

# ELLERY QUEEN HALFWAY HOUSE

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT WILSON'S CONTORTED FACE, HE REALIZED WITH A SENSATION OF ANNOYANCE, THAT HAD PIQUED HIM FROM THE VERY FIRST GLANCE.

# HALFWAY HOUSE

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Ellery Queen was both a famous fictional detective and the pen name of two cousins born in Brooklyn in 1905. Created by Manfred B. Lee and Frederic Dannay as an entry in a mystery-writing contest, Ellery Queen is regarded by many as the definitive American whodunit celebrity. When their first novel, *The Roman Hat Mystery* (1929), became an immediate success, the cousins gave up their business careers and took to writing dozens of novels, hundreds of radio scripts and countless short stories about the gentleman detective and writer who shared an apartment on West 87th Street with his father, Inspector Queen of the NYPD. Dannay was said to have largely produced detailed outlines of the plots, clues and characters while Lee did most of the writing. As the success of Ellery Queen grew, the character's legacy continued through radio, television and film. In 1941, the cousins founded *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. Edited by Queen for more than forty years, the periodical is still considered one of the most influential crime fiction magazines in American history. Additionally, Queen edited a number of collections and anthologies, and his critical writings are the major works of the detective short story. Under their collective pseudonym, the cousins were given several Edgar awards by the Mystery Writers of America, including the 1960 Grand Master Award. Their novels are examples of the classic 'fair play' whodunit mystery of the Golden Age, where plot is always paramount. Manfred B. Lee, born Manford Lepofsky, died in 1971. Frederic Dannay, born Daniel Nathan, died in 1982.

# HALFWAY HOUSE

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ELLERY QUEEN

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# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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## THE NEW YORKERS

BORDEN, JASPER  
FINCH, GROSVENOR  
FRUEH, SENATOR SIMON  
GIMBALL, ANDREA  
GIMBALL, JESSICA BORDEN  
GIMBALL, JOSEPH KENT  
JONES, BURKE

## THE PHILADELPHIANS

ANGELL, WILLIAM  
WILSON, JOSEPH  
WILSON, LUCY

## THE TRENTONIANS

AMITY, ELLA  
DE JONG, (CHIEF) IRA  
POLLINGER, (PROSECUTOR) PAUL

## THE TRAGEDY

*“...the play is the tragedy, ‘Man’,  
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.”*

“TRENTON IS the capital of New Jersey. According to the census of 1930 it has a population—man, woman, and child—of 123,356. Originally it was called Trent’s Town, after William Trent the royal magistrate. (Did you know that, Mr. Kloppenheimer?) On the Delaware, of course. Most beautiful damned river in the whole United States.”

The dried-up little man nodded cautiously.

“Delaware? Say, this is the place where George Washington licked the daylights out of those, now Hessians. Christmas of 1776, it was,” continued the large fat man, burying his proboscis in the claret tankard, “in a terrible storm. Old George got his boys into boats and sneaked across the Delaware and caught those Hessian baby-killers with their pants off. Didn’t lose a man—that’s history. And when was this? Trenton, Mr. Kloppenheimer, Trenton!” Mr. Kloppenheimer rubbed his dry little jaw and mumbled something placative.

“Why,” said the fat man, smacking the tankard down, “do you know what? Trenton was once *almost* the site of the national capital! Fact. Congress met right here in this little old burg in ’84, Mr. Kloppenheimer, and voted to lay out a Federal city on either side of the river!”

“But,” pointed out Mr. Kloppenheimer timidly, “the Capitol’s in Washington.”

The fat man jeered. “Politics, Mr. Kloppenheimer. Why...”

The large person, who looked eerily like Herbert Hoover, had been singing the glory that was Trenton into the desiccated ears of Mr. Kloppenheimer for some time. Fascinated, the spare young man in pince-nez glasses at the next table had divided his energies between the pig’s knuckle and sauerkraut before him and the monologue beside him. It took no Poesque power of ratiocination to conclude that the fat man was selling something to the timid man; but what? The city of Trenton? seemed improbable. ... Then he heard Mr. Kloppenheimer utter the word “hops” and again the word “barley” in reverent breaths, and the mist lifted. Mr. Kloppenheimer clearly represented brewing interests, and the fat man no doubt was spokesman for the local Chamber of Commerce. “Ideal location for a brewery,” beamed the fat man. “Ah, there, Senator! Now, look here, Mr. Kloppenheimer...”

The mystery solved, the spare young man stopped listening. Notwithstanding the knuckle and stein before him, puzzles were his meat and drink; and there was no riddle too lean for his appetite. And the fat man had helped while away a half hour. For despite the male crowd in the small taproom of the Stacy-Trent, with its horsy red-and-white cloths and its clink of glassware behind the wooden screen, he felt a stranger in a strange land. In the shadow of the gilt-domed Capitol on West State Street, the Stacy-Trent was frequented by men who spoke another language; the air crackled with legislative talk—and he did not know a bloc from a caucus! The spare young man sighed. He signaled the waiter, ordered deep-dish apple pie and coffee, and consulted his wristwatch. Eight forty-two. Not bad. H

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“Ellery Queen, you old ferret!”

Startled, he looked up to find a man as tall and spare and young as himself chuckling down at him, hand outstretched. “Why, Bill Angell,” said Ellery, with delight in his voice. “I trust these failing eyes of mine aren’t playing tricks. Bill! Sit down, sit down. Where the deuce have you sprung from? Waiter, another stein! How on earth——”

“One at a time,” laughed the young man, dropping into a chair. “Still as quick on the trigger as ever I see. I poked my head in here to spot some one I knew, and it took me a full minute to recognize you, you ugly Hibernian. How’ve you been?”

“This way and that. I thought you lived in Philadelphia.”

“So I do. I’m down here on a private matter. Still sleuthing?”

“The fox changes his skin,” quoth Ellery, “but not his habits. Or would you prefer it in Latin? My classics used to irritate you.”

“The same old Ellery. What are you doing in Trenton?”

“Passing through. I’ve been down Baltimore way on a case. Well, well, Bill Angell. It’s been a long time.”

“Damned near eleven years. At that, the fox hasn’t changed much.” Angell’s black eyes were steady and controlled; but Ellery fancied that the pleasure on their surface covered a certain lurking worry. “How about me?”

“Wrinkles at the corners of the eyes,” said Ellery critically. “A mastiff set to the jaw that wasn’t there, and a pinch to those very sensitive nostrils. Hair microscopically thinner at the temples. Pocket bursting with sharpened pencils—that denotes at least a receptivity to labor; clothes a careless, unpressed, and well-cut as ever; an air of self-confidence mixed with what might be termed quivering *qui vive*... Bill, you’ve grown older.”

“There,” said Angell, “*is* a deduction.”

“But you’re essentially the same. Still the little boy smarting at the injustices of the world and lashing back. *And* a very handsome dog. Bill, I’ve been reading things about you.”

Angell flushed and picked up his stein. “The usual tripe. They never stop dishing it out. That Curran will case was a lucky break.”

“Lucky your foot! I followed it closely. Sampson—the DA in New York County—tells me it was the most brilliant piece of legal research in a year. He predicts a future for you.”

The young man calmly drank some beer. “Not in this rich man’s world. Future?” He shrugged. “I’ll probably finish behind the eight-ball, pleading small-claims cases before some liverish old goat with halitosis.”

“Always on the defensive. I recall you used to have the most chronic inferiority complex on the campus.”

“The poor man hasn’t a——” Angell showed his small white teeth in a grin. “Lay off, you murderer. You’re baiting me. How’s the Inspector? I loved that old bird.”

“He’s very well, thanks. Married, Bill?”

“No, thank *you*. All the poor wenches I know think I’m screwy; and you’ve no idea what I think of the wealthy ones.”

“I’ve known some that were passable,” sighed Ellery. “And how is that charming sister of yours?”

“Lucy’s doing nicely. She’s married, of course. To a traveling man—Joe Wilson. Very decent chap doesn’t drink, smoke, gamble, or beat his wife. You’d like him.” Angell looked at his watch. “I suppose you don’t remember Lucy very well.”

“Don’t I! I recall how smitten my poor adolescent heart used to be. Botticelli would have gone in fits over her.”

“She’s still a stunner. Lives over in Fairmont Park in a modest little private house. Joe’s done pretty well—for a bourgeois.”

“Now, now,” said Ellery chidingly. “What line is he in?”

“Cheap jewelry. Trinkets. Gewgaws.” Bill’s voice was bitter. “I’m afraid I gave you the wrong impression. To tell the truth, Lucy’s husband is on his own, and he’s little more than an itinerant peddler. Oh, he deserves credit; he has no family and he’s pulled himself up by his non-existent bootstraps. One of our self-made men. But I always thought my sister would do better than...” Bill scowled.

“What on earth’s wrong about a man who makes his living going from place to place selling honest merchandise? You damned snob!”

“Oh, it’s honest enough. And I suppose I am a fool. He’s madly in love with Lu, and she with him, and he’s always provided for her very handsomely. The trouble with me is that lean and hungry look Cæsar mentioned.”

“You *have* a case.”

“Lord love you! I’ve a guilty conscience, that’s all. My apartment’s in the heart of town and I don’t get out to see Lucy very often. I’ve been beastly about it; Joe’s on the road most of the time, and she must get lonesome as the devil.”

“Oh,” said Ellery. “Then it’s woman trouble you suspect?”

Bill Angell studied his hands. “My dear old friend, I see it’s still futile trying to keep anything from you; you always were a magician in these matters. The trouble is that he’s away so much. Four, five days a week. It’s been that way for ten years—ever since they got married. He has a car, of course, and I’ve no reason except my own blasted suspicious nature to believe that he stays away on anything but business...” He looked at his watch again. “Look here, Ellery, I’ve got to be going. I’ve an appointment with my brother-in-law not far from here for nine, and it’s ten to now. When are you pushing on to New York?”

“As soon as I can breathe life into old Duesey again.”

“The Duesenberg! Lord, have you still got that ancient chariot? I thought you’d donated it to the Smithsonian long ago. How would you like a companion on your trip back to the city?”

“Bill! That’s handsome of you.”

“Can you wait an hour or so?”

“All night, if you say so.”

Bill rose and said slowly: “Joe shouldn’t take long.” He paused. When he continued it was in a casual tone. “I was intending to run down to New York tonight anyway; tomorrow’s Sunday, and I’ve a New York client who can’t be seen at any other time. I’ll leave my car in Trenton. Where will you be?”

“In the lobby yonder. You’ll stay over with Dad and me tonight?”

“Love to. See you in an hour.”

Mr. Ellery Queen relaxed, watching the wedge-like back of his friend vanish past the coatroom gilt. Poor Bill! He had always shifted to his own broad shoulders the burdens of others... Ellery wondered for a moment what lay behind Bill's appointment with his brother-in-law. Then, shrugging, he told himself that it was very clearly none of his business, and he ordered another cup of coffee. In the dumps or out of it, he reflected as he waited, Bill would be a tonic; and in the young man's company the ninety-minute drive to the Holland Tunnel would doubtless dwindle to nothing.

And that, strangely enough, was its fate. For, although Mr. Ellery Queen was at the moment unaware of it, neither he nor Mr. William Angell, young Philadelphia attorney, was destined to leave Trenton at all that mild Saturday night, the first of June.

Bill Angell's aged Pontiac coupé puffed along the deserted Lamberton Road, which paralleled the eastern shore of the Delaware River. It was a narrow road, and his dimmers shimmered on the puddles in the black and rubbly macadam. A warm rain had fallen in the afternoon and, although it had stopped just before seven o'clock, the road and the bleak stretches of dump and field on his left were still muddy. A few lights blinked pallidly on the river to the west, where Moon Island lay; to the east the uneven terrain was gray and flat, like paint.

Bill slowed down as he passed a long bulky mass of buildings on the riverside, the Marine Terminal. It was not far from here, he thought. According to Joe's instructions... He knew the road well; he had often taken it in traveling by automobile from Philadelphia to Trenton by way of the Camden bridge. In the vicinity of the Marine Terminal there was nothing but dreary dumping-ground; the Sewage Disposal Plant on the east had effectively spoiled the section for housing development and there were no dwellings in the neighborhood. The directions had been specific: a few hundred yards past the Marine Terminal, reckoning from Trenton. ...

He trod on his brake. To the right, toward the river, on the narrow shore between Lamberton Road and the water polished to sullen steel by the quarterlight of deep dusk, stood a building with dimly glowing windows.

The Pontiac snuffled and stopped. Bill examined the scene with fixity. The structure, black against the river, was little more than a shack—a random, dilapidated affair of weather-beaten clapboard with a sagging roof half-denuded of its shingles and a crumbling chimney. It was set well back, approached in rather grotesque grandeur by a semicircular driveway which led from Lamberton Road past the house in an arc and back to the road. In the shadows of near night, there was something repellent about the place. An empty roadster of huge dimensions stood directly before the closed door of the shack, almost on its stone step. The snout of the silent monster faced him. Bill twisted about like a suspicious animal, searching the thick dark blue murk for other details. That car... Lucy ran a small car; she'd always had a runabout for herself—Joe was considerate enough, and he seemed to realize how much alone she was; and Joe himself ran an ancient but serviceable Packard. But this was overpowering, a magnificent sixteen-cylinder Cadillac with, he thought, a special body. Oddly, for all its bulk, there was something feminine in its appearance; it seemed in the murk to be the color of cream, and he could just make out its multiplicity of chromium gadgets. A rich woman's sporting car...

Then Bill spied his brother-in-law's Packard drawn up to face the side of the shack nearer him; and for the first time he noticed a second driveway, this one an unkempt dirt lane, branching off Lamberton Road a few feet in front of his car. The lane, a welter of mud, did not touch the exit of the semicircular drive, but skirted it and curved slightly inwards to lead to a second door in the side of the house. Two drives, two doors, two cars ...

Bill Angell sat very still. The night was pacific, its silence accentuated by the sawing of cricket and the faint chug of a motor on the river, the hum of his own engine. Except for the Marine Terminal and a small watchman's house facing it Bill had passed no dwelling since leaving the outskirts of Trenton, and as far as he could see beyond the shack stretched flat deserted country. This was the meeting place.

How long he sat there he did not know; but suddenly the evening quiet exploded, touched off by a horrible sound. Bill's heart convulsed in warning before his senses became conscious of the nature of the cry. It had been a scream, and it had been torn from a woman's throat: a single protest of outraged vocal chords released from the paralysis of fear all at once, like a plucked string let go. It was short and sharp, and it died away as unexpectedly as it had been born. It came to Bill Angell, sitting in the Pontiac frozen to the wheel, that it was the first time he had ever heard a woman scream. Something inside him responded with a quiver, and he felt it with a sensation of pure astonishment. At the same moment, and for no conscious reason, his eyes went to the watch on his wrist and he read the time by the light of his dashboard. It was eight minutes after nine.

But he glanced up quickly; the light before him had subtly changed. The front door had flown open and he heard the bang as it struck against the inner wall of the shack. A prism of light bathed the side of the roadster before the stone step. Then it was partially blotted out by a figure. Bill half-rose behind his wheel, straining to see. The figure was a woman's, and her hands were before her face as if to shut out the sight of something obscene. She stood there for only an instant, a silhouette the details of which were indistinguishable. With the light behind her and her figure in darkness, she might have been young or old; there was a slenderness about her that was ambiguous. He could make out no details of her dress. This woman had screamed. And she had fled from the shack as if sick and blinded with loathing.

Then she saw the Pontiac, and sprang toward the big roadster, clawing at the door. She was in the car in a flash. The Cadillac roared forward toward him. It swept along the curve of the semicircular drive; it was only when it was almost upon him that his muscles came to life. He jerked the Pontiac into first speed and twisted the wheel to the right. The Pontiac plunged into the muddy lane leading to the side of the house.

Their hubs rasped against each other. The Cadillac swung out, careening on two wheels. For the sheer instant that the two drivers were side by side Bill saw that the woman's gloved right hand was clutching a handkerchief, and that the handkerchief covered her face. Her eyes were wild and wide above the fabric. Then she and the roadster were gone, roaring down Lambertson Road toward Trenton and in a twinkling swallowed by the darkness. It would be futile, Bill knew, to follow her.

Dazed, he drove the Pontiac along the muddy side-lane and brought it to rest beside his brother-in-law's old Packard, conscious that his hands were clammy with sweat. He shut off his motor and stepped from the running-board to a small wooden-floored porch at the side of the shack. The door was slightly ajar. He braced himself and pushed it open.

Blinking in the light, he made out only the general features of the interior. He stood in a low-ceilinged room with discolored walls from which the plaster had in many places dropped off. He became aware of an old-fashioned telescopic clothes-rack on the opposite wall, draped with men's suits, of a dingy iron sink in a corner, of a naked and crypt-like old fireplace, of a round central table with an electric lamp on it from which the only light in the room emanated. There was no bed, no bunk, no stove, no closet. A few decrepit chairs and one overstuffed armchair which sagged badly. Bill stiffened.

A man was lying on the floor behind the table. He could see two trousered legs, crooked at the

knees. There was something about those two legs that suggested death.

Bill Angell stood still where he was, just inside the side door, slowly thinking things out. His mouth was hard. It was very quiet in the shack. He felt the overwhelming loneliness of his position. People who breathed were far away, and laughter was a remote and inconceivable luxury. The curtains at the windows rustled a little in the breeze from the Delaware... One of the legs moved. Bill watched it move with a dull and impersonal surprise. He found himself moving, too, across the carpeted floor of the shack to the table and beyond.

The man was lying on his back, glassy eyes staring up at the ceiling. His hands, peculiarly gray, scratched at the carpet like talons in a slow and patient digital exercise. His tan sack-coat was open and the white shirt above his heart was almost gaily splashed with blood. Bill dropped to his knees and with the same surprise heard his voice, which sounded unfamiliar to his ears, say: "Joe. For God's sake, Joe." He did not touch his brother-in-law's body.

The glaze was drowned in the man's eyes. They crept sidewise in a stealthy manner until they came to rest.

"Bill."

"Water—?"

The gray fingers scratched more quickly. "No. Too... Bill, I'm dying."

"Joe, who—"

"Woman. Woman." The broken voice stopped, but the mouth continued to move, lips curling and closing, tongue rising and falling. Then the voice succeeded again: "Woman."

"What woman, Joe? Joe, for God's sake!"

"Woman. Veil. Heavy veil—face. Couldn't see. Knifed me... Bill, Bill."

"Who in the name of hell—"

"Love—Lucy. Bill, take care of Lu. ..."

"Joe!"

The mouth stopped moving, the lips uncurled, the tongue trembled and was still. The glaze returned to the eyes, which continued to stare at Bill with the same savage wonder and agony. Then Bill was conscious that the fingers had stopped scratching. He got stiffly to his feet and walked out of the shack.

Mr. Ellery Queen was sprawled comfortably under a palm in the lobby of the Stacy-Trent, eyes closed over his fuming brier, when he heard a voice bellowing his name. He opened his eyes in astonishment to find a boy in the forest-green and maroon livery of the hotel shuffling past. "Boy. Here."

The lobby was jammed, and a peacock's tail of eyes regarded him with curiosity. His name had rung through the verdant room, and he beckoned the attendant in some annoyance. "Mistuh Queen. Telephone."

Ellery tossed the boy a coin and made his way, frowning, to the desk. Among the heads that had jerked up at the attendant's bawl was that of a red-haired young woman in a brown tweed suit. With a queer quirk of the lips she rose and quickly followed Ellery. Her long legs flashed noiselessly over the marble floor.

Ellery picked up the telephone. The young woman took up a position a few feet behind him, turned

her back, opened her handbag, extracted a lipstick, and began to paint her painted mouth.

“Bill?”

“Thank God.”

“Bill! What’s the matter?”

“Ellery... I can’t go back to New York with you tonight. I— Could you possibly——?”

“Bill, something’s happened.”

“God, yes.” The lawyer paused for a moment, and Ellery heard him clear his throat three times.

“Ellery, it’s simply—it’s a nightmare. It can’t have happened. My brother-in-law... He’s been—he’s dead.”

“Good Lord!”

“Murdered. Stuck in the chest like a—like a damned pig.”

“Murdered!” Ellery blinked. The young woman behind him stiffened as if she had received an electric shock. Then she hunched her shoulders and applied her lipstick furiously. “Bill... Where are you? When did this happen?”

“Don’t know. Not long ago. He was still alive when I got there. He said... Then he died. Ellery, these things just don’t happen to your own people. How am I going to break it to Lucy?”

“Bill,” said Ellery insistently, “stop wool-gathering. Listen to me. Have you notified the police?”

“No. ...No.”

“Where are you?”

“In the watchman’s house across the road from the Marine Terminal. Ellery, you’ve got to help us.”

“Of course, Bill. How far from the Stacy-Trent is this place?”

“Three miles. You’ll come? Ellery, you’ll come?”

“At once. Tell me how to get there. Shortest way. Clearly now, Bill. You’ve got to get a grip on yourself.”

“I’m all right. I’m all right.” Over the wire came the sound of his breath, a shuddering inhalation like the lung-filling gasp of a newborn infant. “Easiest way... Yes. You’re on the East State and South Willow now. Where are you parked?”

“In a garage behind the hotel. Front Street, I think.”

“Drive east on Front for two squares. You’ll hit South Broad. Turn right, go past the courthouse, right again into Center Street one square south of the courthouse. Two on Center and turn right into Ferry. One on Ferry brings you to Lambertson. Turn left there and keep going south on Lambertson until you hit the Marine Terminal. You can’t miss it. The shack... is a couple of hundred yards beyond.”

“Front to South Broad, to Center, to Ferry, and into Lambertson. Right turns all the way except into Lambertson, which is left. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes. Wait at the watchman’s place for me. Bill, don’t go back. Do you hear me?”

“I won’t.”

“Call the Trenton police. I’m on my way.” Ellery dropped the telephone, jammed on his hat, and ran like a fireman. The red-haired young woman stared after him with a light in her hazel eyes that was almost lustful. Then she snapped her bag shut.

It was twenty minutes to ten when Ellery slammed his brake on before the watchman's house opposite the Marine Terminal. Bill Angell was sitting on the running-board of his Pontiac, head between his hands, staring at the damp road. A knot of curious men thronged the doorway of the house. The two men gazed briefly into each other's eyes. "It's rotten," choked Bill. "Rotten!"

"I know, Bill, I know. You've called the police?"

"They'll be coming along soon. I—I've called Lucy, too." A spark of desperation glittered in Bill's eyes. "She's not home."

"Where is she?"

"I'd forgotten. She's always downtown seeing a movie on Saturday nights when Joe... when he was away. No answer. I've sent a wire telling her to come, that Joe'd had an... accident. The wire will get there before she will. We—there's no sense in not facing facts. Is there?"

"Certainly not, Bill."

Bill took his hands out of his pockets and looked at them. Then he raised his head to the black sky. It was the night of the new moon, and only the stars were visible, small and brilliant after their wash in the rain. "Let's go," he said grimly, and they climbed into the Pontiac. He turned his car around and retraced its trail south.

"Slowly," said Ellery after a moment. His eyes were on the shimmering cones of the headlights. "Tell me all you know."

Bill told him. At mention of the woman in the Cadillac roadster, Ellery glanced at his companion's face. It was dark and dangerous.

"Veiled woman," murmured Ellery. "That was fortunate, Bill; I mean poor Wilson's living long enough to tell you. Was this woman wearing a veil?"

"I don't know. It wasn't over her face when she passed me. But she might have slipped it up over her hat. I don't know... When Joe—when he died I went out to the car, backed it out of the side-lane into the road, and drove to the Terminal. Then I called you. That's all."

The shack loomed ahead. Bill began wearily to turn the wheel. "No!" said Ellery sharply. "Stop here. Have you a flashlight?"

"In the door-pocket."

Ellery got out of the Pontiac and nosed the flash about. In a few sweeps of the beam he fixed the scene indelibly in his mind; the silent shack, the muddy lane leading to the side, the semicircular driveway before the front door, the weed-grown segments of ground bordering the drives. He turned the light on the mud of the side-lane, crouching a little. So far as he could see there were no man-made marks on the soggy earth except tire tracks, of which there seemed to be several sets. He scrutinized them closely for a moment and then returned to the Pontiac. "Bill! We'll walk from here."

"Yes."

"Or better still, turn your car about to block the road. We don't want anyone running cars up these drives. I don't see any footprints in the mud here, and that may be important. The tire marks which already exist should naturally be preserved. The rain this afternoon was an act of God... Bill! Are you listening?"

"Yes. Yes, of course."

Ellery said gently, "Then do as I say." He ran forward to the point where the semicircular driveway began. He stopped at the edge of Lamberton Road, careful not to set foot on the driveway. There were

ruts in the mushy earth in which were clearly stamped the treads of tires. He eyed them for a moment and strode back.

“I was right. Bill, perhaps you had better remain out here and guard the drives. Warn the police when they come. Don’t let anyone walk on either driveway; they can reach the house by skirting the and walking on those weedy borders... Bill!”

“I’m all right, Ellery,” muttered Bill. He was fumbling with a cigaret and shivering. “I understand.

As he stood in the middle of the main road leaning against his car, there was something in his eyes that made Ellery turn away. Then, on impulse, he turned back. Bill smiled; a ghastly smile. Ellery patted his shoulder rather helplessly and, raising his flashlight, hurried back to the dirt lane. He vaulted over to the weeds on the river side, played the flash, and made his way cautiously toward the side door of the shack.

Fifteen feet from the porch, he stopped; the weeds ended there, and between the last clump and the porch was bare earth. He gave the old Packard to the side only a passing glance; it was ground around and beyond it that held his attention. For some time he swept the flash about and with a vague, un-sensed satisfaction convinced himself that no human foot had trodden anywhere within range. Then he set his own feet down in the muck.

The wooden porch was tiny, a square platform of rotting boards raised a few inches from the mud. For the moment he ignored the half open side door and the quiet leg which he could see protruding from beyond the round table inside; instead, he crossed to the farther edge of the porch and stabbed the ground with his torch. His brows went up. A narrow path led from the porch toward the river. In the mud of this walk there were two sets of male footprints, one going and one coming. Those which pointed toward the porch were for the most part superimposed upon those which pointed toward the river. Even on superficial examination it was evident that they were all impressions of the same feet.

Ellery sent the beam dancing down the path. It led straight to a small, staggering structure perched on the very edge of the Delaware River, some forty feet away. This second shack was even more woebegone in appearance than the house. “Garage or boathouse,” he thought, peering at it. Then he quickly snapped off his flash and stepped to the threshold of the shack; for a roaring sound was growing on Lambertson Road, coming from Trenton, and it sounded like a high-powered motor car.

His panoramic survey of the room was hasty; but Mr. Ellery Queen had a genius for rapid and accurate observation, and he missed nothing in that first glance... The carpet was a curious note in this seedy hovel: it was well-worn but of superb quality—silky, deep-piled, without design, and a warm fawn in color. It had no borders and had obviously been cut to fit a room of larger size, for it was doubled under where the floor met the walls.

“Made for some woman’s modern bedroom, I’ll wager,” muttered Ellery. “What the devil is doing here?” Then, noting that the rug was spotless, he scraped the soles of his muddy shoes on the step of the side door—someone else had done the same thing before him, he saw—and gingerly walked into the room.

Joseph Wilson’s eyes were still open and twisted sidewise; but now they had the appearance of steamed glass. His breast had bled copiously; the shirt was saturated; but the nature of the wound was evident enough: there was a thin incision over the heart in the very vortex of the blood-welter, a wound which could only have been inflicted by a narrow-bladed cutting instrument. The approaching motor was thunderous now.

He swiftly examined the table, illuminated by the cheap lamp. A chipped crockery plate lay in the glow, its surface covered with the burnt stubs of many small yellow paper matches; otherwise it was

perfectly clean. Near the plate lay a bronze-hafted paper-knife, its long wicked blade bathed to the hilt in dry blood. Something was impaled on the point—a tiny truncated cone of some indeterminate substance, for its surface was concealed under a layer of soot. Whatever it was, it had been thoroughly charred by fire. His eyes went back to the dead man.

There was something about Wilson's contorted face, he realized with a sensation of annoyance, that had piqued him from the very first glance. Disregarding the distortion of death, it was a rather striking face, crisp-featured and interesting and in a subtle way handsome. Wilson had been in the prime of life—between thirty-five and forty, Ellery judged. The forehead was high and mild, the mouth almost feminine, the nose short, the chin faintly cleft. The curly chestnut hair at the temples was thin, but he was vigorous still. What it was that bothered him Ellery could not decide. Perhaps it was the overcast of delicate intelligence, a certain refinement, the mark of good blood...

"Who the devil," said a cool bass voice, "are you?"

"Ah, the police," said Ellery. "Come in, gentlemen, come in." He flipped something negligently off the table. "Wipe your shoes off before you walk on this rug."

The side door was crowded with men, at the head of whom stood a tall broad man with flinty eyes. The two men regarded each other for a moment; then the tall man said curtly, "Clean your shoes, boys," and scraped his own soles on the sill. He glanced from the fawn rug to Ellery and strode in to pick up what Ellery had thrown on the table. "Oh," he said, handing it back. "Glad to have you, Mr. Queen. This man Angell outside didn't mention your name. I've met your dad once or twice. I'm De Jong, chief of police in Trenton."

Ellery nodded. "I've just been poking about. I hope you haven't been tramping all over the driveways?"

"Angell told us what you said; good hunch. I'm having the drives boarded over. Let's see this stiff."

The room dwindled. Men scuffed about, packing it. De Jong went down on his knees beside the dead man. A fatherly-looking old gentleman with a black bag pushed him aside. Flash lamps burst silently. Bill Angell stood in a corner out of the way and watched with stones in his eyes. "Tell me everything that's happened, Mr. Queen," said a wheedling woman's voice from behind Ellery.

He turned from his puzzled scrutiny of the dead man's face to find a tall young woman with red hair and vivid lips, pencil poised over a notebook, smiling at him. Her hat, which looked like a large discus, was pushed dowdily back on her head and a red curl drooped over one bright eye.

"And why," asked Ellery, "should I?"

"Because," said the young woman, "I am the voice and conscience of the pee-pul. I represent public opinion and some damn' captious advertisers. Give, Mr. Queen."

Ellery lit his pipe and carefully dropped the match-stub into his pocket. "It seems to me," he said, "that I've seen you somewhere before."

"Mister Queen! That line had whiskers when Cleo suckled the asp. I was sitting only a few feet away in the lobby of the Stacy-Trent when your boy-friend called you up. Good work, Sherlock, you're living up to your reputation. Who's the pretty lad on the floor?"

"Now you and I," said Ellery patiently, "haven't been formally introduced."

"Rats! I'm Ella Amity, feature-writer for the *Trenton Times*. Come on now, sport. I've got the jump on everybody, but it won't last long. Open up!"

"Sorry. You'll have to see De Jong."

"Stuck-up," said Miss Amity, and she scowled. Then she burrowed in between the old gentleman

with the bag and Chief De Jong, and began scribbling like mad in her notebook. De Jong winked Ellery and slapped her round rump. She giggled, lunged at Bill Angell, hurled questions at him, scribbled some more, threw him a kiss, and darted out of the shack. Ellery heard her screaming "Where in hell's the nearest telephone?" and a man's gruff: "Hey, you, walk on the weeds." A moment later he heard the sound of a motor retreating toward the Marine Terminal.

De Jong said, "Angell," in a friendly voice. The men stepped aside to let Bill pass. Ellery slipped into the group standing over the body.

"Let's have it," said the tall man. "Murphy, notes. You said outside this man was your brother-in-law. His name?"

"Joseph Wilson." The dazed look had gone out of Bill's eyes; his chin was forward. He mentioned an address in the Fairmont Park section of Philadelphia.

"What's he doing here?"

"I don't know."

"And where do you come in on this, Mr. Queen?"

Ellery related the story of his meeting with the young lawyer in Trenton and, before either man could interrupt, the tale Bill had told him about his first journey to the shack.

"Veiled, Wilson said, eh?" De Jong frowned. "Do you think you'd recognize this dame who beat in the Cadillac, Angell?"

"All I saw were her eyes, and they were distorted with fright. I'd know the car, though." Ellery described it.

"Who owns this dump?"

Bill muttered, "I haven't the faintest idea. This is the first time I've been here."

"One hell of a hole," grunted De Jong. "I remember now. It used to be a squatter's shack. They were kicked out years ago. I didn't know anyone was living here; land belongs to the city... Where's your sister, Angell?"

Bill stiffened. Ellery murmured, "Bill's tried to get her on the 'phone, but she's out. He's sent her a wire."

De Jong nodded coldly and went away. When he came back he demanded, "What business was the Wilson in?" Bill told him. "Hmn. Well, this whole thing begins to smell. What's the verdict, Doc?"

The old gentleman struggled to his feet. "A knife through the heart. Deep wound, De Jong; very neat job. It's a miracle he didn't die instantly."

"Particularly," said Ellery, "since the weapon was removed from the wound soon after the attack."

The chief looked at him sharply, and then at the blood-crusting paper-knife on the table. "That's funny. And what the hell's that thingamabob doing on the tip? What is it, anyway?"

"On consideration," said Ellery, "I believe you'll find it to be a cork."

"Cork!"

"Yes, the kind that's often stuck on the tip of a letter-opener when it's bought."

"Hmn. It's a cinch this lad wasn't skewered with *that* on it. Somebody put it on the tip of the knife after the kill." De Jong studied the burnt match-stubs on the plate with irritation. "And charred the cork good and plenty. In the name of hell, why?"

"That," said Ellery, puffing at his pipe, "is technically an epic question. Most pertinent. By the way

it might be wise not to drop any matches about. I'm an intolerant believer in leaving things as they are on the scene of a crime."

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"Nobody's smoking but you," said De Jong in a surly way. "I'm not much on this fancy business of Mr. Queen. Let's get down to brass tacks. You say you had an appointment with your brother-in-law Angell? Let's have the whole story."

Bill did not move for a moment; and then he put his hand in his pocket and produced a crumpled yellow envelope. "I suppose I may as well," he said harshly. "Joe came home from one of his trips last Wednesday. He left again this morning—"

"How d'ye know that?" snapped the chief, eyes on the envelope.

"He called at my office Friday afternoon—yesterday—to see me about something, and he told me he was going away the next morning—that is, today. That's how I know." Bill's eyes flickered. "About noon today I received this wire at my office. Read it, and you'll know as much about this ghastly business as I do."

De Jong opened the envelope and extracted a telegram. Ellery read it over the big man's shoulder.

IMPORTANT I SEE YOU TONIGHT WITHOUT FAIL STOP PLEASE KEEP SECRET FROM EVERYONE THIS MEANS A GREAT DEAL TO ME STOP I WILL BE AT AN OLD HOUSE ON DELAWARE THREE MILES SOUTH OF TRENTON ON LAMBERTON ROAD SEVERAL HUNDRED YARDS SOUTH OF MARINE TERMINAL STOP IT IS ONLY HOUSE OF ITS KIND IN VICINITY YOU CANNOT MISS IT STOP HAS A HALF CIRCLE DRIVEWAY AND A BOATHOUSE IN REAR STOP MEET ME THERE AT NINE PM SHARP STOP VERY URGENT AM IN GREAT TROUBLE AND NEED YOUR ADVICE STOP NINE PM TONIGHT DO NOT FAIL ME... JOE

"Queer, all right," muttered De Jong. "Sent from downtown Manhattan, too. Was he supposed to go to New York, Angell, on this last business trip of his?"

"I don't know," said Bill shortly. His eyes were fixed on the corpse.

"What did he want to talk to you about?"

"I don't know, I tell you. This wasn't the last I heard from him. He 'phoned me from New York at two-thirty this afternoon at my office."

"Well? Well?"

The words came slowly. "I couldn't make out what he was driving at. He sounded horribly depressed and in great earnest. He wanted to make sure, he said, that I'd received his wire and was coming. He repeated how important it was to him, and of course I said I'd be there. When I asked him about the house..." Bill rubbed his forehead. "He said that was part of his secret, that no one he knew was aware of its existence, and that it was the best place for our talk for reasons he couldn't divulge. He was growing excited and rather incoherent. I didn't press him, and he hung up."

"No one knew," murmured Ellery. "Not even Lucy, Bill?"

"That's what he said."

"Well, it sure must have been important," drawled De Jong, "because somebody shut his mouth tight before he could spill it. At that, he wasn't telling the truth. Somebody did know about the house."

"I did, for one," said Bill coldly. "I knew when I received the telegram. Is that what you're driving at?"

"Now, now, Bill," said Ellery. "You're naturally unstrung. By the way, you said that Wilson had visited your office in Philadelphia yesterday. Anything important?"

“Perhaps, perhaps not. He left a bulky envelope in my keeping.”

“What’s in it?” snapped De Jong.

“I don’t know. It’s sealed, and he didn’t tell me.”

“Well, for cripes sake, didn’t he say *anything* about it?”

“Just that I was to keep it for him temporarily.”

“Where is it now?”

“In my safe,” said Bill grimly, “where it’s going to stay.”

De Jong grunted. “I forgot you’re a lawyer. Well, Angell, we’ll see about that. Doc, is there any way of telling exactly when this man was knifed? We know he died at ten after nine. But when was the knife stuck into him?”

The coroner shook his head. “I couldn’t say. Certainly not long before. The man must have held on to life with remarkable tenacity. I could hazard a guess—eight-thirty, perhaps. But don’t bank on it. Shall I send for the wagon?”

“Yes. No,” said De Jong, showing his teeth. “No, we’ll keep him here for a while. I’ll call for the wagon when I want it. Go on home, Doc; you can do the autopsy for us in the morning. You’re sure it was the knife did the job?”

“Positive. But if there was anything else, I’ll find it.”

“Doctor,” said Ellery slowly. “Have you found—on the hands or anywhere else—any burns?”

The old gentleman stared. “Burns? Burns? Certainly not!”

“Would you mind keeping a weather-eye out for burns when you’re doing the autopsy? Particularly on the extremities.”

“Damned fool thing. Very well, very well!” And in something of a huff the coroner stamped out.

De Jong’s mouth was open, ready to ask a question, when a fat detective with a scarred mouth shambled up and engaged him in conversation. Bill strolled about in aimless fashion. After a while the detective waddled away. “Mess of fingerprints all over the place, my man says,” grunted De Jong. “but most of ’em seem to be Wilson’s... Now what are you doing on that rug, Mr. Queen? You look like a frog.”

Ellery rose from his knees. He had been crawling about the room for the past few minutes, scrutinizing the surface of the fawn rug as if his life depended upon it. Bill was planted by the main door, a peculiar glitter in his eye. “Oh, I revert to the animal once in a while,” smiled Ellery. “Does your body good. Remarkably clean rug, De Jong. Not a speck of mud or anything else anywhere on it.”

De Jong looked puzzled. Ellery puffed placidly on his pipe and strolled toward the wooden clothes rack on the wall. Out of the corner of his eye he watched his friend at the door. Bill looked down at his feet suddenly, grimaced, and stooped to fumble with the lace of his left shoe. It took him some time to get it tied to his complete satisfaction. When he rose his face was red from his exertions, and his right hand was buried in his pocket. Ellery sighed. He felt sure, as he glanced at the others, that they had not seen Bill pick up something from the one spot on the rug which he himself had not examined.

De Jong strode out, flinging a glance of warning at his man Murphy. They heard him shouting orders on the wooden porch. Bill dropped into a chair and propped his elbow on his knee, staring down at the dead man with the oddest look of bitter inquiry.

“I grow more and more fascinated by this extraordinary brother-in-law of yours,” growled Ellery, standing before the rack.

“Eh?”

“These suits, now. Where did Wilson buy his duds?”

“Philadelphia department stores. He often picked things up at Wanamaker’s clearance sales.”

“Really?” Ellery flipped back one of the coats and exposed a label. “That’s strange. Because, you’ll accept the evidence of this label, he patronized the most exclusive tailor on Fifth Avenue in New York!”

Bill’s head jerked around. “Nonsense.”

“And the cut, general swank, the material of the garment don’t give the label the lie, either. Let me see... Yes, yes. There are four suits here, and they all purport to come from the same Fifth Avenue source.”

“That’s utterly incredible!”

“Of course,” observed Ellery, “there’s always the explanation that neither the shack nor what’s in it belonged to him.”

Bill was glaring at the rack with a sort of horror. He said eagerly: “Certainly. That’s it, that’s it! Why, Joe never spent more than thirty-five dollars for a suit in his life!”

“On the other hand,” frowned Ellery, picking up something from the floor beneath the rack, “there are two pairs of shoes here that come from Abercrombie & Fitch. And,” he added, reaching for the single hat on one of the pegs, “an Italian fedora that set somebody back twenty dollars, if I’m any judge of what the well-dressed man is soaked for his headgear.”

“They can’t be his!” cried Bill, springing to his feet. He brushed the gaping detective out of his way and knelt by his brother-in-law’s body. “Here, you see? Wanamaker’s label!”

Ellery replaced the hat on the peg. “All right, Bill,” he said gently. “All right. Now sit down and cool off. All this confusion will right itself in time.”

“Yes,” said Bill. “I suppose so.” And he went back to his chair and sat down, closing his eyes.

Ellery continued his deliberate saunter about the room, touching nothing and missing nothing. Occasionally he glanced at his friend; and then he would frown and quicken his pace a little, as if by some irresistible compulsion... One thing impressed him: the shack was a single room and there was no possible corner or closet which might have served as a place of temporary concealment. He even poked into the fireplace, which was very low, and saw that the flue was much too small to admit of a human body.

After a while De Jong hurried back and proceeded to squat behind the table, becoming busy with the dead man’s clothing. Bill opened his eyes; he rose again and went to the table and leaned on his knuckles to stare down at the policeman’s massive neck. From outside the shack came the voices of many men. They seemed to be occupied with a work of importance in the two driveways. Once the silent men inside heard the shrill voice of Ella Amity engaged in ribald banter with the detectives.

“Well, Mr. Queen,” said De Jong at last in a hearty tone, without looking up from what he was doing, “any ideas?”

“None that, like Shaw’s Superman, I would fight for. Why?”

“I’d always heard you were a fast worker.” There was a trace of sardonic humor in the big man’s voice.

Ellery chuckled and took something down from the mantel above the fireplace. “You’ve seen this of course?”

“Well?”

Bill’s head came about in a flash. “What the devil is it?” he asked hoarsely.

“Yeah,” drawled De Jong. “What d’ye make of it, Mr. Queen?”

Ellery glanced at him briefly. Then he deposited his find, with its wrappings, on the round table. Bill gulped it down with his eyes. It was a desk-set in brown tooled leather: desk-blotter pad with triangular leather corners, a bronze-based penholder with wells for two fountain pens, and a small curved bronze blotter-holder. A white card protruded from one of the corner pockets of the large pad. The card was blank except for an inscription in blue ink, written in a large neat masculine script: ‘*To Bill, from Lucy and Joe.*’

“Your birthday soon, Angell?” asked De Jong genially, squinting at a piece of paper from the dead man’s breast-pocket.

Bill turned away, his mouth working. “Tomorrow.”

“Damned considerate brother-in-law,” grinned the chief. “That’s his fist, too, on the card, so there’s no question about *that*. One of the boys checked it with a sample of Wilson’s handwriting from his clothes. See for yourself, Mr. Queen.” He tossed to the table the paper he had been holding, a meaningless and unimportant scrawl.

“Oh, I believe you.” Ellery was frowning at the writing-set.

“Seems to interest you,” said De Jong, piling up a number of miscellaneous articles on the table. “Lord knows why! But I’m always ready to learn a new trick. See anything there that escaped me?”

“Since I’ve never had the pleasure of watching you work, De Jong,” murmured Ellery, “I’m scarcely in a position to gauge the extent or accuracy of your observations. But there are certain *minutiæ* of at least hypothetical interest.”

“You don’t say?” De Jong was amused.

Ellery picked up the wrappings of the package. “For one thing, this desk-set was purchased at Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia. That, I confess, means little. But... it’s a fact; and facts, as Ellis Parkes Butler might have said, *is* facts.”

“Now, how’d you know that?” De Jong fingered a sales slip from the pile of articles on the table. “Found it in his pocket, all crumpled. He bought it in Wanamaker’s yesterday, all right. It was a cash sale.”

“How? By no startling means. I recognized the Wanamaker wrapping-paper, because I bought a little gift for my father there only this afternoon in passing through Philadelphia. And of course I continued Ellery mildly, “you’ve noticed the condition of the paper. The question arises: Who undid the package?”

“I don’t know why it should arise,” said De Jong, “but I’ll bite. Who did the foul deed?”

“I should say anyone but poor Wilson. Bill, did you touch anything in this room before I got here tonight?”

“No.”

“None of your men opened this package, De Jong?”

“It was found just the way you saw it, on the mantel.”

“The probability is, then, that it was opened by the murderess—the ‘veiled woman’ Wilson told Bill about before he died. Probability only; of course it may have been done by still a second intruder. But certainly it wasn’t opened by Wilson.”

“Why not?”

“This writing-set was purchased as a gift—witness the card. It was wrapped as a gift—the price-tag has been removed, and the sales slip is in Wilson’s pocket rather than in the package. Therefore whoever bought it did so with the *preconceived* idea of presenting it to Bill Angell. The chances are Wilson bought it in person; but even if he didn’t and delegated someone else to buy it for him, the inspiration would have emanated from him. This being the case, Wilson could have had little reason for opening the package here.”

“I don’t see that,” argued the big man. “Suppose he didn’t write this gift-card in the store—suppose he opened the package here to get one of these pens to write the card with.”

“There’s no ink in either pen, as I’ve already ascertained,” said Ellery patiently. “Of course, he would know that. But even if I grant that he might have had some other reason for opening the package here, he certainly could have had no reason, as donor of the gift, to destroy the wrappings. Ellery flicked his thumb at the paper: it had been ruthlessly ripped from the writing-set. “Those wrappings could scarcely be used again for their original purpose; and there are no other wrapping materials on the premises. So I say, Wilson at least didn’t open the package; for, if he had, he would have been careful not to tear the paper. The murderess, on the other hand, would have been deterred by no such consideration.”

“So what?” said De Jong.

Ellery looked blank. “My dear De Jong, what an asinine question! At this stage I’m chiefly interested in discovering what the criminal may have done on the scene of her crime; her reasons, whether significant or not, we may worry about later... Now, that paper-knife, used as the weapon, comes from the writing-set—unquestionably—”

“Sure, sure,” growled De Jong. “That’s why the woman tore open the package—to get at the knife. She could have told you long ago it was the killer who opened it.”

Ellery raised his brows. “I shouldn’t say that was the reason at all, you know. For one thing, since the gift was purchased only yesterday, it’s highly improbable that the murderess knew there would be a sharp new letter-opener handy for her crime tonight. No, no; the use of the letter-opener as a dagger was completely fortuitous, I’m convinced. It’s more likely the murderess was prowling about here before the crime and opened the package out of sheer curiosity, or from an inner necessity due to nervousness in anticipation of what she was about to do. Naturally, discovering the letter-opener, she would prefer to use it rather than the weapon she must have brought along—if this was a premeditated murder, as it seems to have been. And from time inconceivable the female of the species has found in the knife the fullest expression of her homicidal impulses.”

De Jong scratched his nose and looked annoyed. Bill said in a halting way, “If she had time to prowl... It would look as if she had the place to herself for a while. Then where was Joe? Had she attacked him first? The coroner—”

“Now, now, Bill,” said Ellery soothingly, “don’t fret about these things. We haven’t enough facts yet. You didn’t know anything about this gift, Bill?”

“Not a blessed thing. It sort of... bowls me over. I’ve never bothered much with birthdays. Joe—” He averted his face.

“Well,” shrugged De Jong, “I’ll admit a croaked brother-in-law is one hell of a birthday present. What else did you find, Mr. Queen?”

“Do you want a complete résumé?” asked Ellery calmly. “You know, De Jong, the trouble with you fellows is that you can never overcome your professional contempt for the amateur. I’ve known

amateurs to sit at the feet of professionals, but I can't say the reverse has held equally true. Murphy, I were you I should take notes. Your local prosecutor may bless them some day."

Murphy looked embarrassed, but De Jong nodded with a grim smile.

"A general description of the shack and its contents," said Ellery, puffing thoughtfully on his briefcase, "leads to a rather curious conclusion. In this one-room shack we find neither bed nor cot—no sleeping equipment of any kind. There is a fire-place but no firewood—in fact, no débris or ashes, and the hearth is remarkably clean. The fireplace obviously hasn't been used for months. What else? A broken-down old coal-stove, eaten away by rust and entirely useless for cooking or heating purposes—no doubt a relic of the days when this shack was occupied by squatters... In this connection, observe that there are no candles, no oil-lamps, no gas connections, no matches of any description—"

"True enough," admitted De Jong. "Didn't this bird smoke, Angell?"

"No." Bill was staring out the front window.

"In fact," continued Ellery, "the only means of illumination here is the electric lamp on the table. There's a power-house—?" De Jong nodded. "It's immaterial whether the occupant of this place had the electricity installed or found it here; probably the latter. In any event, note the bare fact. And, to complete the picture, there is only a handful of chipped crockery, not a trace of foodstuffs, and not even the most ordinary first-aid equipment kept by the poorest for medical emergencies."

De Jong chuckled. "Got all that, Murph? That's dandy, Mr. Queen; couldn't have put it better myself. But when it's all added up, what the devil have you got?"

"More," retorted Ellery, "than you apparently realize. You have a house in which the occupant neither slept nor ate—a place with extraordinarily few of the characteristics of a dwelling and all the indications of... a transient shelter, a wayside convenience, the merest stopover. Moreover, from various signs you can deduce the quality of the occupant. This fawn rug is the only one of the accouterments here which doesn't date from the squatter era—much too regal and costly. I should say whoever has been using this place picked it up somewhere second-hand at a respectable price. A concession to sheer luxury in taste—that's significant, don't you think? This tendency to Sybaritism borne out by the clothes on that rack, by the curtains on the windows—rich stuffs, but badly hung, the masculine touch, of course. Finally, the interior is almost meticulously clean; there isn't a speck of dirt or ashes anywhere on the rug, the fireplace is clean as the proverbial whistle, no dust visible to the prying eye. What kind of man does all this paint?"

Bill turned from the window; his eyes were rimmed with red. "It doesn't paint Joe Wilson," he said harshly.

"No," said Ellery. "It certainly does not."

De Jong's smile faded. "But that doesn't jibe with what Wilson told Angell over the 'phone today—that nobody but himself knew about this place!"

"Nevertheless," said Ellery in a queer tone, "I think that another man entirely is involved."

The voices were loud outside. De Jong scrubbed his chin and looked thoughtful. He said: "That sounds like the goddamned press," and went away.

"Now let's see," said Ellery softly, "what friend De Jong has found in poor Wilson's pockets."

The pile on the table was composed of the usual assortment of odds and ends a man carries about with him: a bunch of keys; a worn wallet which contained two hundred and thirty-six dollars in bills—Ellery glanced at Bill, who still stared out the window; a number of miscellaneous scraps of paper, several registered-letter receipts; a driver's license in Wilson's name; and two snapshots of a very

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