

The African Traveler

Ellery Queen Adventures

by Ellery Queen, 1905-1982

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MR. ELLERY QUEEN, WRAPPED loosely in English tweeds and reflections, proceeded—in a manner of speaking—with effort along the eighth-floor corridor of the Arts Building, that sumptuous citadel of the University. The tweeds were pure Bond Street, for Ellery was ever the sartorial fellow; whereas the reflections were Americanese, Ellery's ears being filled with the peculiar patois of young male and female collegians, and he himself having been Harvard, "Teen.

This, he observed severely to himself as he lanced his way with the ferrule of his stick through a brigade of yelling students, was higher education in New York! He sighed, his silver eyes tender behind the lenses of his pince-nez; for, possessing

that acute faculty of observation so essential to his business of studying criminal phenomena, he could not help but note the tea-rose complexions, the saucy eyes, and the osier figures of various female students in his path. His own Alma Mater, he reflected gloomily, paragon of the educational virtues that it was, might have been better—far better—off had it besprinkled its muscular classes with nice-smelling co-eds like these—yes, indeed!

Shaking off these unprofessorial thoughts, Mr. Ellery Queen edged gingerly through a battalion of giggling, girls and approached Room 824, his destination, with dignity.

He halted. A tall and handsome and fawn-eyed young woman was leaning against the closed door, so obviously lying in wait for him that he began, under the buckling tweeds, to experience a—good lord!—a trepidation. Leaning, in fact, on the little placard which read:

CRIMINOLOGY, APPLIED
MR. QUEEN

This was, of course, sacrilege... The fawn-eyes looked up at him soulfully, with admiration, almost with reverence. What did a member of the faculty do in such a predicament? Ellery wondered with a muted groan. Ignore the female person, speak to her firmly—?

The decision was wrested from his hands and, so to speak, placed on his arm. The brigand grasped his left biceps with devotional vigor and said in fluty tones: "You're Mr. Ellery Queen, himself, aren't you? I *knew* you were. You've the nicest eyes. Such a queer color. Oh, it's going to be *thrilling*, Mr. Queen!"

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, I didn't say, did I?" The hand, which he observed with some astonishment was preposterously small, released his tingling biceps. She said sternly, as if in some way he had fallen in her estimation: "And you're the famous detective. Hmm. Another illusion blasted... Old Icky sent me, of course."

"Old *Icky*?"

"You don't know even that. Heavens! Old Icky is Professor Ickthorpe, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., and goodness knows what else."

"Ah!" said Ellery. "I begin to understand."

"And high time, too," said the young woman severely. "Furthermore, Old Icky is my father, do you see..." She became all at once very shy, or so Ellery reasoned, for the black lashes with their impossible sweep dropped suddenly to veil eyes of the ultimate brownness.

"I do see, Miss Ickthorpe." Ickthorpe! "I see all too clearly. Because Professor Ickthorpe—ah—inveigled me into giving this fantastic course, because you are Professor Ickthorpe's daughter, you think you may wheedle your way into my group. Fallacious reasoning," said Ellery, and planted his stick like a standard on the floor. "I think not. No."

Her slipper-toe joggled his stick unexpectedly, and he flailed wildly to keep from falling. "Do come off your perch, Mr. Queen... There! That's settled. Shall we go in, Mr. Queen? Such a nice name."

"But—"

"Icky has arranged things, bless him."

"I refuse abso—"

"The Bursar has been paid his filthy lucre. I have my B.A., and I'm just dawdling about here working for my Master's. I'm really very intelligent. Oh, come on—don't be so professorish. You're much too nice a young man, and your *devastating* silv'ry eyes—"

"Oh, very well," said Ellery, suddenly pleased with himself. "Come along."

It was a small seminar room, containing a long table flanked with chairs. Two young men rose, rather respectfully, Ellery thought. They seemed surprised but not too depressed at the vision of Miss Ickthorpe, who was evidently a notorious character. One of them bounded forward and pumped Ellery's hand.

"Mr. Queen! I'm Burrows, John Burrows. Decent of you to pick me and Crane out of that terrific bunch of would-be manhunters." He was a nice young fellow, Ellery decided, with bright eyes and a thin intelligent, face.

"Decent of your instructors and record, Burrows, I'd say... And you're Walter Crane, of course?"

The second young man shook Ellery's hand decorously, as if it were a rite; he was tall, broad, and studious-looking in a pleasant way. "I am, sir. Degree in chemistry. I'm really interested in what you and the Professor are attempting to do."

"Splendid. Miss Ickthorpe—rather unexpectedly—is to be the fourth member of our little group," said Ellery. "Rather unexpectedly! Well, let's sit down and talk this over."

Crane and Burrows flung themselves into chairs, and the young woman seated herself demurely, Ellery threw hat and stick into a corner, clasped his hands on the bare table, and looked at the white ceiling. One must begin... "This is all rather nonsensical, you know, and yet there's something solid in it. Professor Ickthorpe came to me some time ago with an idea. He had heard of my modest achievements in solving crimes by pure analysis, and he thought it might be interesting to develop the faculty of detection by deduction in young university students. I wasn't so sure, having been a university student myself."

"We're rather on the brainy side these days," said Miss Ickthorpe.

"Hmm. That remains to be seen," said Ellery dryly. "I suppose it's against the rules, but I can't think without tobacco. You may smoke, gentlemen. A cigarette, Miss Ickthorpe?"

She accepted one absently, furnished her own match, and kept looking at Ellery's eyes. "Field work, of course?" asked Crane, the chemist.

"Precisely." Ellery sprang to his feet. "Miss Ickthorpe, *please* pay attention... If we're to do this at all, we must do it right... Very well. We shall study crimes out of the current news—crimes, it goes without saying, which lend themselves to our particular brand of detection. We start from scratch, all of us—no preconceptions, understand.... You will work under my direction, and we shall see what happens."

Burrows' keen face glowed. "Theory? I mean—won't you give us any principles of attack first—classroom lectures?"

"To hell with principles. I beg your pardon, Miss Ickthorpe... The only way to learn to swim, Burrows, is to get into the water... There were sixty-three applicants for this confounded course. I wanted only two or three—too many

would defeat my purpose; unwieldy, you know. I selected you, Crane, because you seem to have the “analytical mind to a reasonable degree, and your scientific training has developed your sense of observation. You, Burrows, have a sound academic background and, evidently, an excellent top-piece.” The two young men blushed. “As for you, Miss Ickthorpe,” continued Ellery stiffly, “you selected yourself, so you’ll have to take the consequences. Old Icky or no Old Icky, at the first sign of stupidity out you go.”

“An Ickthorpe sir, is never stupid.”

“I hope—I sincerely hope—not... Now, to cases. An hour ago, before I set out for the University, a flash came in over the Police Headquarters’ wire. Most fortuitously, I thought, and we must be properly grateful... Murder in the theatrical district—chap by the name of Spargo is the victim. A queer enough affair, I gathered, from the sketchy facts given over the tape. I’ve asked my father—Inspector Queen, you know—to leave the scene of the crime exactly as found. We go there at once.”

“Bully!” cried Burrows. “To grips with Crime! This is going to be great. Shan’t we have any trouble getting in, Mr. Queen?”

“None at all. I’ve arranged for each of you gentlemen to carry a special police pass, like my own; I’ll get one for you later, Miss Ickthorpe... Let me caution all of you to refrain from taking anything away from the scene of the crime—at least without consulting me first. And on no account allow yourselves to be pumped by reporters.”

“A murder,” said Miss Ickthorpe thoughtfully, with a sudden dampening of spirits.

“Aha! Squeamish already. Well, this affair will be a test-case for all of you. I want to see how your minds work in contact with the real thing... Miss Ickthorpe, have you a hat or something?”

“Sir?”

“Duds, duds! You can’t traipse in there this way, you know!”

“Oh!” she murmured, blushing. “Isn’t a sport dress *au fait* at murders?” Ellery glared, and she added sweetly: “In my locker down the hall, Mr. Queen. I shan’t be a moment.”

Ellery jammed his hat on his head. “I shall meet the three of you in front of the Arts Building in five minutes. Five minutes, Miss Ickthorpe!” And, retrieving his stick, he stalked like any professor from the seminar room. All the way down the elevator, through the main corridor, on the marble steps outside, he breathed deeply. A remarkable day! he observed to the campus. A really remarkable day.

The Fenwick Hotel lay a few hundred yards from Times Square. Its lobby was boiling with policemen, detectives, reporters and, from their universal appearance of apprehension, guests. Mountainous Sergeant Velie, Inspector Queen’s right-hand man, was planted at the door, a cement barrier against curiosity-seekers. By his side stood a tall, worried-looking man dressed somberly in a blue serge suit, white linen, and black bow-tie.

“Mr. Williams, the hotel manager,” said the Sergeant.

Williams shook hands. “Can’t understand it. Terrible mess. You’re with the police?”

Ellery nodded. His charges surrounded him like a royal guard—a rather timid royal guard, to be sure, for they pressed close to him as if for protection. There was something sinister in the atmosphere. Even the hotel clerks and attendants, uniformly dressed in gray—suits, ties, shirts—wore strained expressions, like stewards on a foundering ship.

“Nobody in or out, Mr. Queen,” growled Sergeant Velie. “Inspector’s orders. You’re the first since the body was found. These people okay?”

“Yes. Dad’s on the scene?”

“Upstairs, third floor, Room 317. Mostly quiet now.”

Ellery leveled his stick. “Come along, young ’uns. And don’t—” he added gently, “don’t be so nervous. You’ll become accustomed to this sort of thing. Keep your heads up.”

They bobbed in unison, their eyes a little glassy. As they ascended in a policed elevator, Ellery observed that Miss Ickthorpe was trying very hard to appear professionally blasé. Ickthorpe indeed! This should take the starch out of her... They walked down a hushed corridor to an open door. Inspector Queen, a small birdlike gray little man with sharp eyes remarkably like his son’s, met them in the doorway.

Ellery, suppressing a snicker at the convulsive start of Miss Ickthorpe, who had darted one fearful glance into the death-room and then gasped for dear life, introduced the young people to the Inspector, shut the door behind his somewhat reluctant charges, and looked about the bedroom.

Lying on the drab carpet, arms outflung before him like a diver, lay a dead man. His head presented a curious appearance: as if some one had upset a bucket of thick red paint over him, clotting the brown hair and gushing over his shoulders. Miss Ickthorpe gave vent to a faint gurgle which certainly was not appreciation. Ellery observed with morbid satisfaction that her tiny hands were clenched and that her elfin face was whiter than the bed near which the dead man lay sprawled. Crane and Burrows were breathing hard.

“Miss Ickthorpe, Mr. Crane, Mr. Burrows—your first corpse,” said Ellery briskly. “Now, dad, to work. How does it stand?”

Inspector Queen sighed. “Name is Oliver Spargo. Forty-two, separated from his wife two years ago. Mercantile traveler for a big drygoods exporting house. Returned from South Africa after a year’s stay. Bad reputation with the natives in the outlying settlements—thrashed them, cheated them; in fact, was driven out of British Africa by a scandal. It was in the New York papers not long ago... Registered at the Fenwick here for three days—same floor, by the way—then checked out to go to Chicago. Visiting relatives.” The Inspector grunted, as if this were something justifiably punished by homicide. “Returned to New York this morning by plane. Checked in at 9:30. Didn’t leave this room. At 11:30 he was found dead, just as you see him, by the colored maid on this floor, Agatha Robins.”

“Leads?”

The old man shrugged. “Maybe—maybe not. We’ve looked this bird up. Pretty hard guy, from the reports, but sociable. No enemies, apparently; all his movements since his boat docked innocent and accounted for. *And* a lady-killer. Chucked his wife over before his last trip across, and took to his bosom a nice

blonde gal. Fussed with her for a couple of months, and then skipped out—and *didn't* take her with him. We've had both women on the pan."

"Suspects?"

Inspector Queen stared moodily at the dead traveler. "Well, take your pick. He had one visitor this morning—the blonde lady I just mentioned. Name of Jane Terrill—no sign of occupation. Huh! She evidently read in the ship news of Spargo's arrival two weeks ago; hunted him up, and a week ago, while Spargo was in Chicago, called at the desk downstairs inquiring for him. She was told he was expected back this morning—he'd left word. She came in at 11:05 this a.m., was given his room-number, was taken up by the elevator-boy. Nobody remembers her leaving. But she says she knocked and there was no answer, so she went away and hasn't been back since. Never saw him—according to her story."

Miss Ickthorpe skirted the corpse with painful care, perched herself on the edge of the bed, opened her bag and began to powder her nose. "And the wife, Inspector Queen?" she murmured. Something sparkled in the depths of her fawn-brown eyes. Miss Ickthorpe, it was evident, had an idea and was taking heroic measures to suppress it.

"The wife?" snorted the Inspector. "God knows. She and Spargo separated, as I said, and she claims she didn't even know he'd come back from Africa. Says she was window-shopping this morning."

It was a small featureless hotel room, containing a bed, a wardrobe closet, a bureau, a night-table, a desk, and a chair. A dummy fireplace with a gas-log; an open door which led to a bathroom—nothing more.

Ellery dropped to his knees beside the body, Crane and Burrows trooping after with set faces. The Inspector sat down and watched with a humorless grin. Ellery turned the body over; his hands explored the rigid members, stiff in *rigor mortis*.

"Crane, Burrows, Miss Ickthorpe," he said sharply. "Might as well begin now. Tell me what you see—Miss Ickthorpe, you first." She jumped from the bed and ran around the dead man; he felt her hot unsteady breath on the back of his neck. "Well, well? Don't you see *anything*? Good lord, there's enough here, I should think."

Miss Ickthorpe licked her red lips and said in a strangled voice: "He—he's dressed in lounging-robe, carpet-slippers and—yes, silk underwear beneath."

"Yes. And black silk socks and garters. And the robe and underwear bear the dealer's label: *Johnson's, Johannesburg, U.S.Afr.* What else?"

"A wrist-watch on his left wrist. I think"—she leaned over and with the shrinking tip of a finger nudged the dead arm—"Yes, the watch crystal is cracked. Why, it's set at 10:20!"

"Good," said Ellery in a soft voice. "Dad, did Prouty examine the cadaver?"

"Yes," said the Inspector in a resigned voice. "Spargo died some time between 11:00 and 11:30, Doc says. I figure—"

Miss Ickthorpe's eyes were shining. "Doesn't that mean—?"

"Now, now, Miss Ickthorpe, if you have an idea keep it to yourself. Don't leap at conclusions. That's enough for you. Well, Crane?"

The young chemist's brow was ridged. He pointed to the watch, a large gaudy affair with a leather wrist-strap. "Man's watch. Concussion of fall stopped the

works. Crease in leather strap at the second hole, where the prong now fits; but there's also a crease, a deeper one, at the third hole."

"That's really excellent, Crane. And?"

"Left hand splattered and splashed with dried blood. Left palm also shows stain, but fainter, as if he had grabbed something with his bloody hand and wiped most of the blood off. There ought to be something around here showing a red smudge from his clutching hand..."

"Crane, I'm proud of you. Was anything found with a blood-smear on it, dad?"

The Inspector looked interested. "Good work, youngster. No, El, nothing at all. Not even a smear on the rug. Must be something the murderer took away."

"Now, Inspector," chuckled Ellery, "this isn't *your* examination. Burrows, can you add anything?"

Young Burrows swallowed rapidly: "Wounds on the head show he was struck with a heavy instrument many times. Disarranged rug probably indicates a struggle. And the face—"

"Ah! So you've noticed the face, eh? What about the face?"

"Freshly shaved. Talcum powder still on cheeks and chin. Don't you think we ought to examine the bathroom, Mr. Queen?"

Miss Ickthorpe said peevishly: "I noticed that, too, but you didn't give me a chance... The powder is smoothly applied, isn't it? No streaks, no heavy spots."

Ellery sprang to his feet. "You'll be Sherlock Holmeses yet... The weapon, dad?"

"A heavy stone hammer, crudely made—some kind of African curio, our expert says. Spargo must have had it in his bag—his trunk hasn't arrived yet from Chicago."

Ellery nodded; on the bed lay an open pigskin traveling-bag. Beside it, neatly laid out, was an evening outfit: tuxedo coat, trousers, and vest; stiff-bosomed shirt; studs and cufflinks; a clean wing-collar; black suspenders; a white silk handkerchief. Under the bed were two pairs of black shoes, one pair brogues, the other patent-leather. Ellery looked around; something, it seemed, disturbed him. On the chair near the bed lay a soiled shirt, a soiled pair of socks, and a soiled suit of underwear. None exhibited bloodstains. He paused thoughtfully.

"We took the hammer away. It was full of blood and hair," continued the Inspector. "No fingerprints anywhere. Handle anything you want—everything's been photographed and tested for prints."

Ellery began to puff at a cigarette. He noticed that Burrows and Crane were crouched over the dead man, occupied with the watch. He sauntered over, Miss Ickthorpe at his heels.

Burrows' thin face was shining as he looked up. "Here's something!" He had carefully removed the timepiece from Spargo's wrist and had pried open the back of the case. Ellery saw a roughly circular patch of fuzzy white paper glued to the inside of the case, as if something had been rather unsuccessfully torn away. Burrows leaped to his feet. "That gives me an idea," he announced. "Yes, sir." He studied the dead man's face intently.

"And you, Crane?" asked Ellery with interest. The young chemist had produced a small magnifying-glass from his pocket and was scrutinizing the watchworks.

Crane rose. "I'd rather not say now," he mumbled. "Mr. Queen, I'd like permission to take this watch to my laboratory."

Ellery looked at his father; the old man nodded. "Certainly, Crane. But be sure you return it... Dad, you searched this room thoroughly, fireplace and all?"

The Inspector cackled suddenly. "I was wondering when you'd get to that. There's something almighty interesting in that fireplace." His face fell and rather grumpily he produced a snuff-box and pinched some crumbs into his nostrils. "Although I'll be hanged if I know what it means."

Ellery squinted at the fireplace, his lean shoulders squaring; the others crowded around. He squinted again, and knelt; behind the manufactured gas-log, in a tiny grate, there was a heap of ashes. Curious ashes indeed, patently not of wood, coal, or paper. Ellery poked about in the debris—and sucked in his breath. In a moment he had dug out of the ashes ten peculiar objects: eight flat pearl buttons and two metal things, one triangular in outline, eye-like, the other hook-like—both small and made of some cheap alloy. Two of the eight buttons were slightly larger than the rest. The buttons were ridged, and in the depression in each center were four thread-holes. All ten objects were charred by fire.

"And what do you make of that?" demanded the Inspector.

Ellery juggled the buttons thoughtfully. He did not reply directly. Instead, he said to his three pupils, in a grim voice: "You might think about these... Dad, when was this fireplace last cleaned?"

"Early this morning by Agatha Robins, the mulatto maid. Some one checked out of this room at seven o'clock, and she cleaned up the place before Spargo got here. Fireplace was clean this morning, she says."

Ellery dropped buttons and metal objects on the night-table and went to the bed. He looked into the open traveling-bag; its interior was in a state of confusion. The bag contained three four-in-hand neckties, two clean white shirts, socks, underwear, and handkerchiefs. All the haberdashery, he noted, bore the same dealer's tab—*Johnson's, Johannesburg, U.S.Afr.* He seemed pleased, and proceeded to the wardrobe closet. It contained merely a tweed traveling suit, a brown topcoat, and a felt hat.

He closed the door with a satisfied bang. "You've observed everything?" he asked the two young men and the girl.

Crane and Burrows nodded, rather doubtfully. Miss Ickthorpe was barely listening; from the rapt expression on her face, she might have been listening to the music of the spheres.

"Miss Ickthorpe!"

Miss Ickthorpe smiled dreamily. "Yes, Mr. Queen," she said in a submissive little voice. Her large brown eyes began to rove.

Ellery grunted and strode to the bureau. Its top was bare. He went through the drawers; they were empty. He started for the desk, but the Inspector said: "Nothing there, son. He hadn't time to stow anything away. Except for the bathroom, you've seen everything."

As if she had been awaiting the signal, Miss Ickthorpe dashed for the bathroom. She seemed very anxious indeed to explore its interior. Crane and Burrows hurried after her.

Ellery permitted them to examine the bathroom before him. Miss Ickthorpe's hands flew over the objects on the rim of the washbowl. There was a pigskin toilet-kit, open, draped over the marble; an unclesed razor; a still damp shaving-

brush; a tube of shaving cream; a small can of talcum and a tube of tooth-paste. To one side lay a celluloid shaving-brush container, its cap on the open kit.

"Can't see a thing of interest here," said Burrows frankly. "You, Walter?"

Crane shook his head. "Except that he must have just finished shaving before he was murdered, not a thing."

Miss Ickthorpe wore a stern and faintly exultant look. "That's because, like all men, you're blinder'n bats... *I've* seen enough."

They trooped by Ellery, rejoining the Inspector, who was talking with some one in the bedroom. Ellery chuckled to himself. He lifted the lid of a clothes-hamper; it was empty. Then he picked up the cap of the shaving-brush container. The cap came apart in his fingers, and he saw that a small circular pad fitted snugly inside. He chuckled again, cast a derisive glance at the triumphant back of the heroic Miss Ickthorpe outside, replaced cap and tube, and went back into the bedroom.

He found Williams, the hotel manager, accompanied by a policeman, talking heatedly to the Inspector. "We can't keep this up forever, Inspector Queen," Williams was saying. "Our guests are beginning to complain. The night-shift is due to go on soon, I've got to go home myself, and you're making us stay here all night, by George. After all—"

The old man said: "Psih!" and cocked an inquiring eye at his son. Ellery nodded. "Can't see any reason for not lifting the ban, dad. We've learned as much as we can... You young people!" Three pairs of eager eyes focused on him; they were like three puppies on a leash. "Have you seen enough?" They nodded solemnly. "Anything else you want to know?"

Burrows said quickly: "I want a certain address."

Miss Ickthorpe paled. "Why, so do I! John, you mean thing!"

And Crane muttered, clutching Spargo's watch in his fist: "I want something, too—but I'll find it out right in this hotel!"

Ellery smoothed away a smile, shrugged, and said: "See Sergeant Velie downstairs—that Colossus we met at the door. He'll tell you anything you may want to know.

"Now, follow instructions. It's evident that the three of you have definite theories. I'll give you two hours in which to formulate them and pursue any investigations you may have in mind." He consulted his watch. "At 6:30, meet me at my apartment on West Eighty-seventh Street, and I'll try to rip your theories apart... Happy hunting!"

He grinned dismissal. They scrambled for the door, Miss Ickthorpe's turban slightly awry, her elbows working vigorously to clear the way.

"And now," said Ellery in a totally different voice when they had disappeared down the corridor, "come here a moment, dad. I want to talk to you alone."

At 6:30 that evening Mr. Ellery Queen presided at his own table, watching three young faces bursting with sternly repressed news. The remains of a dinner, barely touched, strewed the cloth.

Miss Ickthorpe had somehow contrived, in the interval between her dismissal and her appearance at the Queens' apartment, to change her gown; she was now attired in something lacy and soft, which set off—as she obviously was aware—the

whiteness of her throat, the brownness of her eyes, and the pinkness of her cheeks. The young men were preoccupied with their coffee-cups.

“Now, class,” chuckled Ellery, “recitations.” They brightened, sat straighter and moistened their lips. “You’ve had, each of you, about two hours in which to crystallize the results of your first investigation. Whatever happens, I can’t take credit, since so far I’ve taught you nothing. But by the end of this little confabulation, I’ll have a rough idea of just what material I’m working with.”

“Yes, sir,” said Miss Ickthorpe.

“John—we may as well discard formality—what’s *your* theory?”

Burrows said slowly: “I’ve more than a theory, Mr. Queen. I’ve the solution!”

“A solution, John. Don’t be too cocky. And what,” said Ellery, “is this solution of yours?”

Burrows drew a breath from the depths of his boots. “The clue that led to my solution was Spargo’s wrist-watch.” Crane and the girl started. Ellery blew smoke and said encouragingly: “Go on.”

“The two creases on the leather strap,” replied Burrows, “were significant. As Spargo wore the watch, the prong was caught in the second hole, so that there was a crease *across* the second hole. Yet a deeper crease appeared across the *third* hole. Conclusion: the watch was habitually worn by a person with a smaller wrist. In other words, the watch was not Spargo’s!”

“Bravo,” said Ellery softly. “Bravo.”

“Why, then, was Spargo wearing some one else’s watch? For a very good reason, I maintain. The doctor had said Spargo died between 11:00 and 11:30. Yet the watch-hands had apparently stopped at 10:20. The answer to this discrepancy? That the murderer, finding no watch on Spargo, took her own watch, cracked the crystal and stopped the works, then set the hands at 10:20 and strapped it about Spargo’s dead wrist. This would seem to establish the time of death at 10:20 and would give the murderer an opportunity to provide an alibi for that time, when all the while the murder actually occurred about 11:20. How’s that?”

Miss Ickthorpe said tartly: “You say *her*. But it’s a man’s watch, John—you forget that.”

Burrows grinned. “A woman can own a man’s watch, can’t she? Now whose watch was it? Easy. In the back of the case there was a circular patch of fuzzy paper, as if something had been ripped out. What made of paper is usually pasted in the back of a watch? A photograph. Why was it taken out? Obviously, because the murderer’s face was in that photograph... In the last two hours I followed this lead. I visited my suspect on a reportorial pretext and managed to get a look at a photograph-album she has. There I found one photograph with a circular patch cut out. From the rest of the photo it was clear that the missing circle contained the heads of a man and a woman. My case was complete!”

“Perfectly amazing,” murmured Ellery. “And this murderess of yours is—?”

“Spargo’s wife! ... Motive—hate, or revenge, or thwarted love, or something.”

Miss Ickthorpe sniffed, and Crane shook his head. “Well,” said Ellery, “we seem to be in disagreement. Nevertheless a very interesting analysis, John... Walter, what’s yours?”

Crane hunched his broad shoulders. “I agree with Johnny that the watch did not belong to Spargo, that the murderer set the hands at 10:20 to provide an alibi;

but I disagree as to the identity of the criminal. I also worked on the watch as the main clue. But with a vastly different approach.

“Look here.” He brought out the gaudy timepiece and tapped its cracked crystal deliberately. “Here’s something you people may not know. Watches, so to speak, breathe. That is, contact with warm flesh causes the air inside to expand and force its way out through the minute cracks and holes of the case and crystal. When the watch is laid aside, the air cools and contracts, and dust-bearing air is sucked into the interior.”

“I always said I should have studied science,” said Ellery. “That’s a new trick, Walter. Continue.”

“To put it specifically, a baker’s watch will be found to contain flour-dust. A bricklayer’s watch will collect brick-dust.” Crane’s voice rose triumphantly. “D’you know what I found in this watch? Tiny particles of a woman’s face-powder!”

Miss Ickthorpe frowned. Crane continued in a deep voice: “And a very special kind of face-powder it is, Mr. Queen. Kind used only by women of certain complexions. What complexions? Negro brown! The powder came from a mulatto woman’s purse! I’ve questioned her, checked her vanity-case, and although she denies it, I say that Spargo’s murderess is Agatha Robins, the mulatto maid who *found* the body!”

Ellery whistled gently. “Good work, Walter, splendid work. And of course from your standpoint she would deny being the owner of the watch anyway. That clears something up for me....But motive?”

Crane looked uncomfortable. “Well, I know it sounds fantastic, but a sort of voodoo vengeance—reversion to racial type—Spargo had been cruel to African natives... it was in the papers...”

Ellery shaded his eyes to conceal their twinkle. Then he turned to Miss Ickthorpe, who was tapping her cup nervously, squirming in her chair, and exhibiting other signs of impatience. “And now,” he said, “we come to the star recitation. What have you to offer, Miss Ickthorpe? You’ve been simply saturated with a theory all afternoon. Out with it.”

She compressed her lips, “You boys think you’re clever. You, too, Mr. Queen—you especially... Oh, I’ll admit John and Walter have shown superficial traces of intelligence...”

“*Will* you be explicit, Miss Ickthorpe?”

She tossed her head. “Very well. The watch had nothing to do with the crime at all!”

The boys gaped, and Ellery tapped his palms gently together. “*Very* good. I agree with you. Explain, please.”

Her brown eyes burned, and her cheeks were very pink. “Simple!” she said with a sniff. “Spargo had arrived from Chicago only two hours before his murder. He had been in Chicago for a week and a half. Then for a week and a half he had been living by *Chicago time*. And, since Chicago time is *one hour earlier* than New York time, it merely means that nobody set the hands back; that they were standing at 10:20 when he fell dead, because he’d *neglected* to set his watch ahead on arriving in New York this morning!”

Crane muttered something in his throat, and Burrows flushed a deep crimson. Ellery looked sad. "I'm afraid the laurels so far go to Miss Ickthorpe, gentlemen. That happens to be correct. Anything else?"

"Naturally. I know the murderer, and it isn't Spargo's wife or that outlandish mulatto maid," she said exasperatingly. "Follow me... Oh, this is so easy! ... We all saw that the powder on Spargo's dead face had been applied very smoothly. From the condition of his cheeks and the shaving things in the bathroom it was evident that he'd shaved just before being murdered. But how does a man apply powder after shaving? How do *you* powder your face, Mr. Queen?" she shot at him rather tenderly.

Ellery looked startled. "With my fingers, of course." Crane and Burrows nodded.

"Exactly!" chortled Miss Ickthorpe. "And what happens? *I* know, because I'm a very observant person and, besides, Old Icky shaves every morning and I can't *help* noticing when he kisses me good-morning. Applied with the fingers on cheeks still slightly moist, the powder goes on in streaks, smudgy, heavier in some spots than others. But look at *my* face!" They looked, with varying expressions of appreciation. "You don't see powder streaks on *my* face, do you? Of course not! And why? Because I'm a woman, and a woman uses a powder-puff, and there isn't a single powder-puff in Spargo's bedroom or bathroom!"

Ellery smiled—almost with relief. "Then you suggest, Miss Ickthorpe, that the last person with Spargo, presumably his murderess, was a woman who watched him shave and then, with endearment perhaps, took out her own powder-puff and dabbed it over his face—only to bash him over the head with the stone hammer a few minutes later?"

"Well—yes, although I didn't think of it *that* way... But—yes! And psychology points to the specific woman, too, Mr. Queen. A man's wife would never think of such an—an amorous proceeding. But a man's mistress would, and I say that Spargo's lady-love, Jane Terrill, whom I visited only an hour ago and who denies having powdered Spargo's face—she would!—killed him."

Ellery sighed. He rose and twitched his cigarette-stub into the fireplace. They were watching him, and each other, with expectancy. "Aside," he began, "from complimenting you, Miss Ickthorpe, on the acuteness of your knowledge of mistresses"—she uttered an outraged little gasp—"I want to say this before going ahead. The three of you have proved very ingenious, very alert; I'm more pleased than I can say. I do think we're going to have a cracking good class. Good work, all of you!"

"But, Mr. Queen," protested Burrows, "which one of us is right? Each one of us has given a different solution."

Ellery waved his hand. "Right? A detail, theoretically. The point is you've done splendid work—sharp observation, a rudimentary but promising linking of cause and effect. As for the case itself, I regret to say—you're all wrong!"

Miss Ickthorpe clenched her tiny fist. "I *knew* you'd say that! I think you're horrid. And I still think I'm right."

"There, gentlemen, is an extraordinary example of feminine psychology," grinned Ellery. "Now attend, all of you."

"You're all wrong for the simple reason that each of you has taken just one line of attack, one clue, one chain of reasoning, and completely ignored the other

elements of the problem. You, John, say it's Spargo's wife, merely because her photograph-album contains a picture from which a circular patch with two heads has been cut away. That this might have been sheer coincidence apparently never occurred to you.

"You, Walter, came nearer the truth when you satisfactorily established the ownership of the watch as the mulatto maid's. But suppose Maid Robins had accidentally dropped the watch in Spargo's room at the hotel during his first visit there, and he had found it and taken it to Chicago with him? That's what probably happened. The mere fact that he wore her watch doesn't make her his murderess.

"You, Miss Ickthorpe, explained away the watch business with the difference-in-time element, but you overlooked an important item. Your entire solution depends on the presence in Spargo's room of a powder-puff. Willing to believe that no puff remained on the scene of the crime, because it suited your theory, you made a cursory search and promptly concluded no puff was there. But a puff is there! Had you investigated the cap of the celluloid tube in which Spargo kept his shaving-brush, you would have found a circular pad of powder-puff which toilet-article manufacturers in this effeminate age provide for men's traveling-kits."

Miss Ickthorpe said nothing; she seemed actually embarrassed.

"Now for the proper solution," said Ellery, mercifully looking away. "All three of you, amazingly enough, postulate a woman as the criminal. Yet it was apparent to me, after my examination of the premises, that the murderer *must have been a man.*"

"A man!" they echoed in chorus.

"Exactly. Why did none of you consider the significance of those eight buttons and the two metal clips?" He smiled. "Probably because again they didn't fit your preconceived theories. But *everything* must fit in a solution... Enough of scolding. You'll do better next time.

"Six small pearl buttons, flat, and two slightly larger ones, found in a heap of ashes distinctly not of wood, coal, or paper. There is only one common article which possesses these characteristics—a man's shirt. A man's shirt, the six buttons from the front, the two larger ones from the cuffs, the debris from the linen or broadcloth. Some one, then, had burned a man's shirt in the grate, forgetting that the buttons would not be consumed.

"The metal objects, like a large hook and eye? A shirt suggests haberdashery, the hook and eye suggests only one thing—one of the cheap bow-ties which are purchased ready-tied, so that you do not have to make the bow yourself."

They were watching his lips like kindergarten children. "You, Crane, observed that Spargo's bloody left hand had clutched something, most of the blood coming off the palm. But nothing smudged with blood had been found... A man's shirt and tie had been burned... Inference: In the struggle with the murderer, after he had already been hit on the head and was streaming blood, Spargo had clutched his assailant's collar and tie, staining them. Borne out too by the signs of struggle in the room.

"Spargo dead, his own collar and tie wet with blood, what could the murderer do? Let me attack it this way: The murderer must have been from one of three classes of people: a rank outsider, or a guest at the hotel, or an employee of the hotel. What had he done? He had burned his shirt and tie. But if he had been an

outsider, he could have turned up his coat-collar, concealing the stains long enough to get out of the hotel—no necessity, then, to burn shirt and tie when time was precious. Were he one of the hotel guests, he could have done the same thing while he went to his own room. Then he must have been an employee.

“Confirmation? Yes. As an employee he would be forced to remain in the hotel, on duty, constantly being seen. What could he do? Well, he had to change his shirt and tie. Spargo’s bag was open—shirt inside. He rummaged through—you saw the confusion in the bag—and changed. Leave his shirt? No, it might be traced to him. So, boys and girls, burning was inevitable...

“The tie? You recall that, while Spargo had laid out his evening-clothes on the bed, there was no bow-tie there, in the bag, or anywhere else in the room. Obviously, then, the murderer took the bow-tie of the tuxedo outfit, and burned his own bow-tie with the shirt.”

Miss Ickthorpe sighed, and Crane and Burrows shook their heads a little dazedly. “I knew, then, that the murderer was an employee of the hotel, a man, and that he was wearing Spargo’s shirt and black or white bow-tie, probably black. But all the employees of the hotel wear gray shirts and gray ties, as we observed on entering the Fenwick. Except”—Ellery inhaled the smoke of his cigarette—“except one man. Surely you noticed the difference in his attire? ... And so, when you left on your various errands, I suggested to my father that this man be examined—he seemed the best possibility. And, sure enough, we found on him a shirt and bow-tie bearing Johannesburg labels like those we had observed on Spargo’s other haberdashery. I knew we should find this proof, for Sparg had spent a whole year in South Africa, and since most of his clothes had been purchased there, it was reasonable to expect that the stolen shirt and tie had been, too.”

“Then the case was finished when we were just beginning,” said Burrows ruefully.

“But—who?” demanded Crane in bewilderment.

Ellery blew a great cloud. “We got a confession out of him in three minutes. Spargo, that gentle creature, had years before stolen this man’s wife, and then thrown her over. When Spargo registered at the Fenwick two weeks ago, this man recognized him and decided to revenge him self. He’s at the Tombs right now—Williams, the hotel manager!”

There was a little silence. Burrows bobbed his head back and forth. “We’ve got a lot to learn,” he said. “I can see that.”

“Check,” muttered Crane. “I’m going to like this course.”

Ellery pshaw-pshawed. Nevertheless, he turned to Miss Ickthorpe who by all precedent should be moved to contribute to the general spirit of approbation. But Miss Ickthorpe’s thoughts were far away. “Do you know,” she said, her brown eyes misty, “you’ve never asked me my first name, Mr. Queen?”

