beau shook his head warningly at Kerrie. She placed her hands, palms up, in her lap and stared out the window.

"Lucky stiff," said Sam to Beau with a scowl.

"Yeah," said Beau, looking steadily at Kerrie's profile. "Am I lucky."

When the call came from Centre Street, Inspector Richard Queen was in Doc Prouty's office playing a hot game of two-handed *klabiatsch* with Sergeant Velie. He

was waiting for the Medical Examiner's autopsy report on Hunk Carnucci, the nation-wide search for whom had ended that very evening at the bottom of the East River.

"*What?*" said the Inspector into the telephone; and Sergeant Velie saw his superior's gray mustache quiver and his little bird-like face blanch. "Yes. Yes. All right. Now listen. No reporter gets into that room, see? Grab the registration card, too. I'll have your scalp if there's a leak. . . . Right away!"

He hung up, looking ill.

"What's the matter?" asked the Sergeant.

"Plenty." Inspector Queen rose. "A woman's been knocked off at the *Villanoy*."

The Sergeant looked puzzled. "So what?"

In the squad car, rushing towards Times Square with the siren screaming, the Inspector told him so what.

"I don't believe it," protested Velie. "It's a gag."

"They're registered as Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Queen, I tell you!" snarled the old man.

"But who's the dame? And the one that was shot?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows yet."

"When'd you see Ellery last?"

"This morning. He didn't say anything to me about his getting married. I thought he acted funny, though." The Inspector gnawed his mustache. "To do a thing like this to me! Step on her, will you?"

"Boy, the papers," groaned Velie.

"Maybe there's a chance to keep it quiet," said the old man feverishly. "Step on it, you baboon!"

The Sergeant looked at him pityingly.

At the *Villanoy* the Inspector shook off reporters, had the lobby cleared, listened to several reports, nodded to one of his squad, who was waving a registration card, and commandeered an elevator.

In the elevator he surreptitiously examined the fateful card. "Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Queen." His eyes narrowed

even as he sighed with relief. The handwriting was not Ellery's. But it was almost as bad—it was Beau Rummell's.

"What's the bad news?" whispered Sergeant Velie.

"Stand by, Thomas," muttered the old man. "There's something queer going on. It's Beau Rummell, not Ellery; he's using Ellery's name."

"The nervy sprout!"

"We'll play along for a while. Pass the word along to the squad. No cracks about who Beau is."

The instant Inspector Queen entered 1724 Beau seized his hand. "'Lo, Dad! How's the old man? I'll bet you never expected to find sonny-boy in a spot like this!" He winked.

The Inspector deliberately took a pinch of snuff. He glanced at the body, and then at Kerrie, and then at Beau.

"I'll bet I didn't," he said dryly, and turned to one of the precinct men. "All right, Lieutenant. Clear the room. Witnesses outside till I call." Then he took Beau by the arm and steered him into the bedroom.

"Thanks, Pop!" said Beau, grinning. "That was fast thinking. Thanks a million. Now look, I've got to scram out of here—"

"You do?" The Inspector eyed him coldly. "What's the idea of using Ellery's name and who's the brunette?"

"It's a long story. Too long to tell now. She's my wife—"

"Your *what!*" gasped the old man. "I thought that 'Mr. and Mrs.' business was—"

"With her? Say, we were married late this evening. There was a reason—I mean, why I couldn't use my own name."

"Ellery know?" snapped the old man.

"Yes."

He was silent.

"I've got to get out of here for a half-hour, Pop!"

"Where do you think you're going?"

"I won't leave the hotel."

"Beau." The Inspector looked him in the eye. "Did you have anything to do with that woman's murder in there?"

Beau looked back and said simply: "No, Pop."

"Did your wife?"

"No."

"How d'ye know?" asked the old man in a flash. "I'm told you walked in on her after the murder—your wife said so herself."

"I can't tell you how I know," muttered Beau. "For Pete's sake, Pop, let me go now, will you? It's important!"

"I'm a fool," snarled the Inspector.

"Pop, you're a prince!"

Beau strolled back into the sitting room, which was cleared except for the Inspector's squad. He sauntered over to Kerrie and whispered into her ear: "I've got to go now, kid, for a little while. Remember what I said. Don't talk. Not a word. Not even to—my old man."

"What?" Her eyes were swimming in tears. "I mean . . ."

Beau swallowed. She looked so helpless he felt like jumping through the window. He had to do something! Get into that room from which the shots had come. After that . . . improvise. Keep going. It was toughest on her.

"I'll be back soon."

He kissed her and went out.

With him went the *Do Not Disturb* placard which had been hanging by its chain on the inside of the sitting room door. He thrust it casually into his pocket.

Outside, a group of hotel employees and police looked at him curiously. Detective Flint, at the door, said it was all right. He went to the elevator and rang the

Down bell. An elevator stopped. He got in and said: "Sixteen."

He got out on the sixteenth floor and bounded up the steps of the emergency stairway to the seventeenth floor. The exit gave on a different corridor. He stole out. Clear sailing.

He made his way on tiptoe to Room 1726. Around the corner he could hear the group before 1724 talking excitedly.

Beau set his ear to the door of 1726. Then he slipped the *Do Not Disturb* sign over the knob and tried the door noiselessly. It gave. He pushed the door in quickly and softly, stepped inside, and closed the door again, careful to make no sound.

When the door was shut he turned the catch sidewise, locking the door from the inside.

Only then did he heave a sigh and turn round.

He crouched.

Some one was smoking a cigaret in the darkness of the room.

The murderer!

He rasped: "Don't move. I've got you covered!"

"Really?" drawled Mr. Queen from behind the glowing tip of the cigaret. "Bluffer."

XIII. MR. QUEEN AND MR. QUEEN IN ROOM 1726

"NERVES," SAID MR. QUEEN. "FROM WHICH I GATHER you've been having a rough time of it."

"Damn you," said Beau. "How'd you get in?"

"As you see, in one piece. Oh, you don't. Then let's have some light. We both seem to need a lot of that." Mr. Queen groped, found the light-switch, and snapped it on.

They blinked at each other, and then about the room.

"Don't worry," said Mr. Queen, noting the object of

his partner's scrutiny. "I shut the window at once, and of course the blind was drawn when I got here."

"Prints?"

"I'm wearing gloves. As for you, don't touch anything. When we're through, there's still the law."

"You'd never know it," grunted Beau. "Maybe with the light on, though—it's only a few feet across the angle of the court to the window of the sitting room there—"

"No danger," said Mr. Queen cheerfully. "This room is reserved, did you know that?"

Beau stared.

"Oh, you didn't. Well, it is."

"How d'ye know?"

"I asked."

"You mean you just walked into the hotel—"

"Certainly. Always carry a badge or two. Detective What-You-Call-It, of H.Q.—at your service. I got in all right, and even made a few 'official' inquiries at the desk. Beat all around the mulberry bush to find out what I wanted to know without tipping my hand. At any rate, some one reserved Room 1726—"

"Man or woman?"

"No information. Reserved this room at about a quarter to nine this evening."

"A quarter to nine? Why, Kerrie and I only checked in around half-past eight!"

Mr. Queen frowned. "That's fast work. Followed you, do you suppose?"

"I don't see how it's possible. El, there's been a leak!"

"Who knew you were coming to the *Villanoy*?"

"Only Margo. You know how I pretended to cook up that scheme with her. She fell for it, but insisted on knowing just where I was going, because she wanted to make sure I didn't doublecross her. She even made me promise I wouldn't spend the night with Kerrie—jealous as hell. Only Margo knew—so she's the one who talked."

"To whom?"

"To the same one she gave Kerrie's gun to! How was the reservation made?"

"By wire, in an obviously false name—L. L. Howard. Of course, 'Howard' didn't show up to claim the room—officially. Simply made sure the room would be unoccupied by reserving it, then let himself in with a skeleton key, I suppose, the way I did. How's Kerrie?"

"Never mind," said Beau miserably. "Let's go."

"You're sure she didn't bop Margo herself?"

"I told you what she told me! Don't badger me. If we find evidence that some one was in this room, it's a confirmation of her story, isn't it?"

"It won't mean much legally. Not a terribly inspiring room, is it?"

It was an ordinary single room-and-bath, with a bed, a dresser, two chairs, and a writing-table. The bed was prepared for the night, its spread neatly folded at the foot, and blankets turned down at one corner; but the pillows were plump and unwrinkled and the blankets smooth.

"Those ashes—" began Beau, pointing to the rug.

"Mine," said Mr. Queen. "Also that butt in the tray on the desk. The other trays are clean, I see. Well, let's begin with the bathroom. Look, but don't touch."

They went to work in silence. The bathroom was speckless—fresh towels laid out, clean bath-mat, paper-wrapped soap, shower-curtain, wash-rag. Nothing in the medicine chest. Nothing in the hamper. The wash-bowl was dry.

"That's one," said Mr. Queen, and they went back into the bedroom.

"Closet's as clean as the bathroom," announced Beau. "Not a sign. How you doin'?"

Mr. Queen crawled out from under the bed, "Remarkaby efficient cleaning women in this hotel! Beau, start at the door and work towards the window. I'll start at the window and work towards the door."

"What on?"

"The rug."

They crept towards each other in a weaving route—from one side of the room to the other. When they met in the middle of the room they glanced at each other and then rose.

"This," remarked Mr. Queen, looking about, "is going to be tough."

He went through the writing-desk and the dresser, not because he hoped but because he was thorough.

"That's that," he said. "Beau, what have we missed?"

"The window? Shade?"

"I went over them while you were in the closet. The only evidence that might be there is fingerprints, and while I can't be sure, I've a feeling friend 'Howard' wore gloves."

"But there must be something," scowled Beau. "This guy was in here at least an hour, maybe more. You just can't occupy a room for that length of time without leaving some trace of yourself."

" 'Howard' seems to have done it, though."

"Well, let's go. It's a washout." Beau turned disconsolately to the door.

"Wait, Beau. My fault!" Mr. Queen whirled.

"What's your fault?"

"I overlooked something on this side of the room."

"What?"

"The radiator."

Beau joined him at the window. The cold steam-radiator stood directly beneath the sill.

Mr. Queen stooped over the coils, trying to peer between them. Then he lay down on the rug, twisting so that he might see clearly the narrow patch of rug just beneath the coils.

He stiffened. "Here's something!"

"Hallelujah! Fish it out, Brother Queen!"

Mr. Queen reached in and, after a moment, delicately,

between gloved thumb and gloved forefinger, drew out a longish slender object which tapered to a point.

It was black and made of a hard rubber composition. An automatic pencil. The gold clip was loose.

"Simple enough to reconstruct what happened," observed Mr. Queen after examination. "Whoever fired those shots at Margo Cole had to shoot through this window. So he was standing at the window—perhaps for a long time, watching from behind the drawn shade in the dark. At some point during that vigil, he stooped; and, the clip being loose, the pencil dropped from his pocket.

"By a miracle it missed both the sill and the radiator, falling through the space between them to the rug without making a sound. And it rolled several inches under the radiator. He had no reason to use a pencil, consequently he left without discovering his loss. Very considerate of him."

"That's all true the way you say it," argued Beau. "But suppose it was dropped by some one who occupied this room yesterday, or last week, or last year?"

"Improbable. The room was prepared for occupancy late this evening, after the wired reservation. We know that, because the bed's made up for the night. That means a maid cleaned up in here later than 8.45 tonight. And a maid who left not a speck of dust under a bed would scarcely have overlooked a pencil under a radiator. No, Beau, this pencil was dropped by 'Howard,' whoever he is.

"Not much of a clue," growled Beau. "Just a plain, ordinary, garden variety of automatic pencil. He might just as well have dropped nothing."

"Well, now, I don't know," murmured Mr. Queen. "Doesn't anything about this pencil strike you as familiar?"

Beau stared at it. "Not guilty."

"You've never seen one like it before?"

"I've seen thousands like it before," retorted Beau. "That's just the trouble."

"No, no, not a pencil. Don't you recall another writing implement of hard black rubber composition, with a gold clip?"

"Cole's fountain-pen?" Beau laughed shortly. "That's quite a deduction. Are you trying to tell me that, just because Cole's pen was hard black rubber stuff and had a gold clip, this pencil was part of Cole's pen-and-pencil set?"

"I'm trying to tell you exactly that," said Mr. Queen, "but not for the reason you give, although the similarity of construction and appearance are striking. Where are your eyes?"

He held the pencil up. Beau looked it over without touching it—from its leaded point, where Ellery was gripping it, up its body to the eraser-cap.

And just below the cap he saw something that made him exclaim. The hard rubber was considerably scratched and dented in a sort of arced pattern; some of the nicks were deep.

"Those nicks looks like the ones in Cole's pen. . . . But that's impossible!"

"Disregarding philosophical considerations," said Mr. Queen with a certain excitement, "I think we may prove or disprove the theory by completely material means."

He laid the pencil carefully down on the rug between them and produced his wallet. From an inner pocket of the wallet he extracted a series of tiny squares of film.

"The microphotographs of the nicks in Cole's pen I asked you to take," he explained.

"But I thought they were in the office."

"Too valuable to be left lying about. I've been carrying them in my wallet ever since." Mr. Queen compared the photographs with the pencil on the rug. Then he handed the films to Beau.

When Beau looked up there was an expression of incredulity in his eyes. "The same!"

"Yes, the marks on this pencil and the marks on Cole's pen were created by the same agency. Consequently this pencil *is* a companion of Cole's pen."

"Cole's pencil," mumbled Beau. "*Cole's.*"

"Without a doubt."

Beau got to his feet. Mr. Queen squatted on his hams Buddha-like, musing over the photographs and the pencil.

"But it can't be," Beau said.

"There's the evidence."

"But—Cole's been dead for nearly three months! Unless the pencil's been lying here—"

"I explained before," replied Mr. Queen with a trace of impatience, "why that's probably not so. But if you insist on confirmation, run your hand over the rug and patch of flooring under the radiator and between the radiator and wall. You'll find it completely free of dust. Indicating that the rug and floor have been cleaned very recently. No, this pencil was dropped tonight by the person who shot Margo Cole."

"By Cole, I suppose?" Beau laughed shortly. "You'll be asking me to believe in the boogey man next!"

"There are other possibilities," murmured Mr. Queen. "But if you insist on being argumentative—why not by Cole?"

"What?" cried Beau.

"Well, why not?" Mr. Queen stared at his partner impassively. "*What proof have we that Cole is dead?*"

Beau looked groggy. "It's beyond me. Cole not dead?"

"I'm not asserting a fact, I'm posing a question. We have only one person's word for the alleged fact that Cole died—Edmund De Carlos's. Captain Angus, the crew—every one who could possibly substantiate De Carlos's story is gone. No body was produced—'buried at sea,' wasn't the report?"

"But . . ."

"Is the reason Cole hired us three months ago beginning to emerge? Has Cole been hanging around all this time under the cloak of the perfect disguise—death and burial?"

"It's true," muttered Beau, "that we wouldn't know him even if he were alive—no, that's not true. We did see him. In our office. So that doesn't wash. Then that would mean he's hiding out somewhere. But why?"

"I can think of at least two reasons," replied Mr. Queen, "either of which is perfectly sensible and makes the theory very attractive—very."

"You mean you think Cole's behind the whole business—the attacks on Kerrie, the murder of Margo? Then why did he hire us in the first place? Or, if he's alive, where do the heirs fit in? Heirs can't inherit from a living man; if they do, if that's what he planned . . ." Beau shouted: "I'm going nuts!"

Mr. Queen said nothing.

"Wait! We're both crazy. Of course there's the simplest explanation! Cole *is* dead. This *is* his pencil, all right, but somebody else got hold of it and has been using it. Whoever that was is our man. Phew! For a few minutes there you had me going."

Mr. Queen still said nothing. He wrapped the pencil in his breast-pocket handkerchief and tucked it away. Then he rose.

"Here! What are you doing?" demanded Beau. "Hand over that pencil."

"I think not," said Mr. Queen, buttoning his coat.

"But it's our only evidence that someone was in this room. We've got to give it to your old man, Ellery."

"We shan't even tell him about it yet."

"But—for the love of Pete, why not?"

"The trail's a little too involved for the regular police mind," said Mr. Queen egotistically. "Acute as Dad is. And we're not destroying evidence—we're merely sup-

pressing it temporarily. By itself it means little; we've got to make it mean more. And handing it over to the police means inevitably publication of its discovery. We can't afford to warn off our man before all the cards are in our hands."

"But—Kerrie!" stormed Beau. "Where's the poor kid come in? At least that pencil establishes that some one was in this room tonight. To that extent it bolsters her story of the shots having come from this window."

Mr. Queen looked grave. "If I really thought the pencil would clear her, Beau, I'd tell Dad myself. But it won't, and you know it won't. She's in a tight spot; the circumstances under which she was found are so damning by contrast with the tenuous reasoning from the pencil that she's bound to be held. Let her tell her story by all means, truthfully; exactly as it happened. Dad will examine this room and find"—he grinned—"a burnt match-stick and the ashes and butt of my cigaret. That's even better evidence than the pencil that the room was occupied tonight—the maid would certainly have removed *those* if they'd been present when she cleaned up."

"You mean we don't even tell him we've been in here?"

"He'll probably guess it," said Mr. Queen comfortably. "And then there's the light in here. But he can't prove it's my butt if we don't talk, can he?"

Beau stared at him. "You'd doublecross yourself, I swear, if you thought some good would come of it!"

"Dad and I have been on opposite sides of the fence before," said Mr. Queen in a thoughtful way, "although I will admit this business tonight is in the nature of a dirty trick."

"My God! He's actually got a conscience!"

"So long, Beau. Let me know in the morning exactly what happened."

XIV. Inspector Queen Inspects

When Beau stepped past the detectives on guard in 1724 he found Kerrie gone from the sitting room and the door to the bedroom shut.

Inspector Queen was alone. He was seated in the armchair by the window, a sheaf of reports before him. The débris of flash-bulbs cluttered the floor.

The body of Margo Cole was gone.

"Where's Kerrie?" asked Beau, alarmed.

The Inspector looked at him. "Why don't you stick around and find out?"

"Where is she?"

"In the bedroom in charge of the hotel doctor and a nurse. And one of my men. And a friend of hers, a Violet Day."

Beau blinked. "Vi! How did she get here?"

"Your wife kept calling for her, told us where Miss Day was stopping. . . . No, don't go in yet. I want to have a talk with you."

"But if Kerrie's sick . . . Let me see her for a minute!"

"She isn't sick; she just fainted. She's all right now."

Beau was silent. Then he said: "Did she talk?"

"You told her not to," said the old man dryly, "so she didn't. She must like you a lot, Beau, because she's in one big kettle of fish."

"She's in no spot she can't explain! Do you know who she is?"

"Sure. Kerrie Shawn. And the dead woman was her cousin, Margo Cole."

Beau sat down suddenly. "Look, Pop. Let's not spar around. What have you got?"

The Inspector sneezed over a pinch of snuff, and then regarded Beau unwinkingly. "Your wife's own admission establishes the fact that you weren't here when the

Cole woman arrived. In fact, that you didn't get here till after the shooting. That lets you out for the record.

"Your wife was the only one in this room with Margo Cole—unless," said the Inspector, "she can produce a third person. Point number one."

"She can produce me," said Beau quickly. "I tell you I was here. She said I wasn't because she didn't want to involve me."

"Nothing doing. I've got a witness who saw you leave the hotel, Beau, and one who saw you come back. I know the exact times you went and returned. You couldn't have been in this room when it happened. The elevator boy who landed you on the seventeenth floor says he heard the shots just as you stepped out of his elevator."

"I tell you—"

"No, not you, Beau," said the old man patiently. "Somebody else—if there was somebody else. But I'm pretty sure there wasn't."

"There was!"

"Who?"

"Beau looked down. "I don't know—yet."

"I see." Inspector Queen paused. "Well, let's go on. Point number two: The house dick and O'Brien, manager of the hotel, both saw your wife holding the revolver which shot Margo Cole—holding it over the dead body. The house man says the barrel was still warm when he wrapped the gun in his handkerchief. Doc Prouty, who's been here and gone, dug one of the three bullets out of the body. The slug came from a .22. The revolver your wife was holding is a .22. I'm having comparison tests made downtown right now, but I'm pretty sure without the report that those slugs came from the same weapon."

"There were three bullets fired from the .22?"

"Yes. And, of course, your wife's fingerprints are on it, too. *And no others.* That's point number three." The

Inspector waited, but when Beau said nothing he went on. "Four: A quick check-up with the pistol-permit records has established that the .22 *belongs to your wife.*"

"But it was stolen from her," protested Beau.

"Exactly when? Under what circumstances?"

Beau drooped. "Never mind. We can't prove when or where. She only missed it yesterday."

"Why didn't she report the theft?"

"She hasn't had time! She missed it yesterday, I tell you."

The Inspector shook his head. "Thin, Beau. The picture looks—well, good. Her weapon, sole opportunity, caught red-handed a matter of minutes after the shooting, caught over the body with the proved weapon in her hand. . . . The only thing we've got to fill in is motive."

"Yeah, motive," exclaimed Beau. "You say Kerrie killed Margo. Why should she?"

"That's what I asked De Carlos."

Beau sprang to his feet. "You talked to that— Where is he? What did *he* have to say, the hairy ape?"

"I notified De Carlos and Goossens by telephone of the murder; they'll both be here soon. I asked De Carlos about a possible motive, and he was very helpful."

"I'll bet," growled Beau. "What did he say, damn him?"

"Oh, you don't like him? Why, several things. He said if you and Kerrie Shawn hadn't run off to be married tonight, he could think of a dandy motive. At Margo's death Kerrie would inherit the dead woman's share of the income from the Cole estate, you see."

Beau nodded gloomily.

"But, of course," continued the Inspector, "he explained—and Goossens confirmed it when I asked him later—that Kerrie's marriage automatically cut her out

of all participation in the estate—her own share as well as Margo's. So that motive's out."

"So what are you battin' about?" grumbled Beau.

"But he mentioned something," drawled the old man, "about some 'accidents' to your wife in the past few weeks which didn't quite come off—a horse that threw her and almost broke her neck, that little business in the garage last night. . . ."

"What? What's that? What about it?"

"And then I had a little chat with Miss Day a few minutes ago," replied the Inspector mildly. "And she told me they weren't accidents—something about nails having been loosened in the horse's foreshoe, and the locking in of your wife in that garage having been deliberate, and something about some one having climbed into Miss Shawn's bedroom not long ago during the night for a little exercise with a knife—"

"That blabbermouth," said Beau hoarsely.

"And Miss Day also said it was both her opinion and Kerrie's that all those 'accidents' had been staged by Margo Cole."

Beau sat down again. "I don't get you." Then he rose.

"No? Then I'll explain it to you." The Inspector leaned back. "If your wife thought Margo Cole was trying to kill her—whether Margo Cole was or not, mind you!—then wouldn't it be natural for your wife to buy a gun—as she did—and wouldn't it be natural for her to shoot Margo Cole when Margo showed up in this room tonight and the two of them were alone? Yes, sir, that sounds like a motive to me."

It's an out, thought Beau desperately; a possible out. "Even if that's so," he shouted, "it's self-defense, isn't it?"

"My job is to get the facts. It's the D.A.'s job to put them together." The old man eyed Beau. "By the way,

don't you think it's time you hired a good criminal lawyer?"

Beau began to race around the room.

"It's as strong a circumstantial case as I've ever seen, Beau," said the Inspector soberly.

"You've got it all wrong, I tell you. When you hear Kerrie's story, you'll see!"

"It will have to be more than a story, I'm afraid." The Inspector rose. "Beau, you know how friendly your father and I were. And I've always looked on you as a sort of second son. Why don't you tell me what you know, so I can help you?"

"I don't know anything about it," snapped Beau. "Nor does Kerrie!"

"There's something else behind this. Where did you go a while back? What were you looking for? Who'd you see? Beau, you can trust me—"

Beau was silent.

"You're putting me in a rotten spot," said the Inspector gently. "You registered here in Ellery's name and, even granting it was with El's permission, that drags in a lot of personal considerations. I may even have to step out of the case because you did that. I've suppressed facts myself tonight. I've taken possession of the registration card and threatened all sorts of extra-legal punishments to those in the hotel who know the name you registered under. The newspaper boys are still in the dark about that. But they won't be for long. At least tell me why you used my son's name, so I'll be prepared with an explanation."

"Pop, I can't," said Beau hoarsely. "Pop . . . did you tell Kerrie?"

"Your wife?" The Inspector's eyes narrowed. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me your own wife doesn't know who you are?"

"She thinks I'm Ellery Queen," confessed Beau. "Ellery knows about it. In fact, it was his idea."

Inspector Queen stared at him; then, shaking his head, he went to the bedroom door.

Kerrie lay on one of the twin beds holding on to Violet Day's hand. A nurse and a doctor stood by. There was a pungent odor of ammonium carbonate in the air. Leaning against the wall was Sergeant Velie.

Kerrie was the first to move. Her head swivelled, froze. But a moment later she sat up eagerly.

"Darling, you were so long." She sounded tired.

Beau started for the bed, but the Inspector touched his arm. "No."

Kerrie remained in a sitting position.

"Doc, would you mind waiting in the next room?" said the Inspector. "You, too, Nurse."

They left the bedroom, Sergeant Velie carefully closing the door behind them.

"Well, I'm waiting," said Inspector Queen.

Kerrie moistened her dry lips.

"It's all right, Kerrie," said Beau in a low voice. "It's all right to talk now. Tell just what happened."

Her glance was grateful. Vi took her hand again. Inspector Queen nodded to the Sergeant, who took a notebook and pencil out and prepared to write.

Kerrie told simply of the attempts to murder her, her suspicions of Margo, her purchase of the revolver, her discovery in the garage when she was trapped that the revolver had been stolen from the pocket of her roadster. She told of Beau's proposal, and of their elopement.

"One moment." The Inspector glanced at Beau. "You thought the Cole woman was behind these attacks, too?"

"I know she was."

"How do you know?"

"She told me so."

"What!" The Inspector was incredulous.

"I made love to her," said Beau flatly. "I pretended

to be on her side . . . for a price. I told her I was going to marry Kerrie, so that Kerrie's share of the estate would be lost and would revert to Margo. We made a deal in which Margo was to kick back a certain part of Kerrie's share to me."

"Why?" demanded the old man. "Why'd you do this?"

"Because my chief concern was to save Kerrie's life. Margo hated her, because of me and because of the money. If I could put the dough in her hands and convince her I loved her, not Kerrie, Kerrie's life would be safe."

Kerrie's eyes were on his lips.

"The only thing I didn't know," continued Beau, "was that Margo was working with some one else. Go on, Kerrie."

Kerrie went on. She told about their arrival at the *Villanoy*, how Beau left her, and how Margo came.

"I was sitting in the armchair by the window and she came over and stood behind me, still gloating over the trick she said she and Ellery"—the Inspector winced—"had played on me. Somehow she got round to talking about the attacks on my life—"

"Yes? What did she say, exactly?"

"As far as I remember, she said Ellery saved my life by marrying me. 'If you hadn't been lucky,' she said, 'you'd have been dead long before now.' And she went on to say that the visit to my room that night, the accident to my horse, my being locked in the garage and nearly gassed, were not accidents at all. When I said I suspected all along she was responsible, she laughed and said: 'But it wasn't only I who planned those attacks. It was I—and somebody else.' And just as she was about to tell me who the other one was—the shots . . ."

She stopped, her chin quivering.

"Ah, the shots," said the Inspector politely. "But I thought you two were alone in the sitting room."

"We were," she said in a faint voice. "The shots came across the court, through my window, over my head, striking Margo who was standing behind my chair. That other window, my window, I, Margo, were all in one straight line."

The Inspector glanced pityingly at Beau. But Beau was lighting a cigaret with shaking hands.

"Suppose you show me just how it happened," the old man sighed.

Beau jumped forward to help Kerrie off the bed. Her fingers coiled tightly in his. The Inspector looked away, and Sergeant Velie opened the door for them. They all went into the sitting room.

Inspector Queen spent some time over Kerrie's story. He had her sit in the armchair as she claimed to have sat at the moment of the shooting. He checked the position of the body. He made Kerrie retell her story four times.

"A hand threw the gun in through my window, I tell you!" moaned Kerrie. "Why won't you believe me?"

"But you don't seem to know whether the hand was a man's or a woman's."

"I was in the light, and the court and that room there were in darkness. I could hardly see. But I made out the flash of a hand. How could I tell whether it was a man's or woman's?"

The Inspector grunted. The doctor gave him a warning look and insisted on Kerrie's returning to the bedroom to lie down again. The old man nodded and, glancing at Sergeant Velie, who winked, went outside without explanation.

But Beau knew he had gone to examine Room 1726. He went back into the bedroom with Kerrie and sat down on the bed, and she curled up in his arms and closed her eyes. Neither said anything.

Lloyd Goossens arrived shortly after the Inspector

went out, and considerably later, Edmund De Carlos marched in.

Goossens was smoking his pipe with nervous embarrassment, rubbing his unshaven cheeks; he had apparently been roused from his bed by the Inspector's summons. De Carlos's skin was leaden, his beard gaunt. But there was a queer sparkle in the wide eyes behind his spectacles. The Sergeant kept them in the sitting room, where they occupied themselves chiefly in endeavoring to avoid the blood-stained spot on the rug as they paced in aimless circles.

Beau came out of the bedroom and the two men bombarded him with questions. He told them what had happened and then took Goossens aside, to De Carlos's annoyance. "What do you think?"

Goossens shook his head. "It looks bad, Mr. Queen. A hard story to believe. Especially without evidence to confirm it. If I were you, I'd engage the best lawyer in New York. In fact, if you'd like me to suggest counsel for Mrs. Queen—"

"Thanks. Don't you think it's a bit premature?" said Beau curtly.

When the Inspector returned, he conferred with De Carlos and the lawyer for some time in the sitting room. Finally they all went into the bedroom.

It was a bad moment, De Carlos and Goossens hanging back, avoiding Kerrie's staring eyes. But the Inspector was brisk.

"I'll be frank with you," he said to Kerrie and Beau. "There's no evidence of 1726 having been occupied tonight except a cigaret butt, a burnt match-stick, and some ashes. The maid on duty says she prepared the room late this evening, and there's a record of a wired reservation. But the maid isn't sure she mightn't have overlooked the cigaret, and there's a clear record that no one showed up tonight to occupy the room. "Beau."

"Well?"

"There was a light in 1726 this evening. Is that where you went? Is that your cigaret butt in there?"

Beau said: "Who, me?"

The Inspector shrugged. "Anyway, the evidence doesn't begin to bolster the story."

"But it's true," said Kerrie slowly. "I tell you—"

Beau shook his head at her.

The Inspector stroked his mustache with an agitated forefinger. "I'll have to hold you," he said.

XV. The De Carlos Entente

When the Inspector had left, hurriedly and with a murderous glance at Beau, Goossens coughed and said: "Mrs. Queen, as—as co-executor of the Cole estate it's my duty to inform you that your marriage today eliminates you from further participation in the income from your uncle's estate. There are certain matters, papers . . . If there's anything I can do in the way of legal advice, of course . . . Dreadfully sorry . . ."

He left, like the Inspector, in a sort of flight.

Kerrie was sobbing on Beau's shoulder, and Vi was tearing a handkerchief methodically to pieces by the window.

"What are you hanging around for, pop-eyes?" demanded Beau, eying De Carlos with angry dislike.

De Carlos smiled nervously. "I'd like—I'd like to speak to you alone, Mr. Queen."

"Scram."

"I must. It's a private matter—"

"It'll have to wait. Beat it, will you?"

De Carlos said in a soft voice: "But it's quite urgent."

Beau glared at him. The man made a weird picture with his brushlike hair, his beard, his glittering teeth and spectacles, a certain air of mingled intentness, triumph, and anxiety.

"Meet you in my office in Times Square in half an hour," said Beau on impulse. "I'll leave word with the night man to let you in."

"Thank you." De Carlos bowed to Kerrie, smiling or seeming to smile in his beard, and scurried out.

"Ellery. Don't go," said Kerrie tiredly. Her arms were dead weights about his neck.

"I've got to, funny-face." Beau signalled to Vi over Kerrie's head. "Vi won't leave you. Will you, Vi?"

"What do you think I am? Of course not!" said Vi with an attempt at cheerfulness. "I don't like the dump I'm in, anyway."

"You get the doc to give you a shot of something," Beau told Kerrie gently. "You need a pocketful of sleep."

She hung on to him, whimpering.

"Kerrie. You know I love you, don't you?" She hugged him. "You don't believe a single word of what —she told you tonight, do you?" Kerrie shook her head violently. "You know I'm in there batting for you a thousand percent, don't you?" She nodded, empty of words. "Then leave everything to me, and don't worry."

He kissed her and rose. Kerrie twisted her body on the bed and buried her face in the pillow. Beau cracked his knuckles in a sort of baffled agony. Then he kissed her again and ran out.

Beau stopped on the sidewalk outside the hotel to cup his hands around a cigaret.

He glanced swiftly about. The street was deserted. An occasional cab cruised by. By his wristwatch it was almost four o'clock. He tossed the match away and began to walk briskly towards Broadway. The night air had a chilly touch; he turned the collar of his jacket up.

He slipped into an all-night drug store, went into a phone booth, shut the door tightly, and called Mr. Ellery Queen's home telephone number.

Ellery answered almost at once.

"It's Beau. Weren't you in bed?"

"I've been thinking. What's up?"

Plenty. Listen, El, De Carlos showed up at the *Villanoy* and says he's got to have a private chin with me. I played a hunch and told him to meet me at the office right away. You want to sit in?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Mr. Queen with a certain grimness. "Any idea what's stirring?"

"No. Grab a cab and get down here fast as you can."

"I'll be there in time. How's Kerrie?"

Beau hung up.

He strode to Times Square, crossed the street, pounded on the door of his office-building.

A yawning watchman admitted him. "Hey, Joe. I expect a man by the name of De Carlos to blow in soon. Let him in. He'll ask for Mr. Queen. Take him up to our office."

"Sure thing, Mr. Rummell. Say, don't you ever sleep?"

"Don't answer any questions. Get me?"

"Yes, sir."

Beau let himself into the Queen office, switched on the lights, threw open the windows, and took a bottle from a desk-drawer.

Ten minutes later there was a knock at the reception-room door. He put the bottle down and went out.

The knocker was De Carlos, alone.

"Come in," said Beau. He locked the door. "You're early. I've telephoned my partner to come down; he'll be here soon."

"Your partner?" De Carlos did not look pleased.

"Yes. Uh—guy by the name of Beau Brummell—I mean, Rummell. We're like that." Beau rubbed his eyes and led the way to the inner office. "Have a snifter."

"But I wanted to speak to you privately."

"No secrets between Beau and me," growled Beau.

He waved towards the bottle as he lit a cigaret. De Carlos licked his red lips, looking about for a glass. There was none in sight, and Beau did not offer one. De Carlos tilted the bottle. Beau watched him cynically. The man drank and drank. When he set the bottle down his gray cheek-bones had turned pink.

He smacked his lips and said: "Now—"

"Not now," said Beau. "Have another."

De Carlos waved gaily. "Don't mind if I do."

He picked up the bottle again.

De Carlos was drunk when Mr. Queen unlocked the front door and entered the inner office.

The bearded man lay sprawled in the "client's chair," waving the bottle and leering glassy-eyed at Beau.

"Ah, the pardner," said De Carlos, trying to rise. He fell back in the chair. "'Do, Mis'er Rummell. Lovely night. I mean sad. So sad. Have seat, Mis'er Rummell."

Ellery glanced at Beau, who winked. "This is Mr. Edmund De Carlos, Rummell," said Beau to Ellery in a voice loud enough to pierce the clouds of alcohol on Mr. De Carlos's brain. "One of the trustees of the Cole estate, you know."

"Siddown, Mis'er Rummell," said Mr. De Carlos cordially, waving the bottle. "Pleasure, 'm sure. Siddown!"

Ellery sat down behind the desk. "I understand you've something important to say to us, Mr. De Carlos."

De Carlos leaned forward confidentially. "Impor'nt an' worth money, Mis'er Rummell. Pots o' money, y' un'erstan'."

"Go on, spill," said Beau.

"We're frien's. We're all frien's here. An' we're men of the worl', hey?" De Carlos giggled. "Know what it's all about. Now I know de—de-tec-tive a'ncies, gen'l'men, an' I know de-tec-tives. Bought—can all be bought.

Jus' a madder o' price, I say. Jus' a madder o' price . . . tha'sh all."

"Do I understand that you want to engage us to investigate a case for you, Mr. De Carlos?" asked Ellery.

De Carlos stared at him owlishly, then burst into laughter. "Very good, Mis'er Rummell. I wanna 'ngage you *not* to inveshtigate a cashe!"

Beau and Ellery exchanged glances. Then Beau said: "You want what?"

De Carlos grew immediately serious. "'Now look, Mis'er Queen. Le's shpread cardsh on table, huh? I know you married li'l Kerrie tonight 'caush you wash in a deal wi' Margo. You marry Kerrie, she loshes income from eshtate, Margo gets it, you share with Margo—nishe work, Mis'er Queen, nishe work. But wha' happensh? Your wife goesh and shpoilsh it all. Putsh three bulletsh in Margo. Woof! Margo'sh dead." He wagged his head solemnly. "An' then where are you, Mis'er Queen? Holdin' the bag, Mis'er Queen, hey?"

"You can that kind of talk," said Beau in a hard voice. "You might get hurt. You heard the story!"

"Nishe shtory, Mis'er Queen," leered De Carlos, "but it won't go. No, shir, it'sh fan—fantastic. Sure she killed Margo—she'sh guilty ash hell, Mis'er Queen. Whadda you care, anywaysh? Tha'sh not the point. Tha'sh—"

Beau spanned the space between him and De Carlos in a split second. He grabbed De Carlos by the throat.

Ellery said: "Hold it, Brains," and Beau relaxed his grip sheepishly. De Carlos stared up at him, frightened.

"No sense in going off half-cocked," said Ellery smoothly. "You'll have to excuse my partner, Mr. De Carlos. He's had a trying night."

"Got no call shtrangling people," muttered De Carlos, feeling his Adam's-apple.

"You were about to say?"

De Carlos struggled out of the chair, eying Beau

warily. "You gen'l'men been jockeyed out of a lot o' money by Kerrie—by shome one killing Margo." He shook his forefinger at Ellery. "'S a shame, I shay. Y'oughta be recom—recompenshed, I shay. An' Edmund De Carlos's the man to do it! Good frien's, huh? I make it up to you, huh?"

"Huh," said Beau. "The piece of cheese. And we're the rats. I didn't get it, and I still don't. What's the gag, Blackbeard?"

"No gag, gen'l'men! Oh, coursh if I do somethin' for you, you gotta do somethin' for me. Tha'sh on'y fair, hey?" He peered anxiously at them. "Hey?"

"Hey, hey," said Ellery, with a warning glance at Beau. "I should say. Now, as I understand it, you're worried over our loss in the Margo deal, and you'd like to make it up to us financially. In return for your little contribution to our agency account you want us to do something for you in return. And what might that be, Mr. De Carlos?"

De Carlos beamed. "'S a pleasure to do bushiness with you, Mis'er Rummell. Why, you gotta do nothin', shee. Tha'sh what I shaid before. I'm payin' you *not* to inveshtigate a cashe! You shtep out. 'Way, way out You forget you ever heard of Cadmus Cole, or the Cole eshtate, or—or anything. Shee what I mean?"

Beau growled deep in his throat, but Ellery rose quickly and came forward to step between the two men. He kicked Beau's shin not gently with his left heel and took De Carlos's arm.

"I think we understand, Mr. De Carlos," he said with a leer to match their visitor's. "You feel we've been snooping about a bit too freely, and you'd breathe more easily if we directed our agency energies elsewhere. How much did you say our stepping out was worth to you?"

"I didn't shay." De Carlos peered up at him with a bleary shrewdness. "Shall we shay—ten thoushand dollars?"

"Come, come, Mr. De Carlos. We'd have made a good deal more than that in the Margo Cole deal."

"De Carlos-boy'sh bein' held up, held up," De Carlos grunted. "Now don' hol' me up up, gen'l'men. Fifteen."

"Now you're bruising my feelings, Mr. De Carlos."

"Aw ri'," grumbled De Carlos, "shall we shay twen'y thoushand?"

"Shall we rather say twenty-five, Mr. De Carlos?"

De Carlos muttered to himself. Finally he growled: "'S a deal. Twen'y-fi' thoushand. Robbersh!"

"Just business," Ellery assured him. "Now how is this little payment to be made? Cash, I trust?"

"Cash! I don't carry that mush cash aroun' me," said De Carlos irritably. "Give you a sheck."

"Checks bounce," reflected Mr. Queen.

"Well, thish one won't! An' if it doesh, you're protected. You don't have to go through with our 'greement."

"Before that logic we bow. A check it shall be. Chair, Mr. De Carlos?"

He helped the reeling man around the desk and sat him down in the swivel-chair, reaching over to switch on the powerful desk-lamp.

De Carlos fumbled in his clothes and brought out a checkbook. He opened it, stared at the last stub morosely, then groped in his pockets again. Finally his hand emerged with a fountain-pen.

He unscrewed the cap, pushed it onto the other end of the pen, leaned over and, tucking his tongue in one cheek, began laboriously to write out a check.

If he had taken a bomb from his pocket Mr. Queen and Mr. Rummell could not have been so startled.

Their eyes fixed in a fascinated amazement at the pen in De Carlos's lax, blundering fingers.

It was a black hard-rubber fountain-pen, fat and scarred, and it was trimmed in gold.

On the cap, etching-sharp in the bold light of the

lamp, there were certain curious scratchy marks and dents in an arced pattern—a familiar pattern, a pattern Messrs. Queen and Rummell had seen twice before . . . once earlier that evening in Room 1726 at the *Villanoy* on the pencil they had found behind the radiator, and once months before in that very office, at that very desk.

The identical pen. Under the identical circumstances.

It was Cadmus Cole's fountain-pen!

PART FIVE

XVI. The Empty Mouth

Cadmus Cole's fountain-pen! What was it doing in De Carlos's possession?

Ellery raised his eyebrows to Beau. They drifted off to a corner of the office as De Carlos, at the desk, struggled to control his hand.

"You're sure it's the same one?" whispered Beau.

"Positive, although we've always got a check-up against those microphotographs."

"Cole's pen!" mumbled Beau. "The same pen he used to write out that check for fifteen grand when he originally hired us. It might have a simple explanation, El. Maybe De Carlos just appropriated it after Cole cashed in."

Ellery shrugged. "There's one way of finding out. De Carlos is just drunk enough to be off guard, and if we asked him he's apt to tell the truth. Let me handle this."

He went back to the desk and rested his palms on it, smiling down at the writing man.

"There!" said De Carlos with a bubbly sigh. "Twen'y-fi' thoushand dollarsh, Mis'er Rummell." He sat back limply in the swivel-chair, waving the check like a flag

to dry the ink. "Shay! How'd I know you'll keep your wor', gen'l'men?"

"You don't," replied Ellery with a smile.

"You doublecrosh me," said De Carlos furiously, reeling to his feet, "an' I'll—I'll—"

Ellery took the check gently from the man's slack fingers. "Is that friendly? We're a reputable agency, Mr. De Carlos. Word's our bond. Yes, twenty-five thousand, signed Edmund De Carlos—correct, Mr. De Carlos, and thank you!"

"'S all ri'," said De Carlos, forgetting his suspicions and trying to bow. He almost fell on his face. Beau caught him and straightened him up none too carefully. "Thanksh, Mis'er Queen. 'S mighty rocky weather we're having. An' now I'll be on my way."

He put the black fountain-pen back into his pocket. Beau watched it disappear with the expression of a fox watching a rabbit vanish in a hole.

Ellery grasped De Carlos's other arm and he and Beau began to steer the bearded man to the door.

"By the way, Mr. De Carlos," said Ellery respectfully, "you're just the man to help me out."

De Carlos stopped short, weaving. "Yesh?" he said, blinking at Ellery.

"Mr. De Carlos, I have a hobby—you know, hobby? I collect little personal mementoes of famous people. Not expensive things, you know—the homlier and more personal the better I like them."

"I like t'collect the ladies, bless 'em," chuckled De Carlos. "Blon's, brunettes—any kind, I shay, 's long's they're beau'ful."

"Every man to his own hobby," smiled Ellery. "Well, I've often thought no collection of the sort I own would be complete without some memento of Mr. Cadmus Cole."

"Should think sho," said De Carlos warmly. "Great

man, Mis'er Cole. Great man. Gen'l'men, give you Mis'er Cole!"

"I meant to ask him for some little thing when he hired us a few months ago, but he was in such a hurry that I thought I'd wait for a more propitious time. And then," Ellery sighed, "he passed on, and I'd missed my chance. Do you think you could help me out, Mr. De Carlos? I mean, you were probably the closest friend he had."

"On'y frien'," said De Carlos. "Give you my wor'. On'y frien' he had in the worl'. Lemme think. Le' shee. Pershonal—"

"What happened to his personal belongings after his death, Mr. De Carlos—his clothing, fob, studs, things like that? Anything of that nature, you see—"

"Oh, they were all packed in a bunsh o' trunksh, an' I shipped 'em North from Cuba," said De Carlos, waving his hand. "They're in the housh in Tarrytown ri' now, Mis'er Rummell. I'll shee what I can fin'—"

"I shouldn't want to put you to all that trouble. Didn't he give you anything before he died? Or perhaps you took something from his effects to remember him by—his watch, his ring, his fountain-pen, something like that?"

"Di'n' take a thing," said Mr. De Carlos sadly. "Honesht shteward—tha'sh Edmund De Carlos, gen'l'men. Give you my wor'. Di'n' take so much as a shteel pin!"

"Oh, come," protested Mr. Queen. "You must have taken something, Mr. De Carlos. Some little thing. His fountain-pen, for instance. Didn't you take that?"

"I beg your par'on," said De Carlos, offended. "Di'n' take his fou'n'-pen, di'n' take anything!"

"Such epic honesty," said Mr. Queen with a gleam in his eye, "deserves a substantial reward." He snatched off Mr. De Carlos's spectacles suddenly, leaving the man blinking.

"Mis'er Rummell . . ." began De Carlos with a gurgle.

Ellery waved the silver spectacles at Beau. "Give the gentleman his reward."

"Huh?" said Beau.

"Mr. Queen," said Mr. Queen, "the floor is yours. I suggest you stretch Mr. Edmund De Carlos out on it."

Beau's mouth closed. "It would be sort of taking advantage, wouldn't it? He'd fall apart."

De Carlos stood gaping and squinting from one to the other.

"That," said Mr. Queen, "is the idea."

Beau stared at him and then began to chuckle. "Come and get it," he said to Mr. De Carlos.

The bearded man shrank against Ellery.

Beau's paw flashed. It clamped about the nape of Mr. De Carlos's neck.

Mr. Queen stepped back and watched with a detached and scientific interest.

De Carlos squealed and flailed at Beau like an agitated crab. Beau grinned and began to shake him up and down, and from side to side, as if De Carlos had been a cocktail shaker. De Carlos's head flopped back and forth, his eyes popping, his glittering teeth rattling with a peculiar, mechanical rattle that awakened another gleam in Mr. Queen's eye.

And suddenly an astonishing thing happened. Mr. De Carlos's teeth, that shining ivory army, that perfect and beautiful string of dental pearls, detached themselves in one piece from Mr. De Carlos's gaping mouth and flew halfway across the room to land at Mr. Queen's feet. De Carlos began to mumble curses, his cheeks sunken in magically, his gums nakedly forlorn.

Beau shouted: "So *that's* the way it is!" and grasped the man's beard with his other hand, yanking viciously, already triumphant, as if he did not doubt the beard was as false as the teeth. But De Carlos only howled with pain; the beard refused to part from his cheeks.

Cursing, Beau released it and plunged his fingers into

the bush of Mr. De Carlos's hair. This time he was not foiled. Mr. De Carlos's black hair came away from Mr. De Carlos's scalp with a sucking, reluctant sound, in one incredible piece, leaving an almost nude dome behind—almost, for there was a sparse fringe of gray-black hair on his head in the general shape of a horseshoe.

And then Mr. De Carlos ceased howling, ceased struggling, as he felt the top of his head and his hand encountered naked flesh. He grew limp.

"Desist," said Mr. Queen.

Mr. Rummell desisted, looking rather dazed at the unexpected result of his handiwork. Immediately Mr. De Carlos dropped to all fours and began to grope about the rug. He found his wig by chance and hastily —and askew—clapped it back on his pink gray-fringed skull. Then he began hunting for his teeth.

Mr. Queen stooped and picked them up. "You may rise," he said gravely, "we have them," and he inspected them curiously as Mr. De Carlos scrambled to his feet. They were set in their pink shell in perfect alignment —superbly regular teeth disposed with superb regularity . . . so perfect, so superbly regular, Mr. Queen told himself, that he should feel ashamed for not having suspected their falseness before. And he did feel ashamed.

He returned teeth and spectacles to their owner, and their owner swallowed the one and clapped the other on his nose and at once, with a surprising dignity, went to the desk and reached for the telephone.

Mr. Queen sighed. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but apparently the effects both of my partner's whisky and his seismic treatment have not yet worn off, Mr. De Carlos. The hour is late, and if I am not mistaken I detect the dawn's early light. You will not be able to stop the check you wrote out a few moments ago for some few hours yet."

De Carlos replaced the telephone, made an attempt to brush himself off, thought better of it, set his hat on his tilted wig, and calmly went out into the anteroom.

"Mr. Queen," said Mr. Queen, "show the gentleman out."

"But—" began Beau hoarsely.

Mr. Queen shook his head at his partner with violence. Beau shrugged and let Mr. De Carlos escape into the friendlier world.

When Beau came back, he said sharply: "What was the idea of letting him go?"

"Plenty of time, plenty of time," said Ellery. He was examining the twenty-five thousand dollar check De Carlos had written out—examining it with an intentness that puzzled Beau.

"That's easy for you to say," muttered Beau. "How about Kerrie? Hey!" Ellery loooked up. "You're not even listening. What's so interesting about that check? You may as well tear it up. He'll stop it as soon as the bank opens in the morning."

"This check," remarked Mr. Queen, "has more than a monetary value to us. It's so valuable, I suspect, that I shan't entrust it even to the office safe. I'm going to carry it about with me, as I've been carrying these microphotographs."

"You think somebody'd try to crack us open?" demanded Beau, making two fists.

"It's not improbable."

"I'd like to see 'em try! Say, why didn't you take the pen from him, too?"

"No hurry, and we don't want to flush our rabbit too soon."

"It's all mixed up," growled Beau, flinging himself on the leather sofa. "How the hell did De Carlos get Cole's pen, if Cole didn't give it to him? He must have been lying about that. And if he has Cole's pen . . ." Beau sat up on the sofa suddenly. "If he has Cole's

pen, why couldn't he have had Cole's automatic pencil, too?"

Ellery felt absently in his pocket to see if the pencil were still there. It was. He stowed De Carlos's check carefully away in his wallet.

"It's important to check up on De Carlos's story about Cole's personal effects. He said they were in some trunks at the Cole house in Tarrytown. You'd better make sure De Carlos told the truth about that."

"Yeah, but the pencil! I tell you—"

Ellery frowned. "I have the feeling we oughtn't to jump at conclusions, Beau. There's a good deal to weigh and examine and mull over. Meanwhile, I want you to dig into De Carlos's past. Question old-timers in the Street. Find out as much about him as you can. There must be some people who remember him from the days—1919, 1920, or whenever it was—when De Carlos was running Cole's market operations, before Cole retired to his yacht."

"But why?"

"Never mind why," said Mr. Queen. "Do it. And—oh, yes. One thing more—perhaps the most important of all."

"What's that?"

"Find out if De Carlos has ever been married."

"Find out if De Carlos has ever been married? Of all the cock-eyed assignments! What's the point?"

"It may *be* the point."

"You're too much for me. Say! Cole's will actually stated that De Carlos was a bachelor, so there's your answer."

"I'd rather have it from a more objective authority," murmured Mr. Queen. "Check it."

"I wish you'd taken that pen away from him!"

"Yes, the pen." Mr. Queen's tone was damp. Something about the pen seemed to trouble him. Then he shrugged. "Let's forget remote considerations and dis-

cuss things nearer home. What happened tonight after I left you at the hotel?"

Beau told him.

Ellery began to walk about. "I don't like one thing. I don't like the spot we've put Dad in with your use of my name. He's done too much already in the way of suppressing facts. Beau, we've got to spill the truth before the newspapers get hold of it by themselves and ride Dad out of the Department."

"Damn the mess!" roared Beau, jumping up. Then he sat down again, looking foolish. "It's getting too involved for me. You're right. I'll have to face the music. Kerrie—"

"You've got to tell her, Beau. And about the other thing—"

"No!" Beau glared. "That's the one thing I won't tell. And you keep your mouth shut, too. Don't you realize what it would mean if we told about that? We'd be handing her over to the chair on a platter!"

Ellery gnawed his lower lip. "Dad's convinced, you say, that her story is a fabrication?"

"Yeah. You've got to admit, from his angle, it's a pretty tall yarn."

They were silent.

Finally Ellery said: "Well, clean up this business of the name, anyway. I'm going home to catch up on some sleep, and I'd advise you to do the same, because you're in for a busy day."

"Yeah," mumbled Beau. He stared at the floor as if he saw something of unique interest there.

BEAU faced the new day with a scowl. Time Square at dawn is not a gay place.

The place matched his mood; and yet, as he watched Ellery's nighthawk cab drum off uptown, he felt a certain elation, too. Beau had spawned an idea in the office upstairs, and it was growing with abnormal rapidity.

It was such an amazing idea that he had decided to keep it to himself. If Ellery could be mysterious, why couldn't he?

He weighed the idea, turning it over, and the more he weighed it in the cool of early morning, on the deserted sidewalk in Times Square, a cigaret drooping from his lips, the more it staggered him.

If it was so . . . yes, it could wait. He could always pull it out of his hat. Meanwhile, there was a mess to be cleaned. That name business. Kerrie. How could he tell her?

He walked east towards the *Villanoy*, his heels raising echoes on the empty pavement.

The first thing to do was dodge the reporters. They had camped in the *Villanoy* lobby all night. If he knew reporters, they were there still, stretched out on the divans among a litter of cigaret ends and the butts of sandwiches. He entered the hotel by way of the Service Entrance, roused a night-man, a bill exchanged hands, and the man took him up, surreptitiously, to the seventeenth floor.

One of Inspector Queen's men, a detective named Piggott, who had known Beau when he used to visit his father at Headquarters in knee-pants and with barked knees showing, was perched on a chair which leaned against the wall next to the door of 1724. Piggott opened one eye and said, without smiling: "Hello, Mr. *Queen*."

Beau grinned and jammed a cigar into the detective's mouth. He entered 1724 without knocking.

Sergeant Velie was napping in the armchair by the window. He came awake instantly, like a cat.

"Oh, it's you." The Sergeant settled back and closed his eyes again.

Beau opened the bedroom door. The shades were drawn and Kerrie was curled up in a ball on one of the twin beds, under blankets. He could hear her deep,

regular breathing. Vi, fully dressed as she lay on the other bed, raised her head with a start. When she saw Beau she slipped off the bed and tiptoed out to join Beau in the sitting room. She closed the door softly behind her.

Her eyes were red-rimmed and her white skin looked pasty, flabby. She said to him: "Calling on your wife for a change?"

"How is she?"

"All right, no thanks to you. The doc gave her a shot of something and after a while she fell asleep."

"That's good. That's good." Beau was nervous; he began walking about.

Vi looked at him. "If you want to go in there, I can't stop you. You're her husband."

"No, no, let her sleep. Good for her. You're aces, Vi. We've got a lot to thank you for."

"Never mind the baloney," said Vi. "You're a first-class rat, do you know that?"

"Hey." Beau turned round slowly. "What is this?"

"You know damn' well." Vi sat down on the edge of a chair and looked him over with a deliberate insolence.

"You let that poor kid take the rap for you, and you didn't have the gumption to stay with her while she was taking it!"

"What goes on here?" Beau flushed deeply.

Vi glanced at the huge figure of Sergeant Velie lying still in the armchair.

"Never mind him! What was that last crack supposed to mean?"

"I don't think you'd want the big boy hearing what I had in mind."

"Don't worry—he's listening! Come on, Velie, can the act." The Sergeant opened his eyes. "Now out with it! What's on your virgin mind now?"

"You asked for it," said Vi calmly, but she went pale. "I say you were in that room across the court. I say

you fired those shots through the window at the Cole woman. I say you threw Kerrie's .22 into this room. That's what I say!"

She sat very still suddenly. Beau was glaring down at her with such ferocity that her lower lip began to tremble. She glanced swiftly towards the Sergeant, in a panic.

The Sergeant rose. "Listen, boy—"

"Keep out of this, Velie. You think I bumped off Margo and then framed Kerrie for the job, do you?" Beau spoke very quietly, standing over Vi with his arms dangling.

"Yes!" The cry burst from Vi's lips, defiant through her fear.

"And I suppose you planted that idea in Kerrie's head, too? You did, didn't you?"

"I didn't have to. The idea was already there."

"You—doublecrossing—liar!"

"Ask her," said Vi with a glance of hate; but she shrank. "It was all so pat, your leaving her the way you did. Kerrie had to realize that. She does! She fights against it, but she does. She loves you—God only knows why. She ought to curse the day she ever set eyes on you!"

"Go on," said Beau hoarsely.

"You were in with this Margo. That's the way I figure it . . . Sergeant!" Vi slipped out of the chair and ran from Beau to grab the Sergeant's beefy arm. From behind him she continued defiantly: "You were Margo's sidekick. You'd get Kerrie out of the way, the two of you. You and Margo. When your clever attacks didn't work, you schemed to marry Kerrie and do her out of the money. Then you'd split—"

"I don't want to hear your poisonous version of it," growled Beau. "I want to know what Kerrie thinks!"

"And then Margo lost her head and came here last night and was going to squawk that you and she were

partners. You were afraid of that, so you followed her and, just before she could blab, you shot her."

"I said I want to know what Kerrie thinks."

"She thinks what I think! Only she won't admit it to me or to herself. There's one part of her that still believes you're a right guy. And all the time she's taking your rap! Don't you feel proud of yourself?"

Beau drew a deep breath. "Get out of here."

Vi glared back at him.

Beau began to stalk towards her, and she screeched and retreated completely behind the rampart of the Sergeant's body.

"Take it easy, son," rumbled Velie.

"I said scram."

"You can't make me!"

"I said scrambo, you forked-tongued copperhead!"

"Kerrie needs me!"

"The way she needs a hole in the head. Are you going to get out of here, or do I have to throw you out?"

He was addressing her over the Sergeant's shoulder now, in a low and clear voice, completely blind to the mountain of flesh between them.

"Leave you with her?" shrilled Vi hysterically. "So that you can murder her, too?"

"If you were a man," grunted Beau, "I'd just about break your neck for that."

"Lay off, I said," said Velie, and he grabbed Beau's arm.

They all turned at a clicking sound.

Kerrie was in the bedroom dooorway—in her thin nightgown, her hair tumbled about her face, her face as white as the wall.

Beau's neck turned red. He started to say something. But Kerrie stepped back and slammed the bedroom door. Vi cried out and ran after her. The door slammed again.

Beau started after them.

Sergeant Velie was quicker. He set his broad shoulders against the door. "You'd better take a powder yourself, Beau," he said mildly.

"I've got to talk to Kerrie! I can't let her think—"

"Isn't she in a tough enough spot without you making it tougher? Go on home and get some shut-eye. You'll feel better in the afternoon."

"But I have to tell her—who I *am*, Velie! I've got to come clean about this name business—I've got to clear that crazy idea of hers up—that I'm trying to frame her for a murder she thinks I pulled off—"

"It's certainly going to convince her," said Sergeant Velie dryly, "when she hears you've been hidin' under an alias ever since she knows you. That under a phony handle you upped and married her—"

At the word "married" Beau swallowed and stepped back, as if the Sergeant had tried to take a poke at him.

He turned and shambled out without another word.

XVII. Mr. Rummell Becomes Himself Again

When Beau plodded into his apartment he pulled off all his clothes, set the alarm of his ninety-eight cent clock, and threw himself onto the bed.

The alarm went off before noon. He opened his eyes with a groan.

"Sure feels like a hangover," he muttered. "Only worse."

He crawled out of bed, danced under a cold shower, shaved, dressed, and went out.

On the corner he stopped in at a cigar store for two packs of cigarets and a nutted chocolate bar. Munching the chocolate, he headed for the subway.

Kerrie awoke from an exhausted sleep just before nine. Vi was tossing and snoring on the other bed.

Kerrie crept out of bed and peeped into the sitting

room. Sergeant Velie was gone, but another detective was reading the morning paper in the armchair. When he saw her he quickly hid the headlines. She shivered and closed the door.

When Vi awoke it was noon and Kerrie was fully dressed, seated at one of the bedroom windows staring out into the court, her hands in her lap.

Vi said something, but Kerrie did not reply. The blonde girl yawned, and then made a face, and then joined Kerrie at the window.

"Kerrie!"

Kerrie looked up, surprised. "Oh, you're up. What?"

"Don't you see those rubbernecks?"

"What?"

The windows facing their side of the court were densely peopled. Women, men, at least two staring children; and in one window an enterprising reporter was shouting questions across the court as he leaned perilously out.

"I didn't see them," said Kerrie indifferently.

Vi yanked down the shade; and after a moment, as if she were just conscious of the reporter's shouts, Kerrie closed the window, too.

It was a curiously peaceful day. Occasionally the door from the sitting room to the corridor opened and slammed as a detective came in. Men were coming in and out all day. There was some activity in 1726, too; Vi peeped from the window and could see men bustling about in there.

But no one entered the bedroom except a detective; and he came in only because Vi, after trying vainly to rouse the telephone operator, complained that they were starving.

"Okay," said the detective. "Why didn't you ask before?"

"Ask!"

"No tickee, no washee." He went out.

"They've cut the line," said Vi in a scared voice.

Kerrie said nothing.

Fifteen minutes later the detective wheeled a table in which was laden with food. He went out immediately.

"Come on, hon. We may as well stoke up."

"Yes," said Kerrie.

She sat down at the table and toyed with a slice of toast. She looked calm enough; only a certain air of abstraction, a deepening of the two lines from her nostrils to the corners of her mouth, pointed to anything unusual inside her.

Vi saw it and said in a small voice: "Kerrie dear, you've simply got to eat. You haven't eaten—"

"I'm not hungry, Vi."

Kerrie went back to the window.

Vi sighed. She finished her breakfast and, after hesitating, Kerrie's, too. She took a bath, borrowed fresh underwear and stockings from Kerrie, dressed, and then the two of them sat still, without conversation, all the long afternoon.

By nine o'clock in the evening Vi was ready to scream. Any noise—a cough, a cry, sobbing—would have been relief. But Kerrie just sat with her hands folded in her lap like some female Buddha carved from stone.

And then there was a commotion outside, the noise of many voices, at least one scuffle. Vi jumped up. Even Kerrie turned her head.

The bedroom door opened and Sergeant Velie, accompanied by several strange men, stood there. The Sergeant was carrying a folded paper.

Kerrie rose, pale.

"I've got a warrant here," said the Sergeant in a flat voice, "for the arrest of Kerrie Shawn. Miss Shawn, will you get ready?"

After that, things became confused, like a motion picture run wild. A cameraman managed to pierce the

cordon outside, and bulbs began to flash, and detectives shouted, and reporters wormed through, and there was almost a free-for-all. In the tumult Vi got Kerrie into her hat and a light camel's-hair coat, and Sergeant Velie said Vi couldn't go along, and Vi clung to Kerrie, weeping, until Kerrie said sharply: "Don't act like a baby, Vi!" and kissed her goodbye; and after a while Vi found herself almost alone in 1724, in the midst of bulbs and newspapers and articles of Kerrie's wardrobe, and she sat down on the floor and cried for the benefit of the two female reporters who had remained behind for sinister purposes of their own.

They even helped Vi, when she gathered strength enough to stand up, to get Kerrie's things together in the suitcases, asking questions all the way like two jabbering jays until Vi swore at them and threatened weepily to bang their sleek heads together.

Finally she managed to escape with Kerrie's bag and the aid of a policeman. One of the two newspaperwomen said: "Nuts," with disgust, and they followed the course of empire southward, to Centre Street.

Vi reached her hotel with her hat over one ear. When she walked through the lobby she thought two men looked at her in a hard, suspicious way. She locked herself in her room.

Then the telephone began ringing. After a half-hour she told the operator not to ring her at all. So people began knocking at her door. She rang the hotel operator again and threatened to call the police if the pests didn't stop knocking.

The operator said: "Yes, Madam—hold on a minute," and then said: "Sorry, Madam—it *is* the police," and Vi opened the door, and one of the two men who had looked at her hard and suspiciously said not to try any funny stuff but just stay put, sister, see?

"Stay put?" screamed Vi. "You think you're hanging that rap around my neck, too, you wall-eyed flatties?"

"We're not sayin' nothin'," said the other man. "Just take a little friendly advice, see, blondie?"

Vi slammed the door, locked it.

After that, her telephone did not ring and her door was not knocked upon. And she stayed put.

BEAU burst into Inspector Queen's office at Police Headquarters, roaring mad.

"What the hell's the idea, Pop! What was I picked up for?" Then he saw Kerrie. He said slowly: "What's this?"

Kerrie looked at him with eyes of liquid pain.

"I wanted to talk to you," said Inspector Queen. He seemed a little shrunken through his spare, wiry body. "As for Miss Shawn, we've decided to hold her for—well, technically as a material witness. But we all know what for."

There were three other men present. Beau recognized them all. One was a stenographer. The other two were assistants of District Attorny Sampson's.

"She's innocent," said Beau. "She told you how it really happened. The real killer was in 1726. He shot Margo through the window across the angle of the court, then tossed in the roscoe. Kerrie picked it up; she was dazed."

"Is that all you've got to say?" asked the Inspector in a queer tone.

"Isn't the truth enough for you?" snarled Beau.

"One moment." Kerrie's voice was calm, low-pitched. "Inspector Queen, you've accused me of murdering my cousin, and I admit the circumstances—"

"Don't admit anything!" yelled Beau. "Let me handle—"

"Please." She looked at him, and he turned away. "I admit the circumstances are against me. But if I shot Margo, I must have had a motive. What was my motive?"

"We know your motive," said the Inspector.

"I couldn't possibly have any! You mean I hated her, I was—jealous of her on account of . . . my husband? But if I were, wouldn't I have shot her *before* I was married? I had nothing to be jealous about, Inspector. We were married. Would I have waited until after my marriage to kill her?"

The Inspector did not reply. The stenographer was quietly recording the conversation, and the two men from the District Attorney's office were listening in a strained silence.

"Or you might say," Kerrie went on, "that I wanted to put Margo out of the way in order to gain financially. But that can't be so, either, you see, because my marriage cut me out of Uncle Cadmus's will. I couldn't possibly inherit Margo's share; in fact, I'd even forfeited my own. So don't you see how silly this charge is? There isn't a reason in the world why I should have wanted to kill Margo!"

"But there is," said the Inspector in a flat tone.

"What could it possibly be?"

"Something like twenty-five hundred dollars a week for life."

"But I just told you," said Kerrie, bewildered. "Mr. Goossens—Mr. De Carlos will confirm—the will—"

"Yeah," mumbled Beau. "What's the matter with you, Pop?"

"It's true," said the Inspector in a tired voice, "that this girl has no gain-motive if she were married at the time of the murder." He paused, then repeated: "*If* she were married."

Kerrie sprang to her feet. "What do you mean?"

"It won't do you the least good to put on an act," replied the old man gruffly.

"Ellery!" Kerrie ran to Beau, shook him. "What is your father talking about? Tell me!"

Beau said nothing. But Kerrie saw his eyes, and let

go of him with a sudden gesture of revulsion. She stood still where she was, the last drop of color draining from her face.

"I received a wire this afternoon," said the Inspector, "which amounted to an anonymous tip. We weren't able to trace the tipster, because the message had been telephoned into the telegraph office from a midtown pay-station. But the tipster wasn't nearly as important as the tip. We followed that up right away, and it was right. Miss Shawn—"

"Miss Shawn?" whispered Kerrie.

"Miss Shawn, you weren't married last night. The marriage was a fake. It was an attempt to lay a clever smoke-screen down so that it would look as if you had no motive to kill your cousin Margo. You *still* share in your uncle's estate; you still take over Margo's share. What do you say now?"

"Not married last night. . . . Why, that's simply—that's simply not true! We were. In Connecticut. Near Greenwich. By a Justice of the Peace named—named Johnston. Weren't we? *Ellery, weren't we?*"

A frenzy took possession of her. She seized Beau's arm, shaking him, her eyes wild and wide with horror.

"And that isn't all!" shouted the Inspector suddenly, growing crimson. "This man *isn't* my son—his name's *not* Ellery! It isn't even Queen! His name is Beau Rummell, and he's my son's partner in a confounded private detective agency!"

"Beau—Rummell?" whispered Kerrie. She stumbled back to her chair and sat down, fumbling in her bag for a handkerchief. She remained that way, her eyes on her bag, her fingers fumbling inside aimlessly.

"For God's sake, Pop," said Beau in a small voice.

"It's no use, Beau! There's no record of a marriage license. There's no record or trace of the Justice of the Peace who's suppose to have married you. If there is—let's have it. Produce him! And let's see your license

and your marriage certificate! Why, even the address is a phony—it's a house that was just rented for one night! Otherwise it hasn't been occupied for years!"

Scenes flashed across Kerrie's brain . . . The ramshackle building, the weeds, the dust, the odd Mr. Johnston. . . .

Beau said miserably: "All right, it's true! We weren't married. It was an absolute phony. But Kerrie didn't know anything about that, Pop! She thought it was on the level. I rigged the whole thing up myself, I tell you!"

She should have known; if she hadn't been such a blind, trusting fool. . . . The marriage license. She hadn't signed. "Pull," he had said. He hadn't shown it to her. In that house, the "Justice" was going to marry —marry!—them without a second witness. The whole thing, the whole sickening . . .

Kerrie's stomach began to churn. There was a wry twist to her mouth.

"Yes?" said the Inspector flatly.

"You've got to believe me, Pop! This thing is all a mess now. Margo Cole tried three times to kill Kerrie. She hated Kerrie because she—well, she'd taken a shine to me herself. And she was spending more dough than was coming in, and she wanted Kerrie's share of the income. She told me so herself! I'll swear to that on the witness-stand! I played along, figuring that was the best way to protect Kerrie; we didn't have anything on Margo in the way of evidence, so there was no use pulling the law into it. Ellery knows all about this. He'll back me up."

"Don't bring Ellery into it!" thundered the Inspector.

"I've got to, Pop. Even if I didn't, he'd come to bat—"

"Does he know these things of his own knowledge?" demanded the old man quickly.

"No. I told him. But it's true, I tell you! I planned the fake marriage because, with Kerrie apparently mar-

ried, Margo would temporarily get Kerrie's share, or expect to get it soon, so half her motive against Kerrie would be satisfied. The other half—well," and Beau threw back his shoulders defiantly, "I made a deal with her. I pretended to be her accomplice, saying I was marrying Kerrie to give Margo the extra income, so she and I could split. I told her I loved her, not Kerrie—that the marriage wouldn't mean a thing. She fell for it. Last night, like the she-devil she was, she couldn't resist coming down to crow over Kerrie after the damage, as she thought, was done."

"You expect me to believe this girl here didn't know that marriage was a phony?"

"Do you think she's the kind—" began Beau; then he made a gesture of futility. "I didn't marry her on the level because I didn't want to see her lose that legacy. I didn't tell her the marriage was a fake because, if I had, she wouldn't have gone through with it. You don't know her, I tell you!"

The two Assistant District Attorneys whispered together. Then one of them beckoned the Inspector, and the three of them whispered some more. Finally the Inspector, very pale, said to Beau: "Just where did you go last night, Beau, when you left this girl in that hotel room after you'd checked in?"

Kerrie raised her head at that; her eyes looked hurt, misty, dull.

"For one thing I'm not a skunk!" snarled Beau. "I was in a tough spot. She thought we were married, I knew we weren't. . . . I made some rotten excuse, said I was coming back, and blew. When I got outside I thought of something. There were two people who had to be notified that the marriage wasn't on the up and up—they were the trustees of the Cole estate.

"I went back to my Times Square office and wrote out two letters—one to Goossens, one to De Carlos. They were identical. They said the marriage was a phony, and

I was notifying them because the legal question of the passing of Kerrie's share to Margo was a factor; I didn't want Kerrie to lose even a week's income. I said Margo was after Kerrie's scalp, and I wanted them to play ball with me, stall along for a while, until I could pin those murder attempts on Margo. Then I sealed the letters, put special-delivery stamps on them, and mailed them in the lobby slot. The night man in my building let me in and let me out. Then I went back to the *Villanoy*."

"The check-up will be made, of course." The Inspector turned away, stonily.

Beau ran over to Kerrie. "Kerrie, I want you to believe me! I want you to know I love you, and that everything I've done so far was because—damn it, Kerrie, I'd cut off my right arm before I'd pull a dirty trick like that!"

The Inspector and the two lawyers were conferring in whispers again. The attorneys were demanding something, and the Inspector was arguing fiercely against them.

"I think I know who killed Margo," whispered Beau in Kerrie's ear. "It's just come to me—just since last night. I mean since early this morning. All I need is a little time, darling. Kerrie, say something. At least tell me you don't think I'm a murdering heel!"

She turned slowly at that, raising her eyes and fixing them on his. In their hurt, misty way, they were troubled searchlights, probing the darkness.

And suddenly she put her arms about him and pulled him down to her. He closed his eyes gratefully. He felt the straining of her arms, the beating of her heart.

A man tapped her on the shoulder, shoving Beau aside. Beau did not protest.

He watched them lead her away—to the Tombs, as he knew, to go through the whole ghastly and scarifying process of being booked, fingerprinted, locked in a cell. . . . She walked in a dream, seeing nothing.

Beau glanced at the Inspector, who waved his hand.

"Don't leave the city." Inspector Queen's voice was dry; he did not look up from his desk, where he was fussing with some papers.

"Sure, Pop," said Beau gently. "And—thanks."

The Inspector started, then went back to his papers.

Beau left quickly. He knew that he would be followed. He thought it very possible, from the Inspector's peculiar expression and the glances of the two men from the District Attorney's office, that before twenty-four hours had passed he might be lodged, with Kerrie, in the Tombs on an accomplice charge.

In fact, he was sure that only the Inspector's insistence had kept the two attorneys from having him taken into custody on the spot.

Beau walked the streets of downtown New York half the night. He analyzed his case over and over, mercilessly, picking, probing, digging for flaws. And finally, with a grunt of satisfaction, he said to himself: "It's in the groove," and sent Ellery a telegram to meet him at the office at nine o'clock in the morning.

Then Beau went home and to sleep.

At nine they met, and Mr. Queen's haggard appearance said that he knew of Kerrie's arrest, and moreover that he had had no sleep since learning of it.

Beau told him exactly what had happened while Ellery listened in a gloomy silence. "Well," he said at last, "we have some time—these things go slowly, and we need a complete case. Did you check up on De Carlos yesterday?"

"I found some old-timers in the Street who remembered him. They all think De Carlos was a weak sister. Big ideas, but no follow-through. With Cole dominating him from the background, planning the campaigns, De Carlos pulled the big deals in actual practice. By himself, as a planner, De Carlos was useless. As a matter

of fact, he's been in the market since Cole's death—did you know that? And he's lost his shirt."

Ellery was thoughtful. "And then, too, he's been spending that million Cole left him like a gob on shore-leave. He must be pretty nearly flat, if they cleaned him in Wall Street."

"He is," said Beau.

"Any trace of his ever having been married?"

"What do you think I am, a Houdini? Far as I could check, no."

"Well, I've been doing some checking myself. For some time. There's always the possibility, but it seems fairly certain, and from the reports I've been receiving, we may assume De Carlos never married. Now, how about Cole's personal belongings?"

"Checked. Lots of duds, odds and ends of jewelry—some pretty valuable stuff, I'd say, watches, rings, studs—and a bunch of personal papers. Nothing to interest us, though."

"Did you find a fountain-pen?"

"No, nor an automatic pencil."

"False teeth?"

"No."

"Eyeglasses, toupee, wig?"

"No."

Miss Penny came in with a telegram. Beau tore it open and began to jig, waving a yellow slip. "I don't know what you've got," he yelled, "but I've got plenty!"

"You can be very annoying at times," said Mr. Queen. "What is that?"

"A wire from our man on the Coast. He's located Captain Angus!"

"What?"

"Absolutely. And he'll be in with him tonight. That clinches it, you sockeroo! That's all I needed to clean up this case!"

"Oh," said Mr. Queen slowly. "You have a theory?"

"Theory? Nuts! I've got the answer!" And Beau began to explain, chattering like a machine-gun. Mr. Queen listened in silence, nodding glumly every once in a while. "What's the matter? You don't look very happy about it!"

"It all points that way, I confess," said Mr. Queen. "I can't disprove your theory—in fact, I can add to it and strengthen it considerably. There's only one point that bothers me, Beau."

"What's that?"

Mr. Queen waved his hand. "It's a small discrepancy —too small at the moment to worry about."

"Then the hell with it! What do you say—do we go to town?"

Mr. Queen sighed. "I suppose we may as well."

They put their heads together, going over Beau's case, checking it, re-examining, working out the details of a plan. Beau's eyes gleamed at certain contributions of Mr. Queen's; his spirits steadily rose, and he looked happy for the first time in months.

And then the telephone rang and Miss Penny said: "It's your father, Mr. Queen."

Beau sat down, losing his grin.

"Well, Dad?" said Ellery.

He listened; and as he listened he stiffened. When finally he set down the instrument he laughed aloud. "What do you know about that?"

"Know about what? Talk, you brass monkey!"

"It's the beginning of the end now, Beau." Mr. Queen rose and shook himself a little, like an athlete before running out to meet his opponent. "Dad just tipped me off. Margo Cole—hold your chair, now!— was NOT the daughter of Huntley and Nadine Cole. She was NOT Cadmus Cole's niece, or Kerrie's cousin. In fact, she was NOT Margo Cole."

Beau's jaw sagged. "She wasn't— Then who the devil was she?"

"One of the coolest imposters on record!"

And Mr. Queen hustled his speechless partner out of the office and downstairs, bound for a taxicab and Police Headquarters.

XVIII. ENTER MISS BLOOMER

THEY TOOK A CAB DOWNTOWN.

"How'd Pop ever dig that one up?" demanded Beau, when he had recovered from the shock.

"I didn't like her."

"Talk sense!"

"I am. I got to thinking about the woman who presented herself as Margo Cole, and there was something about her and her story that made me think in terms of flies and honey, if you know what I mean. She seemed too much the woman of the world."

"That's reasoning, all right," grunted Beau. "Lucky guess!"

"Certainly." Ellery laughed. "Except for the little detail of the 'partner' she mentioned to Kerrie just before she was murdered. A partner suggested a plot, and a plot—" He shrugged. "At any rate, I merely suggested to Dad that he have the dead woman's fingerprints taken. He did, and sent photos of them by radio to Scotland Yard and the Sureté. Scotland Yard came through."

"Who was she? I'm still winded!"

"A woman named Ann Bloomer. A London slum product—drunken father, sluttish mother—lived by her wits from adolescence. When she was 19 she was caught by the British police in some blackmailing scheme and sent to clink for a year. When she was released in 1925 she disappeared from England. 1925, remember, was the year the real Margo Cole's mother died in France."

"But the French police checked this woman!"

"We've all been neatly taken in. Don't you see what happened? When the Bloomer woman appeared in this country, claiming to be Margo Cole, she told a certain story. Well, that story was a consolidation of two stories. That is, *she told the history of the real Margo Cole up to the year 1925; from 1925 on, the story she told was her own history.* That means the real Margo disappeared in 1925—or, at least, there's no record of her existence after that year."

"You mean this business goes back that far?" Beau whistled. "Murder as far back as 1925?"

"Don't know." Mr. Queen gazed somberly out of the taxi window. "Dad's news opens up a new field of speculation and inquiry, however. Anyway, we know Ann Bloomer, who said she had changed her name from Margo Cole to Ann Strange, was actually an English adventuress with no possible relation to the Cole family. Dad checked that, too. And it's that woman who tried to murder Kerrie and was murdered herself for her pains!"

"Say, how'd she get hold of Margo Cole's proofs of identity? Do you suppose—"

"Dad's called Goossens to bring down all those proofs."

Beau told the driver to stop at the Tombs.

When Kerrie saw him she gave a little cry and ran into his arms. After a while Mr. Queen coughed.

"You might introduce me to the lady, Beau."

Beau did the honors and, from the safety of his arms, Kerrie eyed Ellery in a puzzled way. "I'm terribly happy to meet the man I *thought* I'd married. So you're Ellery Queen!"

"And you're Kerrie Shawn."

"A little the worse for wear, I'm afraid," sighed Kerrie. "Mr. Queen, haven't we met somewhere?"

"It's one of those annoying probabilities," replied Mr. Queen quickly, "that it's so much better not to bother

oneself about. Now that we meet in fact, Miss Shawn, and I've an opportunity of seeing for myself, I don't wonder you've upset Beau's whole self-centered life!"

"I'm not very much to look at these days," said Kerrie with a sad smile. "A little slap-happy from all these flattering attentions from life. . . . Darling." She pressed Beau's hand.

"Look, kid." Beau was embarrassed. "I had to stop in and sort of put my arms around you again. You know. See that you weren't sore at me. But we've got to beat it."

"So soon?" Kerrie cried.

"Some day we'll knock off for a thousand years and go away together and just hold hands the whole damn' time. But right now Ellery and I have work to do."

"All right, Beau." She kissed him. "That's really a nice name. Beau Rummell. Why, do you know—"

"No cracks," said Beau hastily. "Kerrie, you all right? They're treating you okay?"

"Yes, Beau."

"Anything I can get you before I leave?"

"Vi's been here. She brought me a few things she knew I'd need. Beau . . . the police are watching Vi, too."

"Aw, that's just a matter of form," muttered Beau. "They wouldn't earn their pay if they didn't look smart."

"Have you—have you hired a lawyer for me yet?"

"What's the matter with me? I'm a lawyer!"

"Oh, darling, I know, but—"

Beau kissed her. "We won't need one. Ellery and I'll have this case cracked in one more day."

Kerrie's eyes grew round. "You mean you've found out—"

"Just a little more patience, funny-face. We'd try to spring you, only with that murder rap hanging over your head it's no use trying. They've got to work fast,

anyway. Either release you or change the charge—"

Beau's face darkened, then he grinned at her. "You'll just have to stay here a little while longer."

"Make it a very little while," Kerrie whispered.

"Miss Shawn, did you know that Margo Cole really wasn't Margo Cole?" asked Mr. Queen suddenly.

"I beg your pardon?" gasped Kerrie.

"Never mind." Mr. Queen smiled in a satisfied way.

"Beau, what does he mean?"

Beau told her. She was bewildered. "But I don't—"

Mr. Queen took her hand. "Don't try. While you're here don't answer too many questions and have a nice rest. Jails are really awfully good places to rest in."

She smiled back faintly. "I'll remember that—the next one I'm in."

"I promise you you won't be in this one long!"

"Thanks, Mr. Queen."

"The name is Ellery, Miss Shawn."

"Kerrie, Ellery."

"Charmed! By the way, Beau and I have a lot of explaining to do. Do you think you can wait?"

"Whatever Beau says."

Beau kissed her again, and they left quickly.

"Such faith," observed Mr. Queen, "should be deserved."

Beau did not reply in words. But his eyes and jaw said something that silenced Mr. Queen.

They found Inspector Queen with Lloyd Goossens, elbow-deep in records. Both men seemed worried.

"Well, they're in order," said the Inspector disgustedly. "Every last one of 'em genuine. I don't understand it at all!"

"Nor do I," said Goossens, sucking nervously on his empty pipe. He stared from Beau to Ellery. "Which is which, Inspector?"

"There's the real Ellery Queen," snapped the Inspector, "and this varmint who passed himself off as

Queen is Beau Rummell, my son's partner. I wouldn't blame you if you took a poke at both of 'em, Mr. Goossens."

"I'm afraid it's too late for that now," said Goossens sadly, shaking hands with Ellery. "Some day you gentlemen must tell me why you deceived me. At the moment this business about Margo Cole, or rather Ann Bloomer, has me rather floored."

"You're sure the identification papers are in order?"

"Positive. See for yourself. I've brought Miss Shawn's along, too, for comparison."

"How do we know she isn't an imposter, too?" demanded Inspector Queen suddenly.

Beau bridled. "In her case the record's clear! Besides, there's a photo of her when she was a kid of ten or so—"

"I don't like it," growled the old man. "It upsets the whole cart."

"My heart bleeds for you," said Beau with a grin.

The Inspector eyed him peculiarly. "Oh, I don't mean about the case against her. Finding out that the woman who claimed to be Margo Cole was an imposter doesn't really change Kerrie Shawn's motive, if Kerrie Shawn *thought* the woman was Margo Cole. Or even if she knew, the motive still holds. In that case she'd rely on the woman's imposture never coming out. It's not that."

"Then what is it?"

The Inspector failed to reply.

"What bothers me," said Goossens, "is my position as executor and trustee in this matter. And being paired with this man De Carlos doesn't—ah—improve matters." He ran his fingers through his thinning hair. "All that money handed over to this Bloomer woman out of Cole's estate—"

"You can't be held responsible for that," said Mr. Queen. "We all made the same mistake. Because the

proofs of identity were genuine, we assumed the person presenting them was their owner."

"Oh, I'm safe enough legally," said the lawyer. "It isn't that, Mr. Queen. There will be lots of newspaper talk, a scandal—it won't do my firm's reputation any good, you know; may very well scare away future clients. Well, that's my problem, not yours."

"Talking about legal considerations," remarked Beau, "there's the estate itself, Goossens. The real Margo Cole must be searched for. Kerrie's back in the picture as an heiress—with a charge of murder hanging over her. The Surrogate won't like these little developments—"

Goossens looked unhappy. "Yes, yes, I'm aware of that." He frowned. "By the way, Mr. Queen, you know that technically you disobeyed the testator's instructions in having Mr. Rummell impersonate you. You had no right to give Mr. Rummell a job to do which you were personally hired to accomplish."

"If you mean," said Beau, "that we'll give back the fifteen grand, my friend—take another whiff!"

"No, no," said the lawyer with a nervous smile. "I shan't press the point. But under the circumstances, I think the firm of *Ellery Queen, Inc.*, will have to bow out of the case."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Queen.

"The Surrogate won't like that little business, Mr. Queen. I imagine he'll insist on my engaging a new firm, or doing the job myself."

"You mean of beginning a search for Margo Cole all over again, now that the Bloomer woman has been exposed?"

"Yes."

"We stand," said Mr. Queen firmly, "upon our rights."

Goossens laughed. "I don't believe you have any. However, it's probably a dead issue. Dead issue—very good!"

Mr. Queen politely laughed, too. "What's that?"

"I mean—Margo Cole is probably dead. She must be. So it's a tempest in a teapot."

"Very possible," admitted Mr. Queen.

"Well . . . I suppose, Inspector, you want to hang on to these records for a while?"

"Yes, leave them here."

The lawyer nodded glumly and left.

"Bad case of cold feet," remarked the Inspector. "Well, I suppose he *is* in a jam." He sat down at his desk and began to finger his little figurine of Bertillon. "As I am. Beau, you and Kerrie are lucky this happened now. It smudges up our case, and the D.A.'s frankly sorry he advised such a quick arrest. And yesterday he wanted to arrest you, too!"

"On what charge?"

"Accessory to the murder." The old man paused, then said quietly: "I talked him out of it. I know you didn't have anything to do with it—not because the facts aren't against it, but because of a lot of things the law won't recognize as evidence."

"But Beau couldn't possibly have committed that murder," protested Mr. Queen with an outraged chuckle.

"I'm not talking about the murder," said his father shortly. "I said accessory."

"Thanks, Pop," said Beau dryly.

"Just the same, my own hands aren't too clean. The Commissioner is thinking of taking me off the case. Now, with this new development . . ." He shook his head.

"It seems to me," observed Mr. Queen, "that we're moving in concentric circles. Let's tackle this thing logically."

The Inspector brightened visibly. "You see daylight?"

"Brilliantly."

"Then you don't believe Kerrie Shawn shot the Bloomer woman?"

"I do not."

The Inspector sank back. "You're prejudiced!"

"Not a bit of it. I have reasons for thinking her innocent."

"Reasons? What reasons? The Lord knows I'm a reasonable man. But if you can explain away the circumstances of this crime—except by some cock-and-bull story like the one Kerrie Shawn tells—I'll eat your hat in Madison Square Garden with catsup and mayonnaise!"

"I may take you up on that," said Mr. Queen; and he rose and began to walk up and down, frowning at the floor. "We must begin from the new fact: that the woman who represented herself as Margo Cole, bearing genuine proofs of Margo-Cole identity, as it were, is a proved imposter named Ann Bloomer.

"Now, with this woman an imposter, the question arises: Where is the real niece of Cadmus Cole, the real daughter of Huntley Cole and Nadine Malloy Cole—the Margo Cole Ann Bloomer pretended to be?

"You'll admit there are two inclusive possibilities: that either the real Margo Cole is alive, today, or she is dead.

"Let's examine the case if she's alive. If she is, why hasn't she come forward to claim her share of her uncle's estate? We'd have to rule out the possibility that she doesn't know anything about her uncle's death and the will he left. This has been the most widely publicized will-case in modern legal history. Cole's death, the odd conditions of his will, have been announced by newspapers, periodical literature, and radio all over the world, not once but many times—in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, even Africa and the South Seas. And this publicity has been going on for several months—first the death, then the publication of

the will, then the news of the discovery of the two heiresses, and since then a continuous drumfire of their activities.

"Don't you agree that if the real Margo were alive it's reasonable to assume she'd have heard of Cole's death and her own eligibility as an heiress by this time?"

"Do you mean by that," asked the Inspector, "that because Margo Cole hasn't come forward you think she's dead?"

"Not yet," said Ellery quickly. "I'm merely brushing in the background. I do say that the unusual publicity must have got to her eyes or ears if she's alive. Now, proceeding on this reasonable assumption—that if she's alive she knows—why hasn't she come forward?

"One possible, even probable, answer is that she knows she doesn't qualify under the terms of the will . . . that she is or has been married, for example—a state of affairs which would automatically cut her out of an inheritance."

"I should think," objected Beau, "that, even if she were or had been married, she'd show up and make a fight for that dough. That's only human."

"But she hasn't; that's a fact. Let's not get involved in counter-theories; let's proceed along the straight line. If she's married, and since she's failed to show up, what then? She would fight, you say. Yes, I agree; she would. But how? By contesting the will? She hasn't done that. Could she fight in another way? Certainly—*if she got hold of a woman like Ann Bloomer and made a deal with her.*"

Both men looked blank.

"A deal like this, for instance: a fifty-fifty split of the income after Ann Bloomer, armed with the proofs of identity furnished her by the real Margo, showed up, was accepted as the legitimate heiress, and began to collect her share. Ann Bloomer's qualifications, from Margo's standpoint, would merely have to be: that she was

not and is not married, and that her history could be mortised into Margo's history somewhere along the line —as actually happened, in fact."

"But that means," said the Inspector excitedly, "that this partner Kerrie says the woman mentioned was—the real Margo! Why, if Ann doublecrossed Margo after Ann was accepted as the heiress, if Ann didn't fork over the split, that would be a motive for murder. . . ."

"So it would," chuckled Ellery. "By the way, I thought you didn't believe Kerrie's story!"

"I don't," said the old man, flushing. "I'm just—arguing. For the sake of argument."

Both Beau and Ellery laughed. "At any rate," said Ellery, "I'm not arguing to reach *that* sort of conclusion, even though it might be true. The only conclusion I wish to reach you've already accepted, Dad—that, if the real Margo still lives, she probably hired Ann Bloomer to present herself, furnished Ann with the proofs of identity, and was Ann Bloomer's silent partner in a scheme to get hold of half of Cole's estate, to which she was not entitled. In other words, Ann Bloomer had—had to have—a partner.

"Now, take the other possibility—that the real Margo is dead. Then how did Ann Bloomer get possession of those proofs of identity? From the reports, the Bloomer woman had not the slightest connection with the Cole family, certainly not by a blood tie. Yet the proofs of identity must have been in the possession of some one close to the dead Margo—we're assuming now, remember, that the real Margo is dead. In whose possession? A blood relation? The real Margo's only living relatives by blood were Kerrie Shawn, her cousin, and Cadmus Cole, her paternal uncle. Neither has had the least contact, or could have had from the facts, with the real Margo Cole.

"Then who is left as a possible possessor of those proofs? Such a person as the real Margo Cole's surviving

husband, let us say. A good possibility, although it may have been one of a number of differently related persons. In any event, for the Bloomer woman to have got her hands on those proofs of Margo Cole's identity, she must have got them from *some one* who had been close to Margo Cole; and for this person to have turned the proofs over to Ann Bloomer means again a deal, a partnership. So again the vital conclusion arises: *Ann Bloomer had a partner.*"

The Inspector stirred. "Couldn't it have been like this? Margo Cole and Ann Bloomer were friends. Ann Bloomer murdered Margo, stole her proofs of identity, and showed up here to pose as Margo Cole. So there's no partner at all!"

"Two things against that theory," replied Ellery, "which, of course, has occurred to me. One is that if Margo and Ann had been friends, why didn't the French police, who checked over every last detail of Margo Cole's movements from her birth until 1925, and of Ann Bloomer's movements from 1925 to date, run across any evidence of such a friendship? They did a careful job, as you know. The answer is: there was no such evidence to run across; there was no such friendship.

"Besides, that theory would indicate that Ann Bloomer was a lone—er—wolverine. Yet she told Kerrie a moment before she was murdered that *she had a partner.*"

"We've only Kerrie Shawn's word for that," said the Inspector stubbornly.

"And all sorts of confirmation in what El's just told us," growled Beau. "Don't be pig-headed, Pop!"

The Inspector waved Ellery on.

"Deductively, then," said Ellery, "we've established the existence of a person hitherto unsuspected—Ann Bloomer's partner-in-crime, the person she referred to

when she boasted that she *and some one else* had planned the attacks on Kerrie.

"Now Beau told Ann he was marrying Kerrie, that he was taking Kerrie to the *Villanoy*; he even promised Ann he would leave Kerrie alone for the night, as he did —although for reasons of his own.

"Ann Bloomer must have informed her partner; how else could this partner have known? So the partner went to the *Villanoy* soon after Beau and Kerrie checked in, found out what room they had engaged, and then sent the hotel a wire reserving Room 1726. I've investigated that wire, incidentally, and it was telephoned to Western Union from a pay-station—no doubt from a booth in or near the *Villanoy*. Of course, this covered the trail.

"Room 1726 being reserved, this mysterious partner then let himself in with a passkey of some sort, and awaited developments. The partner heard Ann's arrival, heard the entire conversation through the open windows, heard Ann's injudicious boast about the partnership of the attacks on Kerrie, and shot Ann before she could reveal the identity of her partner—himself. Then he tossed Kerrie's own revolver through the windows into 1724. Ann herself had said she and her partner had planned the attacks on Kerrie, so it's not strange that this partner had possession of Kerrie's stolen .22."

The old man was silent.

"I imagine," continued Ellery gravely, "that this partner had three motives for killing Ann Bloomer.

"Remember Ann's character, her unscrupulousness, her known record for loose living on the Continent, her self-incriminating confession of attempts to murder Kerrie. And think of the situation existing between her and her partner. With the proofs of identity presented by her and accepted by the executor-trustees of the estate and by the Surrogate, she found herself in the driver's seat.

"She no longer needed a partner—any partner; he had

served his purpose by giving her the Margo-Cole proofs of identity. She could back down on her bargain with this partner without danger to herself—that is, she could refuse to share the profits with the partner who supplied her with the means of making those profits. And what could this partner do about it?—nothing. To expose the woman as an impostor meant exposing and incriminating himself.

"So the partner lost his share of the loot without a comeback. Natural motive on his part? Revenge.

"Second motive: Fear. Ann Bloomer, a woman with a police record, might be unmasked as an impostor at any time, through the merest mischance. If caught, she would certainly involve her silent and invisible partner. As a matter of fact, when Ann boasted to Kerrie in the hotel room that she and somebody else had planned the murderous attacks, and actually stated: 'I and somebody else. I and—' . . . the partner shot her dead instantly. He couldn't afford to have her reveal his identity. Dead men don't bite. Nor, for that matter, do dead women."

Ellery paused, and Beau said: "You said there were three motives. What's the third?"

"That," replied Mr. Queen, "can wait. Aren't two sufficient?"

"Why couldn't *Kerrie* have been the Bloomer woman's partner?" demanded the Inspector. "Forgetting all this business of Rooom 1726 and Kerrie's story."

"Come, come, Dad, you're confused. Kerrie's the last person on earth who could have been Ann's partner-in-crime. If Kerrie originally possessed the proofs of Margo Cole's identity—a vast improbability by itself—whether the real Margo Cole were alive or dead, would Kerrie have engineered the imposture and thereby set up a *competing* heiress? For if the real Margo didn't come forward, Kerrie would have had the income from the entire estate, not half. No, Dad, Kerrie didn't need a partner."

Inspector Queen nibbled the end of his mustache. "Where's the proof of all this?"

"We're not ready to submit proof."

"The circumstantial case against the girl is too strong, Ellery. Even if I were convinced, there's Sampson. The D.A. simply can't drop these charges without proof."

Beau winked at Ellery and took him aside. They conferred *sotto voce* for some time.

Ellery looked worried. But he finally nodded and said to his father: "All right. You'll have your proof. I'm going to let Beau run this show, because it's fundamentally his inspiration."

"Let me handle this," said Beau eagerly, "and you'll have your killer in twenty-four hours—yes, and a whole lot more besides!"

"It shouldn't take more than twenty-four hours," agreed Mr. Queen. "Yes, I think we can promise that."

The Inspector hesitated. Then he threw up his hands. "All right. What do you want me to do?"

XIX. The Cadmean Illusion

At nine o'clock that night the main office of *Ellery Queen, Inc.* was crowded. The shades had been drawn and all the lights were on. On the desk stood some apparatus. A Headquarters expert sat near the apparatus, looking puzzled.

Kerrie was there in charge of a detective and a matron. She and Violet Day sat in a corner. Vi was nervous. Every few moments Kerrie had to lean over and reassure her. At other times Kerrie kept her eyes on Beau with a faith patient, secret, and maternal.

Inspector Queen was there, looking worried; District Attorney Sampson, looking skeptical; Edmund De Carlos, looking the worse for drink; Goossens, representing

the estate and looking unhappy. A stranger with a kit waited in Beau's laboratory-darkroom.

Beau was jumpy. Mr. Queen took him aside. "You're skittering. Look confident, you big ape. You're acting more like an expectant father than anything else of a human nature."

"It's the look in Kerrie's eye," groaned Beau. "You suppose it's going to turn out okay? You're sure you got that message straight?"

"Captain Angus and the Coast operative landed at Newark Airport all right, I tell you," said Ellery impatiently. "They're coming here under police escort and all the trimmings. Get going, will you?"

"I'm all atwitter," said Beau with a feeble grin.

"And you show it! The whole secret of this business is to act Jovian. You're Messiah. You know it all. A temblor couldn't shake your confidence. Go ahead!"

Beau breathed hard. He stepped forward, and Mr. Queen retired to lean against the door to the reception room.

Beau described in rapid detail the circumstances of Cadmus Cole's visit to that very office three months before, of how the multimillionaire had engaged Ellery's services in an investigation which "turned out to be the search for Cole heirs after he should die." He described Cole—his baldness, his clean-shaven, sunburnt cheeks, his toothless mouth, the way he had bumped into the door-jamb, the way he had squinted: "He seemed, both to Mr. Queen and myself, very nearsighted."

Beau went on to relate how Cole had left his fountain-pen behind—the pen with which he had sat at that very desk and written out a check for fifteen thousand dollars.

"We sent the pen back to his yacht, *Argonaut*," said Beau, "but before doing so, we took microphotographs of some very unusual markings towards the end of the cap." He took an envelope from his pocket and handed

it to the Headquarters expert seated by the apparatus at the desk. "Dr. Jolliffe, here are those microphotographs. Will you examine them?"

The expert accepted the envelope. "Of course, I've only your word for it—whatever your purpose is, Mr. Rummell—that these photographs are of that pen."

"We can do better than that," put in Mr. Queen suddenly.

"We certainly can," drawled Beau. "We can produce the pen itself!"

And he stepped before Edmund De Carlos, whipped back the man's coat, plucked a fountain-pen from his vest-pocket—the pen which De Carlos had employed to write out the check for twenty-five thousand dollars and tendered *Ellery Queen, Inc.* as a bribe—and handed the fat black gold-trimmed pen to the expert with an air of triumph.

De Carlos was startled. "I don't see—"

"Dr. Jolliffe," said Beau, "will you please examine this pen under the 'scope and compare its markings with those on the microphotographs?"

The expert went to work. When he looked up he said: "The markings on this pen and the markings on these photographs are identical."

"Then you'd say the microphotographs," demanded Beau, "are of this pen?"

"Unquestionably."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Rummell," remarked the District Attorney, "that I don't get the point."

"You will, Oscar," said Beau grimly. "Just bear in mind that this man De Carlos had in his possession, when he entered this office tonight, a fountain-pen which was in the possession of Cadmus Cole three months ago."

District Attorney Sampson looked bewildered. "I still—"

Beau stood squarely before De Carlos. "What did you say your name was?"

De Carlos stared at him. "Why—Edmund De Carlos, of course. Of all the ridiculous questions—"

"You're a cock-eyed liar," said Beau. "*Your name is Cadmus Cole!*"

The bearded man leaped to his feet. "You're insane!"

He snorted, half-turned away. Beau caught his arm, and the man cried out.

"You're Cadmus Cole," said Beau softly, "—nose for nose, eyes for eyes, mouth for mouth, chin for chin; in fact, feature for feature. And we can prove it!"

"Prove it?" The man licked his lips.

"If you'll be kind enough to remove your beard, your wig, your glasses, and your false teeth, Queen and I will make a formal identification of you as Cadmus Cole."

"Ridiculous! Never heard such nonsense. Inspector, you can't—Mr. District Attorney, I stand on my rights as—"

"One moment," snapped the Inspector. He conferred with District Attorney Sampson inaudibly. Then he came forward and said abruptly to Beau: "You claim this man is really Cole, and that you and Ellery can identify him as such?"

"That's our story," said Beau, "and he's stuck with it."

The Inspector glanced at Ellery, who nodded slowly.

"Then I'm sorry, Mr. De Carlos, or Mr. Cole, or whoever you are," said Inspector Queen in a grim voice, "but you'll have to submit to an identification test."

He reached up himself and pulled at the man's hair, and was obviously flabbergasted when the hair came off the man's head in one piece. Goossens sat open-mouthed, completely and genuinely astonished. Kerrie and Vi were gaping, too.

"Take out your teeth!"

Sullenly, the man complied.

"Now your glasses."

The man did so, and remained blinking and squinting in the harsh glare of the office lights.

"How about this beard?" demanded the Inspector of Beau. "Is that a phony, too?"

"No, it's on the level," replied Beau with a grin. "He must have grown it between the time he visited us and the time he showed up in New York again after that dramatic little business of his own 'death at sea.'"

"Got a razor?" snapped Inspector Queen.

"Better. A barber." And Beau went into the laboratory. He emerged with the stranger who was carrying the kit. "Okay, Dominick," said Beau, smiling broadly. "Once over—but good! *Kapeesh?*"

The detective who accompanied Kerrie came forward on a sign from the Inspector; but the bearded man sat down voluntarily in his chair and folded his arms, blinking and squinting furiously.

The barber shaved him, and his audience watched the operation with a fascinated expectancy, Beau tense behind the chair, as if he expected the bearded man to leap from the chair and try to escape. But the man sat quietly.

During the shaving of the beard, Mr. Queen went into the reception room, shutting the communicating door carefully. After a moment he returned and took Beau aside.

"They're here," he whispered.

"Who?"

"Captain Angus and the Coast man."

"Oh, baby! Keep 'em out there, El, till I find the psychological moment. Then—socko!"

When the beard was gone and the barber dismissed, Beau and Ellery surveyed that denuded, working face in silence. The sunken cheeks, the squinty eyes, the bald head . . .

"Well?" said Inspector Queen. "Is this the same man who called on you here three months ago?"

"That's Cadmus Cole," said Beau.

"Ellery?"

"The same man," nodded Mr. Queen.

"Frame-up!" mumbled the shaven man, drooling. "It's a frame-up! I'm De Carlos! I'm De Carlos!"

"Why, the bug even talks the same way," grinned Beau, "now that his plate's missing. Doesn't he, Ellery?"

"Identically."

"Of course," said District Attorney Sampson, "again we have only the word of you gentlemen."

"Not at all," retorted Beau. "The day Cole called on us in this office I listened in on the conversation from my office next door. We've developed a system in this agency, Your Worship. We like to keep complete records of our wackier clients. That's why we photographed the pen. That's why," he said, taking a large photograph from his pocket, "I took a candid-camera shot of our friend here through a little convenient arrangement in the wall, and later enlarged it. How's this?"

They crowded around the enlargement, staring from the photograph to the man in the chair.

"No doubt about it," snapped the Inspector. "Except for that fringe of gray on his skull now, it's the same man. I guess your game's up, Cole!"

"I'm *not* Cole!" screamed the man. "I'm Edmund De Carlos! I can furnish a hundred proofs I'm Edmund De Carlos!"

"Yeah?" drawled Beau. He waved at Ellery. "I now retire in favor of my eminent colleague, that noted orator, Mr. Ellery Queen."

Mr. Queen stepped forward. "We've proved you're Cole in three ways," he said to the bald man. "By your possession of Cole's identified fountain-pen, by our per-

sonal identification of you as the man who called on us three months ago, and—for legal evidence—by this candid-camera photograph.

"We're in a position to present a fourth proof so damning, Mr. Cole, you may pass judgment on it yourself."

"The name," spat the bald man, "is De Carlos!"

Mr. Queen shrugged and took a photostat from the desk. "This photostat shows the cancelled voucher of a check for fifteen thousand dollars written out by Cadmus Cole in this office the afternoon he engaged our services. It's gone through the Clearing House, as you see.

"Now how can we be sure the signature on this check," he continued, "is genuinely that of Cadmus Cole? There are three ways to authenticate it. First, he wrote it out himself under the eyes of Mr. Rummell and me. Second, and much more conclusive, *Cole's bank authenticated on demand, and later honored, the check exhibiting this signature.* Third, we may compare the signature on this check with the signature on Cadmus Cole's will—the will-signature, incidentally, which was subjected to the most searching scrutiny by the Surrogate, who ultimately probated the will. Mr. Goossens, have you brought the photostat of the Cole will-signature, as I requested?"

The attorney hastily removed a photostat from his brief-case and handed it to Ellery.

"Yes," said Mr. Queen with satisfaction, "the similarity even to a layman's eye is unmistakable. Will you satisfy yourselves?"

The District Attorney and Inspector Queen compared the check-signature and the will-signature.

The Inspector nodded, and Sampson said: "We'd have to have expert opinion, of course, but I admit they look identical."

"And in the face of other evidence, we may take the

assumption to be a fact. In other words, the man who wrote out this check in our office three months ago must have been Cadmus Cole. Do you agree?"

They nodded.

Mr. Queen laid down the Cole check-photostat and picked up two other photostats. "These are of a twenty-five thousand dollar check written out the other night, also in this office, also before our eyes, by this gentleman who has been calling himself Edmund De Carlos. I have the original in my possession; it has not been deposited for, at the moment, immaterial reasons." Mr. Queen handed one of the De Carlos-check photostats to the sunburnt man. "Do you deny the signature on this check to be yours?"

"I'm neither denying nor affirming," mumbled the man.

"No matter; Rummell and I will swear to it, and there must be hundreds of specimens of your handwriting extant since you took up residence in the Tarrytown estate of Cadmus Cole.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," continued Mr. Queen, taking back the photostat, "there exists a strange and exhilarating kinship between the names Cadmus Cole and Edmund De Carlos. Purely a coincidence, of course, but it makes for an attractive little demonstration.

"Note that in the name 'Edmund De Carlos' we have every letter of the alphabet which occurs in the name 'Cadmus Cole' and which would be required in a reconstruction of the name 'Cadmus Cole'! Even, observe, to the capital or initial—C. This makes it possible for us to perform an educational experiment.

"I'm going to take these two photostats of the check written out by Mr. De Carlos, which contains his full signature in his own handwriting, and cut up the De Carlos signature into its components.

"Then I shall rearrange these and paste them down on another sheet of paper, in such an order that they

will spell out the name 'Cadmus Cole.' In this way we'll have the name 'Cadmus Cole' written in Edmund De Carlos's handwriting."

With scissors and pastepot Mr. Queen went to work.

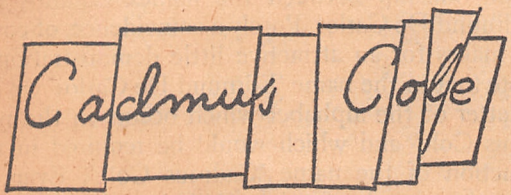
When he was finished he observed: "We are now in a position to cap our little climax. Here is Cadmus Cole's authentic signature, taken from the cancelled check-voucher:

Cadmus Cole

Here is Edmund De Carlos's authentic signature, taken from the original check he wrote out to the order of *Ellery Queen, Inc.*:

Edmund De Carlos

And here is a manufactured 'Cadmus Cole' signature—synthesized from two photostats of Edmund De Carlos's signature:



Compare all three, please."

And while they were examining his three exhibits, Mr. Queen added: "As a matter of fact, while this little demonstration piques, in a sense it was unnecessary. You had merely to compare De Carlos' signature on the Cole will—as witness—with Cole's signature—as testator—to see that they were written by the same hand.

I've never seen the will before tonight, but I'm surprised you didn't notice the similarity, Mr. Goossens."

"I'm surprised myself," muttered Goossens, staring at the exhibits. "And I imagine the Surrogate will be, too!"

The Inspector straightened up. "That's enough for me. You're Cole, Mister, and there's no question about *that*."

District Attorney Sampson looked uneasy. "It certainly appears that way."

"Why did you pretend to be dead?" demanded the Inspector of the silent man in the chair. "What happened to the real De Carlos? What's behind this mesquerade, Cole? With the murder of Margo Cole's impostor hanging over your head, you've got some mighty tall explaining to do!"

The man in the chair looked about wildly. "But I'm not Cole!" he cried in his mumbly voice. "How many times do I have to tell you that?"

He thrust his false teeth back into his mouth and clapped his glasses on his eyes; and this seemed to give him new strength, for he bounded from the chair and began to dance up and down. "I'm Edmund De Carlos! Why, there's one man that's known me for years and years—he could prove in a second who I am, because he knew Cole well, too!"

"And who might that be?" asked Beau with friendliness.

"Angus, Captain of Cole's yacht *Argonaut!* Just give me a little time, Inspector, a little time to locate Captain Angus! He'll tell you who I am! He'll—"

"What would you say," asked Beau jovially, "if I told you that your Captain Angus is in the next room, waiting to identify you as Cole?"

The sunburnt man's mouth fell open.

"We've been looking for him," continued Beau crisply, "ever since you had yourself reported dead, Cole.

One of our operatives finally located him. He'd retired from active service after you docked at Santiago de Cuba and, having no dependents, he decided to take a busman's holiday. He's been on a round-the-world cruise as a passenger. His ship docked in Frisco yesterday, my operative flew him here and—" said Beau as Ellery opened the reception-room door and beckoned—"here he is!"

A tall lean man, wearing a gray suit and carrying a topcoat and a fedora hat, marched in between the San Francisco detective and Sergeant Velie.

Captain Angus was blackened from years of exposure to the ocean sun. His eyes under heavy black brows were a frosty blue-green, the color of icebergs just below the water-line; and he carried himself with an imperious assurance, as if he were accustomed to command and receive obedience.

He paused just inside the office and looked about.

"Captain Angus?" said Beau cheerfully, stepping forward. "I'm Rummell; this is Ellery Queen, my partner; and those two worried-looking gentlemen over there are Inspector Queen of the Homicide Squad and District Attorney Sampson of New York County."

The tall man nodded. "Quite a party," he observed dryly, in a resonant bass voice. "Is this all for me, Mr. Rummell?"

"Captain Angus, I want to ask you just one question." Beau stepped aside and pointed at the medium-sized, sunburnt, bald-headed man in the center of the room. "Who is that man?"

Captain Angus looked puzzled. He glanced from the bald man to the others and then back to the bald man. "I don't understand. Who should he be?"

"That's what we're asking you, Captain."

The captain grinned and said: "Why, that's Mr. De Carlos. Mr. Edmund De Carlos."

Beau choked, swallowed, spluttered. Then he cried: "De Carlos? Look again! Isn't he Cadmus Cole?"

"Mr. Cole?" Captain Angus threw back his head and guffawed. "I should say not! Mr. Cole is dead."

"Mr. Cole—is—dead?" repeated Mr. Ellery Queen, seeming to find difficulty with the English language.

"Of course! He died aboard the *Argonaut* three months ago. I fixed the shroud around his body with my own hands, sir—old-fashioned canvas, all shipshape, the way we used to do it in sail."

Beau roared: "It's a plant, a frame-up! He's been bribed to say that! You'd better tie the can on him, too, Pop!"

"Just a moment." The tall man lost his geniality, and his tone of voice brought about a sudden silence. "Do I understand you to say I'm mixed up in something crooked, Mister?"

"You heard me," snarled Beau.

"Well, you're a loud-sounding pup," said the Captain softly, "and I'd like nothing better than to thrash you for that, but the fact is I can prove my statement, because I know where at least five members of the crew are, and they'll bear me out to a man. There wasn't anything funny about Mr. Cole's death—he died just as I reported it by radio to *White Lady*."

"Give it to him properly, Captain," said De Carlos in a vicious tone.

"Besides, this gentleman couldn't be Mr. Cole. Mr. Cole was a little taller than Mr. De Carlos, thinner, and his eyes were of a different color. Mr. De Carlos is near-sighted, has to wear glasses all the time; Mr. Cole had the best eyesight I ever knew a man of his age to have—right down to the end; never wore glasses in his life. He was completely bald; Mr. De Carlos has a fringe. He didn't have teeth, that's true, just as Mr. De Carlos hasn't; but then Mr. Cole never wore a plate—the inside of his mouth was sensitive, he used to

say; couldn't stand the feeling of a plate at all. He was a vegetarian, anyway, and didn't need false teeth."

In the corner, forgotten, sat Kerrie; and over her face came an expression of hopelessness.

"And that isn't all," continued the Captain, with a quiet satisfaction at the sight of Beau's consternation. "Mr. Cole had severe arthritis in both hands—*arthritis deformans*, I think it's called. Had it long as I knew him. He once told me he'd got it all of a sudden 'way back in '19 or '20, I don't remember which. Why, his hands were so badly crippled they hardly looked human! All knotted up and discolored. You'd spot 'em in a second. But look at Mr. De Carlos's hands; they're normal in shape and color. Mr. Cole couldn't so much as hold up a pair o' telescopic glasses with either hand. He couldn't even eat by himself, because he couldn't hold a knife or fork. The steward's assistant had to feed him, like a baby."

Beau began to say something in a strangled voice, but the Inspector put up his hand.

"Have you any proof, Captain, that what you say is true?"

Captain Angus smiled. He drew an envelope bulging with snapshots from his breast pocket and threw it on the desk. "I thought these might come in handy," he said. "I'm sort of a camera bug."

The District Attorney seized the envelope and began to look through the photographs. There were dozens of them, large snapshots taken with a sharp, excellent lens.

In many De Carlos appeared beside another man, taller, thinner than De Carlos, completely bald, with twisted and crippled hands. All the photographs had been taken on shipboard, as the backgrounds indicated.

"*That*," said Captain Angus with a sly look at Beau, "was Cadmus Cole."

Ellery grabbed the photographs. Beau took one look

and then, the back of his neck furnace-red, stalked off to a corner . . . the corner opposite the one where Kerrie sat.

"That's enough for me," snapped the Inspector. He made a sign to the detective and matron. Beau looked frightened—the first time Mr. Queen had ever seen such a look on his partner's face. His shoulders sagging, he averted his eyes.

With Vi clinging to her, Kerrie was marched away, and soon only Captain Angus, the San Francisco man De Carlos, Beau, and Ellery were left.

"You'll excuse me, too," said Edmund De Carlos, slapping his wig on his skull. "Captain, you're my guest while in New York—don't forget." He stamped to the door. Then he turned and with a malevolent grin said: "And thank you, gentlemen, for the shave."

But Beau sprang like a cat, forestalling him. "No, you don't," he snarled. "You stay!"

He turned, surprised. Mr. Queen had suddenly begun to laugh. He laughed so hard that he doubled up, clutching his abdomen as he sank into the swivel-chair behind his desk.

PART SIX

XX. Mr. Queen Explains a Logical Fallacy

"You're both mad," exclaimed Mr. Edmund De Carlos. "Get out of my way."

"What?" said Beau blankly, watching Ellery.

"If you don't let me go, I'll have you arrested!"

Captain Angus scraped his lean jaws, concealing a smile. "This looks like a private fight. So if you gentlemen will excuse me—"

Mr. Queen wiped his streaming eyes. "Please be good

enough to remain, Captain," he gasped. He began to laugh again.

"What's so funny about what?" growled Beau. "Anybody would think what happened here tonight's a joke!"

"It is. Oh, it is, Beau. A great joke, and it's on me." Mr. Queen sighed and wiped his eyes once more. "I'd appreciate your remaining too, Mr. De Carlos."

"I don't see why I should!"

"Because I ask you to," said Mr. Queen, smiling. He stared at De Carlos. De Carlos clicked his plate agitatedly. "Sit down, gentlemen, sit down. There's no reason why we shouldn't discuss this fiasco like civilized people. Drink?"

Captain Angus brightened. "Now, that's different."

Ellery produced a fresh bottle of Scotch and several glasses from a desk-drawer. The Captain flung his coat and hat aside, drew up a chair, and accepted a glass companionably.

"You, too, Mr. De Carlos," said Mr. Queen. "Oh, forget it, man! Mistakes will happen in the best-regulated detective agencies."

He smiled so disarmingly, and the bottle gave off such a warmly inviting glow under the lamps, that Mr. De Carlos, although surlily, sat down and accepted a glass, too.

"Beau?"

"Don't I look as if I could use one?" Beau asked disgustedly.

"On that basis, you ought to appropriate the bottle. Gentlemen, a toast! To Logic—never sell her short!" Mr. Queen drank and then beamed at them all.

"Where do we go from here?" grunted Beau. "There's Kerrie back in stir, and we're as far from an answer as we ever were."

"Not quite." Mr. Queen leaned back and surveyed them with bright eyes. "Not quite, Beau. This little

experience has taught me a lesson: Always trust the dictates of pure reason. The little voice warned me, and I was very rude. Ignored him. Completely. Shame on me."

De Carlos suddenly helped himself to another glassful, which he tossed down with a jerk.

"I told you, Beau," continued Mr. Queen, his eyes on De Carlos, "that there was one discrepancy in the array of facts at our disposal which bothered me. But the identification of poor old De Carlos here as Cadmus Cole seemed so indisputable that it made me commit the unforgivable sin . . . the sanctioning of a showdown before the case was complete to the last comma. It embarrassed Mr. De Carlos, it embarrassed me, and as for Inspector Queen, my doting parent," he grimaced, "wait until he gets me alone within the four walls of our loving home. Did you see his expression as he left?"

"I saw it," groaned Beau. "But, Ellery, how in God's name could we have been wrong? I still don't see—"

"We based our conclusion that De Carlos was really Cole on three points: his possession of Cole's fountain-pen; his perfect resemblance to the man who visited us in this office three months ago, once you eliminated the false teeth, wig, glasses, and beard; and the crusher—the incontrovertible fact that the handwriting of both persons was identical."

"Do you really need me?" muttered De Carlos. "I'd prefer—"

"Another drink, Mr. De Carlos?" asked Mr. Queen, glancing at him; and De Carlos reached quickly for the bottle again. "Now the first point, the fountain-pen, was the least decisive of the three . . . a leading, or build-up, point. And yet it was in this point that the discrepancy lay."

"What discrepancy?" howled Beau.

"Why, the fact that those peculiar markings on the

cap of the pen could only have been made by *teeth*. Of course, you saw that, Beau? Those arced patterns of dents? Those deep nicks in the hard rubber composition? It was obvious that the markings were impressed into the cap by some one who was in the habit of *chewing on the end of his fountain-pen*."

"Why, sure," said Beau. "So what?"

"The man who used the pen that day in our office was presumably the owner of the pen, and the owner of the pen was unquestionably in the habit of chewing on it. And yet the man who used the pen that day, the man who called himself Cadmus Cole, didn't have a tooth in his mouth!

"And that was the discrepancy, for I asked myself, not once but dozens of times, and finally wound up by ignoring the question: *How can a toothless man make teethmarks on the cap of a fountain-pen?*"

Captain Angus poured another drink for himself; but at the sight of De Carlos's face he suddenly offered the glass to the bald man. De Carlos accepted it and drank with a sort of desperation; and the Captain's cold eyes grew colder.

"But De Carlos wears false teeth," protested Beau. "Couldn't those marks have been made by false teeth as well as by real teeth?"

"As a matter of fact," retorted Mr. Queen, "they couldn't have been—not by Mr. De Carlos's false teeth, at any rate."

"Why not?"

"Skip it. Let's examine, or rather re-examine, the second point: our identification of De Carlos as Cole on the basis of exact facial and physical similarity."

"But we were wrong. The Captain has identified De Carlos as De Carlos, not as Cole."

"That's right." nodded the Captain. "He *is* De Carlos."

"I *am* De Carlos," said De Carlos defiantly, glaring about.

"You *are* De Carlos," said Mr. Queen in a soft tone. "Exactly. But there is still no doubt, Mr. De Carlos, that the man who visited us three months ago looked exactly like you. Consequently, I must revise our former conclusion. We said that since Cole came that day, and since you look exactly like Cole, then you must *be* Cole. Now I say that since you are De Carlos, and since the man who visited us three months ago looked exactly like De Carlos, then the man who visited us three months ago *was* De Carlos!"

"You mean," boomed Captain Angus, "that De Carlos came here three months ago and posed as Mr. Cole?"

"Precisely."

"I'll be damned," gasped Beau.

"Let's rather stick to the point," murmured Mr. Queen. "That's the revised conclusion, gentlemen, and it's the correct conclusion. It also clears up another point that troubled me.

"The man who introduced himself to us as Cadmus Cole came to hire our services. When I asked him, not unreasonably, what we had been hired for, he refused to say.

"Later we discovered that we had been engaged for the simplest possible task—merely to locate a couple of missing heirs. That only deepened the mystery. Why did Cole originally refuse to tell us what he was hiring us for, when it was merely to find two missing heirs?

"But now," grinned Mr. Queen, "you grasp the confirmation of my thesis. Cole made a mystery of why he was hiring us *because he didn't know why himself!* But how could Cole not know? Only in one way: if he wasn't Cole, but some one else!"

De Carlos took still another drink with trembling fingers. His cheeks, where the beard had just been

shaven, were deathly pale; his cheekbones and nose, however, were bright red.

"So he was a crook after all," remarked Captain Angus reflectively. "I always suspected it. Sneaky sort. Couldn't look you in the eye." He roared suddenly at De Carlos: "What did you have up your sleeve that time, you black shark?"

"I think I can guess," said Mr. Queen gently. "The secret of his Cole impersonation three months ago lies in his character. He can carry out orders admirably. He can execute a plan concocted by some one else with remarkable efficiency. But, like most men who are trained to unquestioning obedience, he came a cropper when he pushed out on his own. Isn't that so, Mr. De Carlos?

"You knew Cole had made out his will, that he was suffering from heart disease. Cole may even have told you that he felt he had only a short time to live and would probably not return from the last West Indian cruise alive. So he sent you into town to deliver his sealed will to Goossens, with orders to stop in at our office as well and engage Ellery Queen for an *unstated* investigation. That worried you, Mr. De Carlos. What investigation? But you were too discreet to ask Cole. You were worried and you didn't ask Cole for the same reason: you had prepared a little scheme of your own. And that scheme necessitated impersonating your employer, didn't it?"

De Carlos burst out: "You know that, but you don't know why! The Captain could tell you—he knew Cole as well as I did. He was a devil, a—a snake, that man!"

"He had his moments," admitted Captain Angus with a grim nod.

"For years before his death," said De Carlos hoarsely, "he amused himself with me. He'd tell me he knew why I was sticking to him so faithfully—why I kept living that ghastly living death at sea." His face was a uni-

form mauve now, suffused with passion. "He'd say it was because I expected to come into his fortune when he died. And then he'd laugh and say he was going to leave me a lot of money. And then again he'd seem to change his mind and say he wouldn't leave me a cent. He kept me on a hook like that for years, playing me like a fish!"

Mr. Queen glanced inquiringly at Captain Angus, and the Captain nodded. "It's true. I'll give him that."

"Things got worse between us," cried De Carlos. "The last few months he played only one tune—that he'd leave me nothing. I guess he liked to see me try to act indifferent about it, the old devil! When he made out his will—it was the very first document of his I knew nothing about. He had Angus write it out for him. He wouldn't let me stay in the cabin. So I didn't even know what the will said."

"That's so," said the Captain. "Mr. Cole called me in and dictated his will. I wrote it out in longhand and then, when it was corrected to his satisfaction, he had me type it out. He made me burn the handwritten draft, and he was laughing."

"I was frantic," said De Carlos, clasping and unclasping his hands. "I saw all those years, alone with him, taking his orders, knuckling under to him, enduring his bad temper, having to act a part all the time—wasted, all wasted! Because he didn't have me make out the will and even kept me out of the cabin, I was positive he had cut me off without a cent. He even said to me when he handed me the sealed will to take ashore: 'Don't open it, Edmund. Remember! I've enclosed instructions for the lawyer to examine the seal very carefully—to see if it's been tampered with.' And he laughed that ugly barking laugh of his, as if it were a great joke."

"Of course that wasn't true about the instructions,"

said Mr. Queen. "He was toying with you, trying to make you squirm."

De Carlos nodded, seizing the bottle. He drank deeply and set the bottle down with a bang. "That was when I made my plan," he said defiantly. "It wasn't very clear. I was half-crazy. . . . Who knew Cole personally? I said to myself. Nobody but Angus and I and the crew had seen him for eighteen years. If Cole died at sea and Angus was willing to throw in with me, why, we could buy off the crew and the two of us could come back and say it was *De Carlos* who died and was buried at sea. Because I'd take over the role of Cole! Nobody would be the wiser, and Angus and I would divide something like fifty million dollars."

He stopped short, frightened by Captain Angus's expression. The seaman seized De Carlos by the collar and said in a low voice: "You dirty rascal. Tell these men this is the first I've ever heard of that thieving plan—tell 'em, or I'll make you wish you'd never been born!"

"No, no, I didn't mean to imply—" began De Carlos hurriedly. "Mr. Queen, Mr. Rummell, I assure you . . . the Captain didn't have the faintest idea of what I had in mind. I hadn't spoken to him about it at all!"

"That's better," scowled the Captain, and he sat down again and helped himself quietly to another drink.

"I see," murmured Mr. Queen. "So that's why you impersonated Cole—shaved the gray fringe off your skull, removed your glasses, your dental plate. Made up that way, you corresponded roughly to Cole. Later, when you expected to return, after Cole died at sea, with the story that *De Carlos* had died, you'd pass yourself off as Cole and there would be three people at least prepared to swear in all sincerity that you were Cole—the three people you had visited ashore in the guise of Cole: Goossens, Rummell, and myself. Gran-

diose in conception, Mr. De Carlos, but a little optimistic, wasn't it?"

"I realized that later," muttered De Carlos with a weak, wry smile. "Anyway, when I got back to the yacht Cole blew up my whole scheme himself without realizing it. He showed me a carbon copy of the will I'd just delivered to Goossens—and I saw that in the will, after all, he'd left me a million dollars. A million! I was so relieved I abandoned my—my plan."

"But you still weren't out of the woods," remarked Mr. Queen. "Because Goossens and Rummell and I had seen you bald, toothless, clean-shaven, and without glasses—really quite denuded, Mr. De Carlos—at the time you passed yourself off as Cole. Obviously, in abandoning your plan, you had to plan to present yourself in our society looking entirely different! You had to get yourself a wig—in Cuba, was it?—put back your plate and glasses, and of course it was immediately after Cole told you he had left you a million that you began to grow a beard."

"Wait a minute." Beau frowned. "There's one thing I don't get—that handwriting business. This worm *did* write out a check, signing Cole's name to it, and the bank *did* pass it. How come? Even the signature on the will—"

"Ah," said Mr. Queen, "that was the beautiful part of it—the part that was so slick and pat that upon it we based a wholly erroneous theory. That handwriting business was the crux of your illusion, wasn't it, De Carlos? It made the whole fantastic project possible. Who would dream that the man who visited us was not Cole when we saw him sign Cole's name before our eyes and the check went through the bank without a hitch?

"But Captain Angus has already given us the answer to that." De Carlos slumped in his seat, drunk and sullen. "Cole's arthritis! *Arthritis deformans* is a crip-

pling disease of the joints for which, once it has fully developed—and it develops very quickly—there's no known cure. It's accompanied by a great deal of pain—"

"Pain?" The Captain made a face. "Mr. Cole used to go near crazy with it. He took from sixty to a hundred and twenty grains of aspirin a day for relief as long as I knew him. I used to tell him he ought to leave the sea, because the damp air only made the pain worse, but I guess he was too sensitive about his crippled hands to go back to a landsman's society."

Ellery nodded. "And the Captain said his hands were so badly misshapen that he had to be fed—couldn't even handle a knife and fork. Obviously, then, he couldn't *write*, either.

"But if he couldn't write, that was the answer to the handwriting problem. Cole was an immensely wealthy man and, even though he had retired, his far-flung holdings must have necessitated an occasional signature on a legal paper. And of course there was the problem of signing checks. He couldn't carry his fortune about with him in cash. Solution? Good Man Friday, who'd been with him for more than twenty-five years.

"Certainly at the time arthritis struck him—which must have been just before he made his post-War killing in Wall Street—De Carlos had been Cole's trusted lieutenant long enough to serve as a useful pair of hands in place of the hands Cole found useless.

"So he had De Carlos begin signing the name 'Cadmus Cole' to everything, including checks. To save tedious explanation, and because he was sensitive about his deformity, as Captain Angus has indicated, he wished to keep his condition a secret. He had you open new accounts in different banks, didn't he, De Carlos? So that from the beginning of his monastic existence, his name in your handwriting wasn't questioned!"

"You mean to say," demanded Captain Angus, "that De Carlos didn't tell you gentlemen that?"

"Overlooked it," said Beau dryly.

"But I don't see— Why, he signed Cole's will for the old gentleman! He had to, because Mr. Cole couldn't even hold a pen, as Mr. Queen says. After I typed out the will, I signed as witness and took the will to the radio operator's cubby, where Sparks signed, too. Then I brought the will back to Mr. Cole's cabin, and he sent for De Carlos, and De Carlos signed Mr. Cole's name, I suppose, after I left. I noticed while I was there," the Captain chuckled, "that Mr. Cole didn't let De Carlos see what was in the will. Having his little joke to the last."

"Just the same," retorted Beau, "it seems to me for a smart hombre Cole was taking one hell of a chance letting this De Carlos potato sign his checks!"

"Not really," said Ellery. "I imagine Cole kept a close watch on you, didn't he, De Carlos? Probably supervised the accounts, and then you were at sea practically all the time, where you couldn't get into mischief even if you wanted to."

"Hold!" said Beau. "Hold. There's another thing. This monkey tried to buy us off. Offered us twenty-five grand to quit poking our noses into the case. Why?"

"Excellent question," agreed Mr. Queen. "Why?" De Carlos squirmed. "Then I'll tell you. Because you'd lost most of Cole's legacy by gambling, ill-advised market speculation, night-clubbing, the cutey route, general all-around helling—it didn't take you long to run through what was left of the million after taxes were deducted, did it, De Carlos? And so there you were, almost broke, and the golden goose lying fathoms under. You conceived another brilliant idea."

"You're the devil himself," said De Carlos thickly.

"Please," protested Mr. Queen. "Is that fair to the Old 'Bub? With the woman who posed as Margo Cole dead, and with Kerrie Shawn, the other heiress, arrested and—you fervently hoped—slated for conviction and

execution, that left the huge principal of the Cole estate free of heirs and completely in the hands of its trustees. And who were they? Goossens and your worthy self! Does that suggest anything, Mr. De Carlos?"

Beau stared. "Don't tell me Mr. Smart was going to make another deal to milk the estate—with Goossens, this time!"

"The firm of *Ellery Queen, Inc.* being out of the picture," murmured Mr. Queen, "I daresay that was the general idea. And I've no doubt whatever but that Mr. Goossens is as ignorant this moment, De Carlos, of your second plan as the good Captain here was of your first."

De Carlos struggled to his feet. "You've been very clever, Mis—Mis'er Queen—"

"Incidentally," remarked Mis'er Queen, "let me congratulate you on your forbearance. Of course you knew from the very first that Beau Rummell wasn't Ellery Queen, because you met us both three months ago in our proper identities, when you were pretending to be Cole. But you couldn't unmask us without revealing how you came to know, so you maintained a discreet silence. Truly a Chestertonian situation!"

"What you go—going to do about it?" demanded Mr. De Carlos, leering. "Huh, Mis'er Queen?"

"For the present, nothing."

"Thought sh—so!" said De Carlos contemptuously. "Jus' a lot o' wind. Farewell, gen'l'men. C'm'up an' see me shome—some time!"

He staggered to the door and disappeared.

"I think," said Captain Angus with a certain grimness, "I'll accept his invitation right now. Help you keep an eye on him. I've nothing better to do, anyway."

"That would be fine, Captain," said Mr. Queen heart-

ily. "We can't have him leaving on a sudden jaunt to Indo-China, can we?"

The Captain chuckled, snatched his coat and hat, and hurried after De Carlos.

"Now that we're back where we started from, what are we going to do?" Beau hurled a paper-knife at the opposite wall. It stuck, quivering.

"Good shot," said Mr. Queen abstractedly. "Oh, we're doing it."

"Doing what?"

"Sitting here engaged in a furious cerebration. At least I am, and I suggest you buckle down, too. We haven't much time. We promised Dad a prisoner in twenty-four hours, and that gives us only until late tomorrow morning."

"Quit clowning," growled Beau. He flung himself at the leather sofa and scowled at the ceiling. "Poor Kerrie."

"I'm *not* clowning."

Beau swung his legs to the floor. "You mean you really think there's a chance to crack this hazel-nut?"

"I do."

"But it's more of a mess now than before!"

"Darkest before the dawn, every cloud has a silver lining, and so on," murmured Mr. Queen. "There are heaps of new facts. Heaps. Selection is what we need, Beau— selection, arrangement, and synthesis. Everything's here. I feel it. Don't you?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Rummell rudely. "The only thing I feel is sore. If there were only some one I could punch in the nose! And with Kerrie back in the can, eating her heart out . . ." He seized the bottle of Scotch and said with a glower: "Well, what are you waiting for? Go ahead and think!"

XXI. The Fruits of Cerebration

Mr. Queen made certain preparations for his engagement with ratiocination.

He opened a fresh package of cigarets and lined the twenty white tubules up on the desk before him, so that they resembled the rails of a picket fence. He filled a water goblet with what was left of the Scotch and set it conveniently at his elbow. Mr. Rummell, sizing up the situation, vanished. He returned ten minutes later bearing another quart of Scotch and a tall carton of coffee.

Mr. Queen barely acknowledged this thoughtfulness. He removed his jacket, laid it neatly on a chair, loosened his necktie, and rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

Then, with the goblet in one hand and a cigaret in the other, he seated himself in the swivel-chair, set his feet upon the desk, and began.

Beau lay down on the sofa and thought desperately.

At one-thirty a.m. the silence was riven by a peculiar series of noises. Mr. Queen started out of deep thought. But it was only Mr. Rummell, on the sofa, snoring.

"Beau."

The snores persisted. Mr. Queen rose, filled a glass with coffee, went to the sofa, and nudged Mr. Rummell.

"Huh? What? Well, I was listening—" began Mr. Rummell contentiously, his eyes struggling to open.

"Strange," croaked Mr. Queen. "I wasn't saying anything. Here, drink this coffee."

Beau rumpled his hair, yawning. "Ought to be ashamed of myself. I *am* ashamed of myself. How's it coming?" He drank.

"There are one or two points," observed Mr. Queen, "that still elude me. Otherwise, on *marche*. I beg your

pardon. I always break out in a foreign language at this time of the night. Do you think you can keep awake long enough to answer a few questions?"

"Shoot."

"It's an odd situation," said Mr. Queen, beginning a circumambient patrol of the office. "First time in my experience I've had to rely completely on the senses of another person. Complicates matters. You were in this from the beginning, and I was on the outside trying to look in. I've the feeling that the master-key to this case is hidden in an out-of-the-way place—a chance remark, some innocuous event . . ."

"I'll help all I can," said Beau dispiritedly. "I fell asleep when my limited brain couldn't hold any more. I've shot my bolt, kid. It's up to you now."

Mr. Queen sighed. "I'm duly impressed by the responsibility. Now I'm going over the case from the start. At every point where I omit something that actually happened, or where something occurred which you forgot to mention, sing out. Supply the missing link. I don't care how trivial it is. In fact, the more trivial the better."

"Go ahead."

The inquisition began. Mr. Queen kept it up mercilessly, until Beau's lids drooped again and he had to fight with himself to keep awake.

Suddenly Mr. Queen displayed a ferocious exultancy. He waved Beau back to the sofa and began to race up and down, mumbling to himself excitedly.

"That's it. That's it!" He scurried around the desk and sat down. Seizing a pencil, he began to scribble feverishly, setting down facts in order, like a mathematician working out a problem in calculus. Beau lay, exhausted, on the sofa.

"Beau!"

"Well?" Beau sat up.

"I've got it." And Mr. Queen. having delivered this

epic intelligence with the utmost calm, the stranger for its having been preceded by such fury, set the pencil down and began to tear up his notes. He tore them into tiny fragments, heaped them in an ashtray, and set fire to the heap. He did not speak again until the scraps were ashes.

Beau searched his partner's face anxiously. What he saw there seemed to satisfy him, for he jumped off the sofa and exclaimed: "Damned if I don't think you have! When do I go to work?"

"Instantly." Mr. Queen sat back beaming. "We have a chance, Beau, an excellent chance. You've got to work fast, though. And cautiously."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I know who killed the Bloomer woman. Logically it can be only one person. I've ironed out all the discrepancies, and there can't be the least doubt of the guilt of the person I have in mind."

"Who is it?" asked Beau grimly.

"Wait, wait; don't begrudge me my brief hour of triumph." And Mr. Queen said in a dreamful voice: "Our friend made two mistakes, one of which, I'm afraid, will prove fatal. We can capitalize those mistakes if we jump right in. Any way I look at it— and I've looked at it every way—there are three pieces of evidence which we should be able to produce to make the guilt of Ann Bloomer's murderer stand up in court."

"Three pieces of evidence?" Beau shook his head. "Either I'm a moron and you're a genius, or I'm normally intelligent and you're talking through your hat."

Mr. Queen chuckled. "Two of them are waiting for us—all we have to do is extend our hands at the proper time and they're ours. The third . . ." He rose abruptly. "The third is tough. It's the vital proof, and the hardest to find."

"What's it look like and where is it?"

"I know what it looks like—roughly," said Mr. Queen

with a faint smile. "As for where it is, however, I haven't the foggiest notion."

"Then how did you figure out its existence in the first place?" demanded Beau, exasperated.

"Very simply. It *must* exist. Every consideration of logic cries out its existence. Every fact in the case demands that it exist. It's your job to locate it, and you have until noon tomorrow to do it!"

"I don't know what the devil you're jawing about," said Beau with impatience, "but tell me what it is, and I'm off."

Mr. Queen told him. And as he spoke, Mr. Rummell's black eyes glittered with wonder.

"Holy smoke!" he breathed. "Holy smoke."

Mr. Queen basked in this eloquent atmosphere of admiration.

"Though how in the world you figured it out—"

"Nothing up my sleeve," said Mr. Queen airily. "The little gray cells, as M. Poirot is wont to remark. At any rate, there's no time for explanations now. You've got to burn up the wires, rouse people from their beds—what time it it? three o'clock!—cut through several miles of red tape, grease a number of dry and itching palms, gather a crew of assistants . . . in short, get that evidence by noon!"

Beau grabbed the telephone.

As for Mr. Queen, he stretched out on the sofa with a grunt of pure sensuality and was fast asleep before Beau had finished dialing the first number.

MR. QUEEN awoke to find the sun poking at his eyelids and, to judge from its taste, a piece of old flannel mouldering in his mouth.

He groaned and sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. The office was empty; the litter of glasses and ashes had been cleaned away; and by his wrist-watch it was nine o'clock, so he made the elementary deduction

that Miss Hecuba Penny had reported for the day.

He staggered to the door and peered into the reception room. Miss Penny, as deduced, sat primly at her desk knitting the one hundred and fifteenth hexagon of wool which was to go into her third afghan since becoming an employee of *Ellery Queen, Inc.*

"Morning," croaked Mr. Queen. "See anything of Mr. Rummell?"

"No, but I found this note for you, Mr. Queen. Can I get you your breakfast?"

"The only thing I crave at the moment is a bath, 'Cuba, and I fear I'll have to attend to that myself."

The note, in Beau's powerful scrawl, said: "Do you snore! I'm hot on the track. I'll make the noon deadline or bust. How's the bank account? It's taking an awful shellacking, because this thing is costing a pile of jack! Beau. P.S.—What bank account? B."

Mr. Queen grinned and retired to the laboratory for a wash. With his face freshly scrubbed, he felt better. He also experienced a gentle thrill of anticipation as he sat down to the telephone.

"Inspector Richard Queen? This is an old friend."

"Oh, it's you," said the Inspector's grumpy voice. "Where were you all night?"

"Carousing with the Muses," replied Mr. Queen grandiloquently. "Just an intellectual lecher. . . . Disappointed, eh? Well, I wasn't giving you a chance to crow."

"I'm laughing with tears in my eyes! Sampson and I have been talking the case over all night and— Never mind." The Inspector paused. "What's on your celebrated mind?"

"I sense authoritarian confusion," murmured Mr. Queen, still in the lush vein. "Despite all the fireworks last night—those cerebral Roman candles—you and Sampson can't be so positive now that Kerrie Shawn lied to you. Poor Authority! Well, that's life. How

would you like to attend a lecture this morning, Dad?"

"What, another? I've no time for lectures!"

"I believe," said his son, "you'll find time for this one. The speaker gave a poor performance last night, I'm told, but he guarantees to lay 'em in the aisles today."

"Oh." And the Inspector was silent again. Then he demanded suspiciously: "What have you got this time? Another resurrection from the dead?"

"If you're referring to the late Cadmus Cole, the answer is no. But I should appreciate your cooperation in a reinvestigation of Ann Bloomer's murder on the scene."

"You mean in the *Villanoy*? In 1724?" The Inspector was puzzled. "More phony melodrama?"

"I said the scene," said Ellery gently. "That includes Room 1726, Father. Don't ever forget that."

"All right, including 1726! But both the suite and the single room were gone over with a finecomb. You can't make me believe there's still something there we've overlooked!"

Mr. Queen laughed. "Now look, Dad, don't be obstreperous. Are you going to play ball with *Ellery Queen, Inc.*, or do I have to appeal directly to the Commissioner?"

"You'd do that to your own father, you scoundrel?" chuckled the Inspector suddenly. "Well, all right. But I warn you. If you fizzle this time, Sampson's going to go through with an indictment of Kerrie Shawn."

"If *I* fizzle it!" said Mr. Queen, plainly astonished. "I like that. Who's supposed to be solving this case—the Homicide Squad or a picayune, one-horse outfit? But I feel magnanimous today. The agency to the rescue!"

"Disrespectful, ungrateful—"

"Shall we say eleven-thirty at the *Villanoy*?"

XXII. MR. QUEEN AND THE DRAGON'S TEETH

"THE OLD MAN'S GOT HIS SOUR PUSS ON," WHISPERED Sergeant Velie to Mr. Queen as they stood in the sitting room of 1726 a little before noon watching the silent procession of Mr. Queen's audience.

"You're telling me?" murmured Mr. Queen. "I have to live with that sour puss. . . Ah, Kerrie. How are you feeling this exceptional morning?"

"Terrible, thank you." There were bluish circles under her eyes; her skin was a little gray and taut. "Where's Beau? He hasn't even—"

"Beau," replied Mr. Queen, "is on an assignment, but he should be here any moment now. He's losing a lot of sleep on your account, Kerrie."

"Not as much as I've lost on his; I'll bet," retorted Kerrie. "Is this something—important?"

"To you—all-important," said Ellery cheerfully. "One demonstration, and the nightmare's over for good. Now sit down there, Kerrie, like a good girl, and do nothing at all but listen."

"I—think I'll sit next to Vi. Poor Vi! You'd think, to look at her, that she's the one who's charged with . . . that nasty word."

"That's what friends are for. Ah, Sampson. Worried, as usual. How's the ailing throat?"

"Never mind the state of my health," said the District Attorney testily. "You'd be better thinking of your own! Is this on the level? Have you really got something this time?"

"Why not wait to see? Come in, Captain Angus! None the worse for your last night's experience, apparently, which is more than I can say, Mr. De Carlos, about you. How are you feeling this morning? Yes, yes, I know—merrily we roll along and, suddenly, there's

the hangover. . . . Mr. Goossens! Sorry to trouble you again, but I can assure you this is the last of it. And Inspector Queen. Good morning!"

The Inspector said just one word. "Well?"

"You'll see."

Mr. Queen glanced at his wrist-watch casually. Where the devil was Beau with the evidence? He smiled, cleared his throat, and advanced to the center of the room.

"Yesterday," he began, "Beau Rummell made a certain promise which I seconded. We promised that within twenty-four hours we should turn over to the authorities the murderer of Ann Bloomer, alias Margo Cole. We're ready to keep that promise. The murderer of Ann Bloomer is in this room."

Inspector Queen and District Attorney Sampson stared squarely at Kerrie Shawn. She flushed and looked down at her fingers. Then, defiantly, she stared back at them.

"That person," continued Mr. Queen, "can save a lot of wear and tear on your servant's larynx by surrendering now. I can assure you," he said, glancing pointedly over their heads, "that the ball is over. Will you unmask voluntarily, or shall I have to do it for you?"

Where was Beau?

The Inspector and the District Attorney made an unconscious survey. The objects of their attention were painfully conscious, however. They held their breath until they could hold it no longer; then they expelled it in concert—the innocent with the guilty.

And Inspector Queen and District Attorney Sampson looked troubled, and Mr. Queen went on with a shrug. "Hope," he remarked, "but I assure you—no charity. Very well, you force me to elucidate. And because your crime was a completely mercenary one, and because you insist upon being discovered, as the antique

phrase goes, in the 'full panoply' of your guilt, I promise you there will be no mercy, either."

But again there was only silence.

Where was Beau?

"The case," said Mr. Queen abruptly, "or, rather, the solution of the case, hinges upon three facts. Three facts, and three pieces of evidence.

"The facts first. They are the three characteristics of the killer of Ann Bloomer which I've been able to piece together from an exhaustive analysis of the data at my disposal.

"The first characteristic is really a point of identification. As explained to you last night, Mr. Edmund De Carlos—" here De Carlos choked, and Mr. Queen paused until he had swallowed the obstruction in his throat—"Mr. De Carlos by an oversight left behind him, when he called upon us disguised as Cadmus Cole three months ago, a fountain-pen. This pen was unique in possessing certain identifying marks which distinguished it from all other pens of similar design and manufacture . . . despite the fact that such pens were, and are, sold by the hundreds of thousand the world over.

"Let me explain that statement. The scratches and dents—the entire series of little arced patterns on the cap of the pen—could only have been made by human teeth. Now human teeth are, in their modest way, an eloquent symbol of man: they are invariably imperfect. I'm not referring to dental caries or any other pathological manifestation. I'm referring simply to structure and design. No two sets of teeth, no matter how healthy, are identical. The shape of the arch, the size of the individual teeth, the way they lie in the arch in relation to one another, and so on—these all vary with individuals. Two sets of teeth might appear identical to the layman, but any dentist could show

you dozens of points of difference after the most casual examination.

"It's scarcely necessary to belabor the point. In the old days any one could spot a set of false teeth in a stranger's mouth—the teeth were too *regular*. Unnaturally so. These days dentists hold a mirror up to Nature. They turn out dental plates which fool most laymen. And why are we fooled? Because modern dental plates exhibit teeth not only natural in color but irregularly aligned and imperfectly shaped as well.

"Criminological science has long recognized the value of teeth-marks as clues to identity. Where clear impressions of teeth can be found, they are as incontrovertible evidence as fingerprints. True, the teeth-marks on the cap of the fountain-pen in question are not the impression of a full set of teeth, or even the substantial number of a full set. The marks of, at most, two or three upper teeth and two or three lowers. But even that is sufficient for the careful observer."

They were tightly, watchfully quiet, as if each had a deep personal stake in the least word being uttered by Mr. Queen. He glanced at his watch again.

"I must now confess," he went on with a faint smile, "to have engineered an unquestionably illegal suppression of important evidence. How important I leave you to judge. But I did suppress it when Mr. Rummell and I found it beneath the radiator of Room 1726 only a short time after the murderer of Ann Bloomer fled from it. In short, it was a companion-piece of the fountain-pen—an automatic pencil of the same hard black rubber composition, with similar gold trimming."

Inspector Queen glared at District Attorney Sampson, who glared back, then both glared at Mr. Queen.

The Inspector rose and roared: "You found what?"

"I'll take my punishment later, please," said Mr. Queen. "Meanwhile, may I continue? The facts were these: The room had been prepared for occupancy only

a short time before, and was spotless. The pencil had fallen between the radiator and the window and had rolled under the radiator. Since the murderer stood at the window before and during the firing of the murder-weapon, it was obvious that the pencil had been dropped by that worthy accidentally during or directly preceding the commission of the crime. Incidentally, Dad, the ashes, burnt matchstick, and cigaret butt were mine. I left them for you—I had to leave something in lieu of the pencil, didn't I?"

Inspector Queen sank back, purple.

Mr. Queen continued in haste: "Examination of the pencil indicated that it was part of the writing set to which the pen belonged, that the same person had owned both implements, *for the bite-marks on the pencil were identical with the bite-marks on the pen.*

"Now that," said Mr. Queen in a sharper tone, "is a scientific fact. I've verified that fact by applying for expert opinion since—a concession to legal considerations, for I was satisfied even before consulting authority that the teeth-marks were identical. The person who had the deplorable habit of chewing on his pen and pencil possesses a very long canine in a certain characteristic relation to the tooth below it and the teeth to either side. I could give you the technical picture as it was given to me, but I'm sure it would bore you.

"Just bear in mind that the dent bored by the point of that canine, and the impression of the teeth adjacent to that canine, make identification positive. The identical picture is presented by both pen and pencil. They must have been scarred by the same teeth.

"Now, who dropped that pencil in the room from which the shots were fired which killed Ann Bloomer? The person who occupied the room during the commission of the crime; in other words, the murderer. Or, in still other words—if we can establish the owner-

ship of the pen-and-pencil set, we arrive at once at the identity of the murderer."

De Carlos was struggling to express himself.

"Yes, Mr. De Carlos?"

"It's not—it's not mine," he gasped. "Not mine!"

"No?" asked Mr. Queen softly. "Then perhaps we can eliminate a deal of gabble right now, Mr. De Carlos. If the pen and pencil aren't yours, to whom do they belong?"

De Carlos looked about in a sort of bafflement. Then his chin sank, and his eyes, and he muttered: "I'm not talking. I'm not saying a word."

"Perhaps the moment will come," murmured Mr. Queen, "when you will feel more disposed to conversation, Mr. De Carlos.

"Second characteristic of the murderer: a very curious point that I almost overlooked. Unfortunately for our bashful marksman, I am a methodical creature. I went back over the ground and saw it—really for the first time—in its proper perspective and proportions.

"The police on the day following Miss Shawn's and Mr. Rummell's supposed marriage, received an anonymous tip by telegraph. The obliging tipster indicated that the marriage had been no marriage at all. This information, followed by immediate corroboration when investigation proved the marriage, as advertised, to have been a hoax, supplied the authorities with a perfect motive in the case they were building against Miss Shawn.

"Now who would be interested in copper-riveting the case against Miss Shawn? Obviously the person who had stolen her revolver, who had used it to kill Ann Bloomer, and who had then tossed it into this room across the angle of the court from 1726—in other words, the thoughtful individual who was trying to frame Miss Shawn for the murder . . . the murderer in person. If any further corroboration of this deduc-

tion were needed, I should merely like to point out that the means employed in tipping off the police—telegraph message given to the telegraph office by telephoning from a pay-station—was exactly the means employed in reserving Room 1726 at the *Villanoy* on the night of the murder."

Inspector Queen nodded guiltily, as if this indeed had occurred to him, and the District Attorney reddened, as if it had not.

"Which brings us," continued Mr. Queen in dulcet tones, "to characteristic number three. On another and less memorable occasion I pointed out, through a strictly logical exercise, that the woman who posed as Margo Cole—that is, Ann Bloomer—must have had a partner . . . a silent, invisible partner who provided the notorious Miss Bloomer with the various proofs of identity which established her as one of the missing Cole heiresses.

"This silent partner had three motives for killing Ann Bloomer: revenge, if Miss Bloomer after being accepted as Margo Cole refused to split the loot—in the light of Miss Bloomer's known character, a distinct possibility; fear that she might expose her partner, either deliberately if she should accidentally be discovered to be an impostor, or—as actually occurred—through a slip of the tongue in an unguarded moment; and a third motive which I must again," Mr. Queen said with an apologetic smile, "hold back as a special tidbit for your future delectation.

"At any rate, discover the identity of Miss Bloomer's partner, the mysterious shadow behind her false claim, and you obviously discover her murderer.

"What do we find then, in recapitulation? That the person we seek is: A—the owner of the pen-and-pencil set; B—the person who tipped off the police to the fact that the supposed marriage between Miss Shawn

and Mr. Rummell was a hoax; and C—Ann Bloomer's silent partner.

"Or, to put it another way, we must find the one and only person who had criminal opportunity—the pencil places that person in the room from which the fatal shots were fired; who had criminal motive—as Ann Bloomer's vengeful partner seeking also to seal her lips forever as to his identity; and who wished to frame Miss Shawn—and did so by tipping off the police about the fake marriage.

"That's a fairly complete picture," murmured Mr. Queen. "Need I continue? Won't our friend the silent partner step forward and end this excruciating suspense?"

And in the ensuing silence Mr. Queen thought furiously: "Damn Beau! Why isn't he here?"

And, also in the silence, as if in response to Mr. Queen's unexpressed question, the telephone rang.

They started, nervously. But Mr. Queen smiled as he leaped for the telephone. "A call I've been expecting. You'll excuse me?"

A voice said in his ear—a tired but jubilant voice: "Beau Rummell. Who is this?"

"You're speaking to the proper party," said Mr. Queen sharply. "Well?"

"I've got the goods, my fran'."

"Well, well." Mr. Queen expelled a long, ecstatic breath. "How soon can you be here with the—er—merchandise?"

"I'm downtown. Say fifteen minutes. How's it going?"

"So far, so good."

"Save the last poke for me. Kerrie all right?"

"Bearing up like a Spartan. Hurry, will you?"

Mr. Queen hung up and turned again to his audience. There was a rustle among them—the strangest little sound. Not of impatience. Nor of fatigue. Nor yet

of relief from the unnatural silence. Rather it was the rendition of a tension, a physical expression to relieve an intolerable strain.

And one face there was ghastly.

Mr. Queen chose to ignore its damning pallor. He remarked cheerfully: "Let's examine Point B more closely. Who tipped off the police that the marriage was a hoax, thereby driving the last nail into the frame-up of Miss Shawn?

"There were four persons who knew the marriage was a hoax before the tip was sent. And only four.

"One was my partner, Beau Rummell, the 'bridegroom.' Well, how about Mr. Rummell as a possibility? No, no, he is eliminated on numerous counts. I need mention only one. At the instant the shots were fired Mr. Rummell was stepping out of the elevator on the seventeenth floor of the *Villanoy*. The elevator operator has testified to this. Since a body cannot occupy two different sections of space at the same time, Mr. Rummell obviously couldn't also have been in Room 1726 at that instant. And so he cannot be the person we are looking for."

Mr. Queen lit a cigaret. "The second person who knew the marriage was a hoax was—myself. I could make out some excellent arguments against the theory that I was Ann Bloomer's accomplice and subsequent murderer, of course—"

"Keep going," growled District Attorney Sampson.

"Thank you, Mr. Sampson," murmured Mr. Queen. "A magnificent compliment. By the way, Miss Day—I believe you're Miss Day, although I've never been formally presented—why are you looking so completely miserable?"

Vi jumped visibly, going pale at having every one's attention so abruptly focussed upon her. "I—accused Beau Rummell of . . . Never mind. Of course, I didn't know—"

"I see." Mr. Queen smiled. "Mr. Rummell's told me all about that. Very amusing. I hope you'll apologize, Miss Day."

Kerrie smiled and pressed Vi's hand, and Vi sank back on the verge of tears.

"I don't want to interrupt," murmured Kerrie, "but I —thought pretty much the same thing once."

"Yes, Beau is a secretive individual. Seems tough. Not really, though. I hope *you'll* apologize, too!" Kerrie flushed and lowered her gaze. "I'm sure you will, to Mr. Rummell's complete satisfaction. Now where was I?

"Oh, yes! That makes two of our four possibilities. The remaining pair are Messrs. Goossens and De Carlos, the trustees of the Cole estate. The evening Mr. Rummell and Miss Shawn registered at the *Villanoy* as man and wife, the evening of the murder, Mr. Rummell deserted his 'wife' almost as soon as they had checked in. Quit her cold, the softie. A gentleman beneath it all, you see. Wouldn't take advantage of an innocent girl—"

"Get on, get on," snapped the Inspector.

"Your wish is my command. At any rate, driven to the outer world by his conscience, Mr. Rummell thought of how he might occupy his time. He decided to occupy it usefully. He went up to our office and wrote two letters identical in content—one addressed to Mr. Goossens, one addressed to Mr. De Carlos.

"The letters informed these gentlemen, as co-trustees, that the marriage was a hoax, and begged the recipients to keep this intelligence confidential. Beau wrote only because, had he not informed the trustees of the true state of affairs, they would have had to take immediate steps to cut her out of her uncle's will. Being in fact unmarried, Miss Shawn was still entitled to her inheritance.

"My partner sent these two letters by special delivery. It was late at night, so of course the letters must have been delivered early the following morning. By the

morning after the crime, then, two people more knew that the marriage had been a hoax—the aforesaid Messrs. Goossens and De Carlos. Theoretically, then, either of you two gentlemen," and Mr. Queen addressed himself with a smile to the two trustees, "could have sent the anonymous tip to the police."

"I didn't!" cried De Carlos.

"Nor I," said Goossens.

"Wait a minute," barked the Inspector. "You've mentioned four, Ellery. There are really five. You're forgetting this phony Justice of the Peace who performed the fake marriage ceremony. He certainly knew!"

"Now, Dad," said Mr. Queen sadly. "Must you steal my thunder?"

"Five!"

"Four." Mr. Queen shook his head. "I said four, and I still say four. Acrobatic mathematics, really."

"Rummell, Goossens, De Carlos, you, and the phony Justice—that makes five!"

"This pains me," murmured Mr. Queen. "I *must* dissent: four. Because, you see, *I* was the phony Justice."

He grinned at Kerrie, who stared back with parted lips. The Inspector could only wave his fragile hand feebly.

"Go on," said Lloyd Goossens, lighting his pipe. "It seems Mr. De Carlos and I are to be eliminated by some logical process. I'm curious to hear how you do it."

"I don't want to hear!" yelled De Carlos. "I'm getting out of here! I've had enough of this—"

"Not quite enough, Mr. De Carlos." Ellery eyed him and De Carlos collapsed in his chair in a sort of agony. "And since you're so reluctant to hear, you shall. We must pay special attention to you, Mr. De Carlos. You've caused more trouble in this case, I'm sure, than you're worth! You've been a confuser of issues, a brilliantly red herring, from the very first. And yet, oddly enough, for all the sleepless nights you've given me, I must confess

this case would never have been solved had you not been a factor in it."

"I must say," began De Carlos helplessly, "I must say—"

"I'll say it for you, shall I?" Mr. Queen smiled. "You see, you're the man who, in the guise of Cole, brought that blessed, significant, colossal fountain-pen into my life. Did that pen belong to you? Did it?"

"I told you it didn't!" cried De Carlos. "It didn't!"

"Oh, I know it didn't. Not because you say so, however. It can't be your pen because of your teeth, you see."

"Certainly, certainly," said De Carlos with eagerness. "As you know—I have false teeth—"

"Nonsense. A man with a plate in his mouth might have made those identifying marks on the pen. But not a man with your plate, Mr. De Carlos. You should send your dentist an extra fee; he's really a very bad dentist, for which you should show your gratitude. Because when I examined your plate—remember the incident, Mr. De Carlos? when Mr. Rummell converted you into a human cocktail-shaker and your plate flew out of your mouth?—when I examined it, as I say, I saw that it was a genuine old-timer . . . one of those hideous plates with inhumanly regular teeth, so regular, so perfectly aligned, that they simply could not have made those deep dents in the pen.

"No, those dents could have been made only by a canine out of line, and longer and more pointed than normal. So I knew the pen wasn't yours."

De Carlos wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"Now, then, I asked myself, how did Mr. De Carlos get hold of that pen? Well, the reasonably assumptive source would have been Cole, the man De Carlos was impersonating at the time I first saw the pen in his possession. Was the pen Cole's?

"It might have been at that time, for all I knew; but

Captain Angus scotched that theory last night, and the photographs he produced supported his story: Cadmus Cole didn't have a tooth in his mouth, and moreover never wore a plate.

"So the pen wasn't Cole's. If it wasn't Cole's, and it wasn't yours, Mr. De Carlos, then you must have got hold of it by accident or taken it by mistake, believing it to be yours. A mental leap in the dark—but the gap could be supported by a solid confirmation.

"I knew you were badly myopic. In impersonating Cole three months ago, you had been forced to put aside your spectacles, since Cole didn't wear any. As a result you were badly handicapped: your vision was blurred, you bumped into the door-jamb twice, you squinted and strained—in fine, exhibited every evidence of acute nearsightedness.

"Now a man who could mistake a door-jamb for empty space might easily mistake one fountain-pen for another. So, I reasoned, if you had visited some one just before coming to our office that day, you might have picked up the wrong pen there. *Did* you visit some one else before you appeared in our office that day? Oh, yes, indeed. You told us so yourself. You even told us whom you had visited. You had visited Mr. Goossens, for the purpose of delivering into his hands Cadmus Cole's sealed will.

"Just a moment," said Mr. Queen swiftly, at the gasp and lightning movement before him, "I'm not finished. Was it Goossens's pen De Carlos left behind in our office? Let's see. If De Carlos took Goossens's pen by mistake, then he probably left his own pen behind in Goossens's office."

He darted forward and flipped back the attorney's coat. Goossens was so astonished his pipe almost fell out of his mouth. Mr. Queen snatched an ordinary black fountain-pen out of the man's vest-pocket and held it up. There were a few scratches and dents on the cap.

"Still up to your old biting tricks, eh, Goossens?" said Mr. Queen. He turned and held the pen up before De Carlos's nose. "Mr. De Carlos, is this your property?"

De Carlos pointed with a shaking finger at the tiny initials, E D C, on the body of the pen.

"Then I think it high time, Mr. Lloyd Goossens," said Mr. Queen in a curt voice, whirling about, "that you stopped play-acting and confessed to the murder of Ann Bloomer!"

XXIII. ST. ELLERY SLAYS THE DRAGON

INSPECTOR QUEEN AND DISTRICT ATTORNEY SAMPSON jumped up, and Sergeant Velie moved quickly towards them from the door. But Mr. Queen waved them back.

Goossens stared up at him. Then he shook his head, as if in bewilderment. Finally, he took his pipe out of his mouth and chuckled. "Very amusing, Mr. Queen. A little grisly in its humor, but I'm one man who appreciates a joke."

But when he saw how those about him were, in a rising horror, pushing their chairs imperceptibly away from his vicinity, he lost his smile and shouted: "You're mad! Do you think you can get away with this?"

"To the bitter end," said Mr. Queen reflectively. Then he sighed. "Very well, we'll go on." The Inspector, the Sergeant, and Sampson remained standing, however, their eyes on the attorney.

"Mr. De Carlos! You'll swear, if necessary, that this pen I just removed from Goossens's pocket belongs to you?"

"Yes, yes," said De Carlos excitedly. "I'll tell you just how it happened. While I was in Goossens's private office delivering Cole's will, I took out my own pen to write a list of ports we expected to stop at during the coming West Indian cruise. I laid the pen down on his desk. When I left, I must have picked up Goossens's

pen by mistake, because I recall when I came in that he was writing. Neither of us noticed what I did. When your messenger delivered the other pen to the yacht, I received it; I knew it wasn't mine, and saw what must have happened. But we were sailing and it was too late to do anything about returning it. Later, I forgot the whole incident."

"And so, I fancy, did Mr. Goossens," remarked Mr. Queen dryly, leaning against a table and folding his arms on his chest. "Your first mistake, Goossens: not getting rid of De Carlos's pen. A trivial mistake, but then you didn't realize the significance of those teeth-marks on your own pen, or that they tied up with the marks on the pencil of your set which you dropped in Room 1726. And since then, falling into your old nervous habit of chewing on the caps of pens, you've been maltreating De Carlos's pen in the same way. . . . Let me see your pipe, please."

He said it so casually, and walked towards Goossens so idly, and took the pipe from the man's mouth so very swiftly, that the lawyer was caught unprepared. When he realized the significance of Ellery's action, he sprang to his feet.

But it was too late. Mr. Queen was examining the stem of the pipe intently, and Goossens's arms were pinned immovably back by the iron hands of Sergeant Velie.

"Proof number two," observed Mr. Queen, nodding with satisfaction. "If you'll compare the end of this pipestem with the caps of the fountain-pen and pencil, Dad, you'll find all three bear the identical impressions of his teeth. Beau told me that he never saw Goossens without a pipe, and on the few occasions of my own meetings with him, I remarked the same thing. The habitual pipe-smoker is so accustomed to gripping a pipestem with his teeth that even when he isn't smoking his pipe he'll unconsciously try to compensate for

the lack by biting on something else. A laboratory examination will prove that Goossens made the same marks on the stem of his pipe as appear on the pen and pencil. Well, Goossens, have you anything to say for publication now?"

And Goossens said quietly: "It's really all right, Sergeant. You don't have to keep holding on to me as if I were a . . . criminal." He laughed at the absurdity of the notion.

Sergeant Velie glanced at Inspector Queen, who nodded. The Sergeant held on to Goossens's wrists with one hand and with the other swiftly searched him. When he was satisfied his prisoner was unarmed, he stepped back.

Goossens shook himself. "Do you believe this nonsense, Inspector Queen? Or you, Mr. Sampson? I hope you both realize what a beautiful suit for slander you're setting up!"

"Not to mention," drawled Mr. Queen, "one for false arrest. Oh, quite beautiful—"

There was an altercation in the corridor. Sergeant Velie hurried to the door and opened it.

"Oh, there you are!" said Beau Rummell cheerfully. "Velie, tell this floogie I'm one of the best people."

"Come in, Beau, come in!" called Mr. Queen. "You couldn't have timed your entrance more dramatically."

Beau ran in and stopped short when he saw Goossens, on his feet and pale with anger, in the center of the room. "Oh," he said. "The third act, hey? Well, here's curtains!"

And, with a yearning glance towards Kerrie, Beau drew Ellery aside, handing him a large manila envelope. Ellery quickly extracted from the envelope what looked like a photostat, while Beau whispered in his ear for some time. And as Mr. Queen both looked and listened, an expression of beatitude overspread his lean countenance.

He advanced towards Goossens, waving the photostat.

Goossens frowned. "It's all very dramatic, as you say, but is it legal?" He laughed shortly. "Don't forget, Mr. Queen, I'm a lawyer. If you're foolish enough to take this before a court, I'll make you wish you'd never been born—any of you! Your so-called evidence can be blown to bits—teeth-marks. Pen and pencil. An old pipe. . . . Why, no jury in the world would swallow that sort of stuff!"

"Possibly not," murmured Mr. Queen, "but we're now in possession of a third item of evidence that a jury *will* swallow.

"So far I've shown that you own the pencil found on the scene of the crime—proving opportunity; and that you could have tipped off the police about the faked marriage—your second error, by the way. Now I'll prove *you had motive*—that you, and you alone, fulfill the third requirement of Ann Bloomer's murderer!

"This third proof will implicate you directly, Mr. Goossens. It will indicate that you were Ann Bloomer's silent partner. It will indicate that the plot, from the beginning, was your brain-child—the plot to palm off an impostor as Margo Cole. In fact, I think I know when you conceived and executed that part of the plot, Mr. Goossens!"

"Indeed?" sneered the lawyer.

"You got your first flash of inspiration when De Carlos, pretending to be Cole, delivered Cole's sealed will. You opened that will, Goossens, and you had a reason for opening it—a reason that will be clear to these people when I reveal the nature of my last proof.

"You opened the will, digested its conditions, and saw your opportunity. You left very suddenly on what purported to be a 'business trip'—and where did you go? To Europe, Goossens! Your own secretary gave me that information when I telephoned your office a few days after De Carlos's visit as Cole . . . in fact, I remember it

especially well because just as I set down the telephone my appendix burst. A pathological commemoration of an important event, Goossens! The only trouble was that I didn't appreciate its significance at the time.

"And why did you go to Europe suddenly? Because you knew that Margo Cole had lived in France. Because you knew so much about Margo Cole's history that it was evident to your quick, clever, and harried intelligence that an impostor would have to come from France, too. Somehow during that business trip you ran across Ann Bloomer, exactly the type of woman your plan required. And she agreed to go in with you."

Goossens bit his lip. His cheeks were chalky now.

"You had the proofs of Margo Cole's identity in your possession. You didn't give them to the Bloomer woman in France. You probably coached her in Margo Cole's history then, but you held back the proofs until the last moment—fearing, very justly, a possible double-cross. You handed Ann Bloomer those proofs as she was leaving the *Normandie* in Quarantine! For it was you, and you alone, brief-case in hand, who boarded the *Normandie* ostensibly to greet 'Margo Cole' and escort her to the cutter in which the rest of us were waiting. Those proofs of Margo Cole's identity were in YOUR brief-case when you boarded the *Normandie*. But they were in Ann Bloomer's bag when you escorted her to the cutter a few minutes later.

"But Ann Bloomer doublecrossed you after all. Entrenched here as Margo Cole, she backed out of her bargain with you. Also, she had probably investigated you undercover, in her canny way, and discovered that you were in a stew of trouble, Mr. Goossens—oh, a veritable salmagundi! You've been quite a rounder in your time—you live with your azure-blooded wife for polite reasons only; your real life is replete with women, champagne, gambling parlors, and the like. Your father left you a respectable practice in the administration of

estates, but you went through his money quickly . . . and then you began to race through the moneys entrusted to your stewardship as trustee of estates.

"And so now you had started a vicious circle—constantly stealing from one estate to cover a shortage in another, and you had reached a point where you could conceal your peculations no longer without fresh sources of funds. You were desperate, and that was your motive for leaping at the chance to make a fortune quickly when fate dropped the Cole estate into your lap.

"Somehow Ann Bloomer, I believe, found all this out, and knew she had a powerful weapon against you. One word from her to arouse suspicion that you were fraudulently administering the estate in your trusteeship, and you were ruined. That was the weapon she held over you as she wriggled out of her pact to split the Margo Cole income with you.

"You were probably clever enough not to show your rage. You saw another way: to remove the menace you yourself, a modern Frankenstein, had created—this female monster—and at the same time—your third and last and most important motive—*to gain absolute control over the Cole millions!*

"Because it was in line with your new goal, you even fell in with Ann's pleasant little scheme to murder Kerrie. She may have forced you to become her accomplice, using her threat of exposure as a lever; I don't know; it would be the logical thing for her to do, because as an accomplice you wouldn't be able to expose her as a murderess.

"At any rate, when the attacks failed, and Ann visited this hotel-room to taunt Kerrie, you shot the woman dead. By doing this you accomplished at one swoop a number of purposes: to revenge yourself on her, to prevent her from revealing your identity as her partner, to be rid of her permanently, to frame Kerrie Shawn for the murder and be rid of *her;* and the ultimate goal of

all—to be free then to administer the Cole estate for charity, since the will provided that if the heirs died, you were still to administer the estate for charitable purposes! In that capacity, you would have a peculative field-day lasting years. And you reasoned—accurately, I think—that you could easily persuade Mr. Edmund De Carlos, your co-trustee, to swing in with you.

"While I may be slightly off in some of the details, I fancy I've roughly covered the subject, Goossens?

Goossens stammered: "You—you talked about a proof of motive." Then he got a grip on his nerves and deliberately smiled. "And I've listened and heard nothing but the ravings of a fantastic imagination. Where's this wonderful proof of yours?"

"Admirable, Goossens, admirable," applauded Mr. Queen. "You could have been a great trial lawyer; quite the dramatic flair. Do you deny," he snapped, "that you put Ann Bloomer up to posing as Margo Cole?"

"I certainly do deny it," replied the lawyer hoarsely. "I never saw the woman before she showed up on the *Normandie*. I was taken in just as the rest of you were. You can't make me the goat, Queen! I thought she was really Margo Cole!"

"Ah," said Mr. Queen; and his quiet sigh was so fat with satisfaction that Goossens stiffened and grew still. "You really thought she was Margo Cole." Mr. Queen turned swiftly. "You heard that statement, Sampson? That's the killer-diller. That's a demonstrable lie!"

"What do you mean?" whispered Goossens.

"In this manila envelope," replied Mr. Queen, handing it to the District Attorney, "is the plain evidence of your lie. It's the third and completely incriminating article of evidence I promised to produce against you.

"It explains how you knew all about Margo Cole even before the Cole will was delivered to you. It explains how you happened to have in your possession all the

proofs of Margo Cole's identity. Shall I explain how that was?

"In 1925, when Margo Cole's mother died in France, Margo left that country and came to the United States. She was penniless and probably too angry with Cadmus Cole to look him up. She drifted out to California—Mr. Rummell, who has been exceedingly busy in the past eight hours, and being instructed what to search for, has found the evidence and uncovered a good deal of the story. Margo Cole became a waitress in a Los Angeles restaurant.

"And that's where you met her, Goossens—while you were attending college in Los Angeles in 1926. You were twenty-five years old and already gorging wild oats. You got drunk one night and *married Margo Cole!* You kept that marriage secret even from your father. Your wife, the true Margo, died in Los Angeles shortly after, and you had her buried quickly and quietly, no doubt heaving a great sigh of relief at her having considerately got you out of a bad hole.

"In this manila envelope," cried Mr. Queen, "are the photostats of two documents: Margo Cole's death-certificate, in which she is recorded as Margo Cole Goossens, and your 1926 marriage license—wired East by radio at the behest of our invaluable Mr. Rummell, who must be pretty tired by this time.

"Of course, since I knew that Ann Bloomer's partner must have furnished her with the proofs of Margo Cole's identity, it was an alluring possibility that he possessed those proofs through the most plausible means in the world—marriage to Margo Cole. And it was this conjecture of mine that sent Mr. Rummell on his successful all-night, transcontinental telephone, telegraph, and radio-photographic mission. Satisfied, Goossens?"

But Goossens only sank into his chair, as if the weight of his body were suddenly insupportable, and he covered his face with his trembling hands.

AND thus it came to pass that on a certain improbably glorious day in late September Mr. Beau Rummell said to Miss Kerrie Shawn: "Well, funny-face, where do we go from here?"

"First," said Miss Shawn, "we clean up our affairs—I mean mine. You know, the estate, and all that poky business. Who's running it now, darling? Of course, Mr. De Carlos and Mr. Goossens—"

"The Surrogate will probably appoint some bank to act as trustee for the estate."

"It doesn't make much difference." Kerrie sighed. "As soon as that's settled, and the—the trial is over, we'll find ourselves forgotten, ignored, and poor as church-mice."

"Poor? You're barmy!"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? We're going to be married. And then we'll live unhappily ever after. Beau Rummell, you need a shave!"

"Are we back on that marriage theme again?" growled Beau. "After all the trouble I went to to save that beautiful boodle of dough for you. Kerrie, I simply won't—"

And so, after Lloyd Goossens's trial and conviction, Mr. Rummell and Miss Shawn were married, and they began to live unhappily ever after. It was an authentic marriage this time, complete with accredited parson, verified license, the proper number of witnesses, and half the reporters in the world, who were curious to see a young woman in this crass age so out of tune with the spirit of man that she would give up "a fortune," as they unanimously expressed it, "for love."

Of course, there were gifts. Inspector Queen, who felt he owed Kerrie *something*, sent a set of handsome Swedish silver cutlery. Violet Day sent—silently—a beautiful Lalique flower-bowl. It took her last cent. The gifts from Hollywood were modest but legion.

Strangely, Mr. Ellery Queen sent nothing. Mr. Rummell was hurt.

"It's not the idea of the gift, y'understand," he complained to Kerrie, "but after all—"

"Perhaps he's sick, Beau."

"Say, I never thought of that!" Beau became alarmed. "I haven't seen him for days—"

They took a cab to the Queen apartment. Mr. Queen was out. Mr. Queen was at the office of *Ellery Queen, Inc.*

"Office?" exclaimed Beau. "He *must* be sick!"

But they found Mr. Queen ensconced in his swivel-chair the veritable mirror of health and spirits.

"Ah, the newlyweds," said Mr. Queen, hastening to bestow a partner's kiss on the bride. "How's married life?"

"Never mind that," snapped Beau. "Where you been keeping yourself? You ducked out after the wedding—"

"I've been sitting here in this lonely tomb," murmured Mr. Queen, "reflecting. On life's little ironies. By the way, why aren't you two in a nice, expensive place for your honeymoon?"

"Because we can't afford it," said Kerrie, "And Atlantic City was so lovely."

"Yeah, I'm still getting that taffy out of my teeth," said Beau. "I'd have been around sooner, El, only you know how it is. Just married, have to scout around for a flat—"

"Atlantic City—flat!" Mr. Queen looked horrified. "What are you thinking of?"

"The old budget," said Beau. He wore the faintly hang-dog look of the hopelessly married man. "I can't afford to kid around, Ellery. As soon as we get settled, I'll come back to the office and start peddling the old personality again. You know. Confidential Matters Handled Confidentially? Give Us a Try—We Never Fail. The old grind—"

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Queen firmly. "I'm scouting around myself. For a new partner."

"What?" yelled Beau. "Hey, what is this? What's the matter with *me*?"

"My good man, you're through—*fini*."

Beau looked stricken. "But, Ellery . . . for the love of Mike . . . I've got to make a living, don't I?"

"Not at all."

"And besides," said Beau angrily, "what d'ye mean I'm through! Whose dough is it, anyway, in this dump? You're one hell of a guy. I never thought you'd—"

Kerrie patted her husband's swelling biceps gently. "Can't you see the gentleman has something up his sleeve? Be quiet and listen, Beau!"

"You see," said Mr. Queen dreamily, while Beau gawped at him, "I sat here after your wedding in a perfect dither of thought, and the main thought ran: What can I give those two idiots for a wedding present?"

Kerrie laughed. Beau blushed.

"Shall it be," continued Mr. Queen, "a First Folio, or the 1856 British Guiana number thirteen, or one of the crown jewels of some illustrious potentate, or a ten-room house completely furnished, with interior murals by Rivera? No, I said to myself, too common, too mundane. My gift to Mr. and Mrs. Rummell must be of the essence, gargantuan, *creme de la creme*, epical. And, do you know, I've hit it?"

Kerrie clapped her hands. "What is it? I know I'll just love it!"

"I believe," murmured Mr. Queen, "you will."

"Come on, give, you exasperating stand-in for Madam Chairman!" roared Beau.

"I have decided," said Mr. Queen, beaming, "to present you with a gift worthy of myself. I have decided to give you," said Mr. Queen, and then he darted off into one of those conversational bypaths he was so fond of treading, "—I haven't ascertained the exact figure, of course; you'll have to be patient with me, chickadees,

but I should say it will come to—oh, let's be conservative. Let's say almost fourteen million dollars."

"Fourteen—" Kerrie blinked.

Beau said hoarsely: "Come again?"

"Don't hold me to that figure," said Mr. Queen hastily. "It may come to no more than a paltry thirteen millions."

"Oh, he's joking," groaned Kerrie.

"Listen, you ape!" bellowed Beau. "What is this?"

Mr. Queen chuckled. "My talents have been chiefly engaged, since your nuptials, in trying to dope out a way to break old man Cole's will. You two would be married, and that meant, under the will, that Kerrie lost a very helpful five thousand a week for life . . . now that Margo Cole's death has been established."

"You mean you've—broken it?" asked Beau in an awed voice.

"We're getting there, getting there. It revolves about a delicate point, but the best legal authority seems to be on our side. You're a lawyer, or you were. What is the law's purpose in requiring that a testator's signature to a will be attested by witnesses?"

"Why," said Beau, scratching his newly-shaven cheeks, "to make sure there's no fraud, I suppose. To have proof that the signature of the testator was his legal signature, and was set down on a specific will at a specific date. Same idea as lies behind the notarization of contracts—proof of signature."

"Well, the legal technicality on which the will is probably going to be broken involves the attestation of the witnesses.

"According to Captain Angus's story he and the radio operator signed in attestation of the testator's signature *before* the testator's signature was put down on the will. As a matter of fact, the radio operator, in not signing in Cole's presence, not only attested a signature which still did not exist, but he can't even say truthfully that what

he signed was a will; or if it was a will, the specific will the testator intended. And then even Captain Angus left the cabin before De Carlos wrote down Cole's name, so he can't testify honestly when that signature was written.

"There are other points, but I fancy those will suffice. The Surrogate will probably be only too happy to grasp at the legal technicality and declare the will invalid—it's an awfully screwy and unfair testament. At any rate, with the will broken, Cole will be considered, as you know, to have died intestate. And since Margo Cole died leaving no issue, and Miss Kerrie Shawn, now Mrs. Beau Rummell, is the only living heiress of the testator—well, you can imagine!

"What do you think of my modest little wedding present, Mrs. Rummell?"

But Mrs. Rummell only began to sniffle, and Beau stood there alternately scowling and grinning like a lunatic. . . .

IN the course of time Mr. Queen received letters from Paris, Monte Carlo, Cairo, Bali—very obese letters they were, written on the lush stationery of disgustingly wealthy people, and designed to bring a beam to the sourest countenance. There were even letters from a certain Miss Violet Day who, it appeared, had been re-engaged by Mrs. Rummell to act as secretary-companion and spent most of her time beating the pants off Mr. Rummell at ping-pong, a fact which kept Mr. Rummell in a state of constant rage.

But Mr. Queen only smiled vaguely and proceeded about his business, which was to worry himself to a shadow over another case.

Which case?

Well, that's another story.

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SEPTEMBER, 1947

The Teeth of the Evidence

When a very odd but important millionaire was buried at the bottom of the Caribbean Sea, it might have embarrassed Ellery Queen. After all, the millionaire had been the first client of Ellery Queen, Inc. And now the client had joined the mackerels he was deader than. The crew of his yacht was scattered, and there was no autopsy to suggest the ways and means of his death.

However, Ellery Queen, case-hardened and unembarrassed as ever, stepped into the case without batting an eye, bringing along his new partner, Beau Rummell, a tough egg with a yolk of gold. Together they sliced away as mysterious a tangle of events as even Ellery Queen had ever seen. For clues they had one fountain pen covered with tooth marks, and a few additional corpses. The climax delighted Queen. He liked his cases dramatic, especially with a beautiful girl or two thrown in.

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