

fantastic

ADVENTURES

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VOLUME 3,
Number 5

3 TERR

by John York Cabot



YOU'VE heard of Terrence Titwillow. He's the fellow who wrote all those spine-chilling mystery yarns, such as the *Case Of The Bloody Bishop*, *Death Is So Definite*, and *Murder By The Millions*, just to mention a few.

Terrence and I used to be fellow hacks. We wrote for the same magazines and frequented the same dens of debauchery. But when he wrote his first best-selling novel, *The Severed Left Ear Of A Lady*, he moved out of my class completely, socially and professionally. Except for almost yearly occasions when he'd invite me up to his penthouse to pour a few down the drain and talk over old times, I would have lost track of him completely. Terrence had gone big-time and I was still small fry.

It was a distinct surprise, therefore, when my telephone rang one December evening and I picked up the receiver to hear the voice of Terrence Titwillow on the other end of the wire.

"Hello, h-hello, Danny. This is Terry Titwillow."

They were holy terrors, these three characters out of Titwillow's typewriter. Fine stuff in a novel—but sheer devils when they came alive

IBLE People



"I'm Pierre, the personable Parisian," he said. "One of your characters, remember?"

"Well," I said, feeling like a fool, "well, well. How are you, Terry? What do you know?"

"Plenty," he said, and in that instant I caught something strained, odd, in his voice. Something I couldn't place, a sort of ragged fear. "Plenty," he said again, "but I haven't time for that now. I'm in a hell of a mess, Danny. An awful mess." The fear seemed sharper. "I have to see you, Danny. You've been my best friend in the old days. You're still the only one I can trust. I have to see you."

"When?" I asked, slightly soured at this old-pal hokum.

"Right now," he answered, and I think his voice split an octave on the last syllable. "It's terribly important!"

I hesitated for an instant. It was cold outside, and a good half hour ride to his apartment, a Michigan Avenue penthouse. If I was such a pal, such a damned fine friend in need, why had he waited so long to remember it? Then sentiment took control. Maybe he *was* in trouble. And, after all, we used to be broke together.

"Okay," I replied. "I'll be right over."

In ten minutes I was out in the cold, kicking the starter of my refrigerated jalopy and cursing myself for a chump. This was a hell of a night to be leaving a warm house.

After about ten minutes of driving, I turned on the radio figuring that maybe some hot dance music would warm me a bit. But there wasn't any dance music right then. Just an excited news announcer babbling about some sort of a crime wave that had been holding Chicago in its grip for the past forty-eight hours. I'd lived in Chicago for most of my life, so I was most unimpressed. But one bulletin snapped my head up.

"Flash," said the announcer. "A report has just come into the station, but is as yet unverified. It is believed that the fabulous Coanor Diamond has been stolen!"

The Coanor Diamond!

For a minute I couldn't believe it. Everyone who had been reading the papers in the past two weeks was aware of the fact that the incredibly priceless gem had been brought into Chicago less than a month after its discovery in South America. Some wealthy Chicago merchant had bought the thing. Paid a tremendous price for it.

And now it was believed stolen.

"What a story," I thought. "What a *helluva* good story!" I was so excited that I nearly hit a lamppost. And then, just as I was eagerly awaiting further information from the announcer, a dance band came back onto the air. Disgusted, I snapped it off.

I WAS still ruminating on the possibilities of the diamond theft when I drew up in front of Terrence Titwillow's apartment. Along with my magazine hacking, amateur crime speculation had always interested me intensely. It must have taken some awfully clever work to lift the Coanor. Rumor had it that the thing was guarded night and day by a cordon of ten policemen.

But I pushed the news item to the back of my mind as I pressed the button on the elevator which would lift me to the penthouse hovel of Terrence Titwillow. I wondered what he could have called me for.

He was at the door of his apartment when I arrived, which was quite a surprise. Usually he'd let the butler admit me on my other visits—to impress me. But there was no butler this time, just Terrence Titwillow, standing there

in the door wearing Chinese pajamas, and with a wild gleam in his eye.

"Danny," he croaked, and I saw that he had a full three days' beard stubble on his jowels. Bleary bloodshot eyes, too. I gaped, for I'd never seen him in such bad shape.

"Jeeeeeeudas," I managed to say at last. "What in the devil have you been doing to yourself? Growing ragged from those literary teas?"

He grabbed my hand as though I might run away. "It's terrible, Danny. Simply terrible!"

While I threw my hat and coat on the hall table, Terrence stood there wringing his hands dismally and looking like a fat and troubled edition of Humpty-dumpty. Terrence had always been given to excess flesh, and the fact that he was as bald as an egg and less than five feet three in his bare feet added nothing to his glamour.

His pajamas, hideous black and pink things embellished with rampant dragons, clung to his paunchy frame in a dejected sort of way. He was holding an unlighted cigarette drooped from the corner of his twitching mouth, giving the impression that his hands might be too damp to strike a match.

"Tell me all," I said with enough melodrama to cover the situation.

Terrence nodded and shuffled across the room to where he had several glasses already waiting on a tray. He gave me one, and gulped down the other in a lightning gesture. From the tremble in his hands I could tell that he was bearing down heavily on the stuff.

"Well," I repeated, "what's it all about?"

"It's a long story, Danny. A long and terrible story. Maybe you aren't going to believe me. I haven't dared hint at it to anyone else, and if *you* don't believe me, I'll go utterly raving mad!" There was a passionate plead-

ing in his voice, and suddenly I felt a surge of pity for the man. Here was genius on the verge of going *phfffffft!*

"Go ahead, Terrence," I said as consolingly as I could. "Go ahead and get it off your chest."

HE ran a trembling hand over his third chin and reached for the scotch decanter and soda siphon.

"You remember my first best seller, Danny, *The Severed Left Ear Of A Lady?*"

"Of course," I nodded.

"Remember what the critics said about it?"

I frowned. What the hell, had he brought me up here to remind him of all his nice press clippings?

"Yeah," I answered curtly. "They said that it was a corker. I think they said that your ability to create living and breathing characters would carry you a long way. You were always good at characterization."

"Unusually vivid characterization, Danny," said Terry nodding excitedly. "That's what they said. Characters that lived and breathed!" He gulped his drink and filled himself another.

"That's right," I went on. "All the rest of your stuff got the same raves. Critics claimed that you were the only crime author in the racket who could get away with weak plots and still write best sellers. Of course, they said that your characterization was the key-note of your work. But," I frowned again, and my voice must have been sharp, impatient, "I don't see what in the dickens that—"

He broke in hurriedly.

"Don't get me wrong, Danny. I'm not breaking my arm. I didn't get you up here to listen to self-adulation. I'm just telling you this because it's terribly important. Terribly important in view of," his voice quavered, "*in view*

of what has happened."

"I don't get it." I was becoming thoroughly disgusted by now. Being called out of a warm house on a cold night to listen to a drunk babble on about his deft characterization didn't appeal to me. "Get to the point. If there's something I can do to help you, okay. But if you just want to talk shop—"

"But Danny," Terry was pleading now. "That is the point! That's the all-important point. My characterization, my vivid, utterly real characterization. The thing that the critics have raved about in every book I've written. And now it's boomeranged!"

I rose to my feet. I could see it all clearly now. Titwillow, bless his drunken hide, had been on a bat. Been on a bat and was now in need of someone to hash over his past successes. I'd been picked as the goat.

"Look," I said coldly. "You'll be all right in the morning. Take a cold shower; get your self a bro—"

"But Danny!" He leaped to his feet, folded his hands in an imploring gesture. "Danny, I'm not tight. I wish I were. Oh, I wish I were stinking drunk! But I'm not. Please. I'll get to it in a moment. But all this I've been telling you is vitally important."

"Okay," I said. "I'll give you just two minutes to get to the point. What is it?"

"The characters I created in my novels!"

"I don't get it yet. Get to the point!"

"You remember my characters, Danny. There were three of them on which I built all my stuff."

"Yeah, I know. But what has this all got to do wi—"

"Those three characters, Danny. Honest-to-God, may the heavens strike

me dead if I lie, *have come to life!*" His voice was an almost hysterical scream, and his gimlet eyes fixed wildly on me.

I turned and walked out into the hall to get my coat.

CHAPTER II

Pierre, the Personable Parisian

"DANNY, Danny," Terry's voice was hoarse, pleading. "Don't walk out on me. For the love of heaven, for the chums we once were, for the sake of those good old days, Danny, wait!" He had followed me into the hall.

"Nuts," I growled. "All you need, my fat and successful friend, is a bromo." I slid one arm into my coat.

"Danny!"

"Goodnight!"

"But, Danny, they've come alive. My three biggest characters. I'm not crazy, man. *They've come alive!*"

I was busy looking for my hat, coldly ignoring the rum-pot babblings of my old pal, when I absently reached into my inner pocket for my wallet.

"Danny, believe me, they're here in this very apartment!"

I wheeled on him.

"Where in the hell is my wallet?"

This threw him off the track.

"Wallet?" he muttered. "Don't know where your wallet is. *I haven't got it.*" Then, suddenly, a foolish expression slid slowly onto his face. "Seeeeeeee," he screamed. "There! I told you they'd come alive. Pierre must have taken it!"

I was boiling mad by now. If he thought in his drunken mind that he could make me stay by hiding my wallet like a child! This was the last straw.

"Look," I said slowly, very frigidly, "*give me my wallet!*"

"Pierre has it!" Terry was triumphant, a very sick sort of triumph, however. Like a man who has proved he hasn't any legs.

"And who in the hell is Pierre? A new butler? Tell him to bring it here, pronto!" Maybe I was shouting a little.

"Pierre, you know Pierre. He's one of my characters, Danny!" My drunken chum backed a few paces away as I balled my fists. "Pierre, the personable Parisian, Danny. You remember Pierre. He was one of my most vivid characters, Danny." Terry was backing away, his voice hoarse and squeaky. "I created Pierre in my second novel, *Case of the Bloody Bishop*.^{*} *AND NOW HE'S COME ALIVE, TOO!*"

In a single bound, I had Titwillow by his pajama collar, all my rage exploding in a single gesture.

"Look," I bellowed. "I'll give you just two seconds to give me back my wallet and let me get out of here!"

I had raised my fist above poor Terry's frightened face, when a voice came from behind me.

"You are looking for your wallet, *mon vieux?*"

I wheeled, releasing my grasp on Terry. And as I gazed pop-eyed at the speaker, I wished I'd hung onto Terry's collar, for my knees never needed support as badly as they did at that moment.

There, smiling suavely with white teeth beneath a dark waxed little moustache, was a dapper, exquisitely tailored little Frenchman, holding out my wallet!

"I told you so," I heard Terry gasp weakly. "It's Pierre!"

I'M not quite certain what my emotions were at that moment. I think I almost fainted. For I had read all of the Terrence Titwillow novels, and if Pierre, the personable Parisian, had ever stepped from their pages, he would have looked *exactly* like the smiling little Frenchy who confronted us now!

"Quite yes," murmured the Frenchy, nodding at Terry. "I am Pierre, the personable Parisian!"

I took my wallet and wheeled again on Titwillow.

"Look," I demanded, but without my former fury. "Who the hell is this guy? He looks like a Hollywood ham made up for the role of Pierre in a movie!"

Titwillow just shook his head sadly.

"I thought he *was* a ham actor, once, Danny. I thought all three of them were hams when I first saw them. Thought some of my friends had hired them to play a practical joke on me. But that was over a week ago. Since then I've learned better. It *is* Pierre, Danny. Believe me!"

The Frenchman tweaked the waxed ends of his moustache and bowed gracefully from the hips.

"A pleasure, *Monsieur, hola!*"

"Pleasure, hell," I snapped. "I'll take care of you later, buddy!" For suddenly it was all clear to me, down to the last detail. Undoubtedly some of Titwillow's waggish friends had cooked this all up on him. I knew, from reports, that Terry had been working awfully hard on his latest book. The strain had told on him, and some of his pseudo-chums must have hired this ham actor to slip into poor Terry's apartment and pretend he was Pierre come to life. Terry must have been in a hell of a state of nerves to accept such a childish trick as fact, but some-

^{*} *Case Of The Bloody Bishop*, by Terrence Titwillow. Published 1937, Channing-Moad Co. Story featured the adventures of Pierre, the personable Parisian, a sly, suave, Frenchman, jewel thief and crook extraordinary. Pierre appeared frequently in later novels by Terrence Titwillow. —Ed.

times too much work can do funny things to an author.

I felt sorry for him. Sorry, and sore as hell at the louses who'd fixed up this impersonation on him. Didn't the fools realize it could have sent him off the deep end?

"Take it easy, Terry," I said softly. "Everything is going to be all right. You've just been working too hard, that's all. Someone's played a rotten practical joke on you. But don't worry. I'll handle this from now on."

He smiled feebly. "I know what you're thinking, Danny, and I appreciate it. But you're all wet. Believe me, you're all wet. That guy is Pierre. I've already proved it. And there are two others in the apartment, too."

"Others?" I frowned. "Do you mean to say that you have more than one of these phony Pierres around?"

"No, just one Pierre. And he's not a phony, Danny. I'll prove it in a moment. What I mean to say is that my other two well-known characters, Snodbury Snipe, the super-sleuth of society, and Lady Ashington, the eccentric dowager fence, are also alive," his voice was subdued almost without emotion, now, "and here in the apartment."

"Monsieur Snipe and ze Lady Ashington are indeed here," the Frenchy cut in.

I glared at him.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur,*" the Frenchy drew himself up haughtily, "I am afraid you doubt your eyes!"

"Shut up!" I ordered. "I'll attend to you later!"

Then I took Terrence Titwillow by the arm and steered him back into the living room.

"Take me to those other two frauds, Terry," I said, "and I'll send the bunch of them out of here in a frenzy."

And at that instant, the two other "frauds" made their entrance. As in

the case of Pierre, I didn't have to look twice to recognize them as very excellent reproductions of Quaggle's famous Snodbury Snipe, and the equally celebrated fiction creation, Lady Ashington.*

THEY stepped out of Titwillow's study, and seemed surprised to see me. Surprised, but not particularly concerned. Snodbury Snipe, dressed in white tie and tails, looking keen, young, and bored, was astonishingly like Titwillow's characterization of him in his novels. Lady Ashington, weaving a bit (he had made her quite a drinker), loomed huge in a frilly gown and peered haughtily through a lorgnette.

"So," I snorted. "These are the other two frauds. Your chums went to great lengths to play their practical joke!"

At my words, Lady Ashington glanced inquiringly at Titwillow. She raised her lorgnette, and turned her owl gaze on me. To him she said:

"And to whom do we owe the pleasure of meeting this rude stranger?"

Snodbury Snipe merely smiled in a careless, nonchalant way, and then turned his gaze to his immaculate cuffs.

"Look," I said menacingly. "You two are going to get the hell out of this apartment, pronto, or I'll call the cops. Haven't you, and whoever hired you, deviled Terry enough?"

"I'm sure," said Snodbury Snipe, smoothing out the lapels on his tailcoat, "that I haven't the foggiest notion of what you're trying to say, old fellow. Please be more explicit. If it's police you seek, mightn't I do?"

"Damn you all," I shouted. "Don't think that you can goof me the way

* Snodbury Snipe, young society sherlock, appeared first in *Murder By The Millions*, published in 1936 by Channing-Moad Co. Lady Ashington, the hard-drinking dowager "fence" was a character in the same novel.—Ep.

you've done with him. I meant what I said. Get out of here, quick, or you'll all be in the stir!"

"Fantastic character," murmured Lady Ashington under a heavily alcoholic breath. "What's his name, Terrence?"

"You see," Terry spread his hands in mute, beaten resignation. "They *are* real, Danny. I've been trying to tell you that I *know* they aren't hoaxes. I can prove it to you."

Pierre had followed us into the living room, and now put in his two cents.

"*Precisement*," he added. "We are all quite real, Monsieur. And Titwillow can prove it, *tres bien*."

It suddenly seemed as if the room were unbearably hot. Trip hammers had started a ceaseless tattoo in my head. This was getting to be far too much for me. Hoax or not, real or fake, I couldn't stand much more of it.

"Get them out of the room, Terry," I almost screamed, "I want to talk this thing over!"

Titwillow nodded. But he said nothing to them, merely walked over to his typewriter in the corner of the room. He sat down and inserted a sheet of white paper in the machine, typed out a sentence. I had followed him to the machine, and was looking over his shoulder as he typed. The sentence was, "Together they left the room."

I wheeled. Pierre, Snodbury Snipe and Lady Ashington *had* left the room!

TERRY smiled wanly at me.

"You see," he ran a trembling hand over his fourth chin, "this is how I *know* they are my characters!"

For a moment I almost believed him.

"But Terry, you fool, they heard me tell you to ask them to leave the room!"

Terry shook his head with infinite weariness. He typed out a second sentence. And as the letters sprang up I

read, "They returned to the room for an instant, then left again."

And before I could turn, I heard footsteps coming from Terry's study. When I faced the sounds, I saw Pierre, Snodbury, and Her Ladyship had re-entered the room. Re-entered the room, when they couldn't possibly have known what he had typed—*unless they were his characters!*

A moment passed while I considered the possibility that I had gone stark raving mad, and in that moment the three of them left the room once more!

"Good God, Terry," my voice must have been as hoarse and ragged as his own. "My God, you mean—"

"Yes," he said with simple, utter weariness, "it's just as I told you, Danny. *Those are my characters, right out of the books!*"

I turned and made my way shakily across the room. Titwillow said:

"You'll find the scotch in the cupboard, Danny."

"Thanks," I muttered. "I'm gonna need it!"

"As soon as you get straightened out a bit, I'll tell you exactly why I called you here." By now I was able to marvel at my friend's comparative serenity. It was a wonder that he hadn't cracked completely. Even now, he seemed to have calmed a great deal, just from the knowledge that someone else shared his utterly impossible, horribly incredible problem.

"Yes," said Terrence Titwillow, after I'd gulped down four fingers from my glass. "You can help me more than you'll imagine."

I nodded numbly, scarcely hearing him, pouring out four more fingers into my glass.

"For you see," he said, and some of the shakiness, the ragged terror, crept back into his voice, "I have the Coanor Diamond!"

The glass, the scotch, the decanter, crashed to the floor, just as though they had been knocked from my trembling hands by a baseball bat.

"You *what*?" I screeched.

"Pierre stole it two days ago," Terry said.

CHAPTER III

The Terrible Three

I SAT down abruptly. My knees were knocking together like castanets and the ornately furnished room was spinning dizzily before my eyes.

"Don't say any more," I said weakly, "until you open another bottle of scotch. If I must go crazy I want to do it with a drink in my hand."

Without another word, Terrence waddled to a well-stocked liquor cabinet and returned with two stiff jolts of scotch.

I tossed mine down neat, then hunched forward on the edge of my chair.

"Was I dreaming?" I asked in a whisper, "or did you really say Pierre stole the Coanor diamond?"

Terrence shook his head miserably.

"It's the absolute truth, Danny." He shuddered visibly and then plunged on: "Let me start at the beginning, Danny. I've thought about this thing until I was sure I was going bats, but I'm beginning to get an idea about what's behind all this."

"Shoot!" I said. "If the gentlemen in white jackets don't break up our little party, I'll listen till the cows come home."

"First," Terrence said excitedly, "look at my typewriter!" His plump index finger shot out in the direction of his desk, on which rested a bulky, gleaming, old-fashioned typewriter. "Do you notice anything unusual about

it?" he asked breathlessly.

I was past the point of being surprised at anything my erstwhile chum could say or do.

"No," I said with judicial calm, "I don't notice anything unusual about it."

Terrence mopped his damp brow and stared at the black gleaming typewriter in something very like terror.

"But there *is* something unusual about it," he cried, "horribly unusual."

He was trembling again, his plump little body quivering like a blob of jelly.

"Steady," I said, more for my own benefit than his, "calm down and tell me what you mean."

Terrence Titwillow made a visible effort to get himself under control.

"All right," he said hoarsely, "I said I'd start from the beginning, didn't I? Well, I'll try to." He stood up then, lighted a cigarette and began pacing nervously back and forth in front of me.

"About a week or so ago," he said, "a salesman came here and tried to sell me a typewriter. He wasn't an ordinary salesman by a long shot." Terrence stopped speaking and shuddered at the recollection. Then he went on: "He was a tall, somber looking creature, dressed in black clothes and one of those funny string ties the artists wear. When I opened the door he peered at me through thick tortoise shell glasses and murmured:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I said, 'I want a typewriter—NO!', and slammed the door in his face. But in about an hour he was back. Asked me the same question. It kind of got my goat and I told him to clear out and stay out. He gave me a kind of long sly smile and murmured something under his breath and walked away. I thought he must be some kind of a nut so I forgot about the whole thing. Then," Terrence paused and mopped his brow feverishly, "a day or

so later the bell rang and it was him again. Dressed in black, smiling sadly, peering at me through tortoise shell spectacles. He asked me the same question:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I chased him away," Terrence babbled, his voice suddenly going ragged, "but the next day he was waiting for me in my car. I called the police, but he was gone by the time they got there. The next day he was waiting at my club. I had the management throw him out, but that night he was back here again. Still dressed in black, still smiling sadly, still asking his infernal question:

"'You want a typewriter, yes?'"

"I GUESS I went a little crazy," Terrence muttered, "but I had stood all I could. I jumped on him. I hit him in the face. I rolled him down the steps. I called him every name I could think of. I threatened him with murder and mayhem if I ever set eyes on him again. I finally stopped, but only from lack of breath."

Terrence suddenly gulped the untouched drink which he held in his hand.

"He was still smiling sadly," Titwillow continued frantically, "as he stood up and brushed off his long black coat. He straightened the tortoise shell glasses on his bony nose and peered up at me.

"'So,' he said gloomily, 'you do not want a typewriter, yes?'"

"Then," Terrence said hollowly, "he left. Never a backward glance or anything. He just left and I haven't seen him since."

To say I was irritated with Terrence's long and pointless story would be putting it mildly.

"So what?" I snapped. "What's all that got to do with the Coanor diamond and the rest of your troubles?"

"It's got everything to do with it," Terrence cried wildly, "for the day after that a package came for me and when I opened it I found that blasted typewriter in it. There was a note signed *Admirer* with it and that was all. I had forgotten about the typewriter salesman so I went ahead and wrote a few chapters with this infernal machine." Terrence slumped into a chair and buried his head in his plump hands. "You know what happened then," Terrence cried out in a strangled groan, "Pierre and Lady Ashington and Snipe come to life."

"Now look here," I said, with a nice blend of hysteria and exasperation, "you don't expect me to believe such rot as that."

"But it's the only solution," Terrence said frantically. "This damnable machine he sent to me is bewitched. The people it writes about come to life. He knew what would happen. He knew the terrible, hopeless mess it would get me into. It's his way of paying me back. Don't you see?" Terrence was almost sobbing outright now, "this is his revenge on me for the way I treated him."

I got up and poured myself a drink. A stiff one. I would have liked to get stinking drunk, but I knew there was no chance of that.

"Look," I said, in an attempt at reason, "it isn't so important *how* those characters got here. The important thing is that they *are* here and that you're in a sweet mess. The first job is to get that straightened out if there's any way under heaven we can. Tell me when you discovered these characters of yours and then tell me how and when Pierre copped the Coanor diamond."

Terrence lifted his head from his hands, stared at me with his red-rimmed despairing eyes.

"Monday afternoon," he said dully, "I wrote a chapter on this typewriter. It was for my latest book in which I intended to combine my three most famous characters, Lady Ashington, Pierre and Snodbury Snipe. The chapter I wrote brought all of them into the story. That was all I did that day. I went out to the club, got pretty drunk I'm afraid, and then late that night I returned home."

"And that's when you met Pierre?" I asked.

TERRY nodded.

"He appeared last Monday night. I found him waiting for me in the study when I came home from the club."

"And of course you thought you were drinking too much?"

"Naturally. I snapped off the lights, making a concerted effort of will factors to ignore him, and went to bed. When I got up in the morning he was still there." Titwillow shook his head, as though trying to lose the memory of that horrifying moment. "I saw him and thought instantly that I was in the throes of a staggering hangover. So I ran to the kitchen for another drink."

"And that's where you saw Lady Ashington?"

"Yes, she was there, gloriously drunk and peering owlishly down at me through her lorgnette."

"Gad, what a shock!"

"You've no idea," continued Terry, shuddering. "I rushed to the window, set to hurl myself out—when Snodbury Snipe stepped out from behind one of the drapes in the living room and stopped me!"

"Ughhyh!"

"Ghastly, it was more than I could stand. Then, just as you suspected at first, I thought that perhaps some of my friends had hired ham actors to

scare the hell out of me. I told all three of them, Pierre, Lady Ashington, and Snipe, to leave my house. They just laughed; and Pierre stole my watch." Titwillow shuddered again.

"And then?" I inquired.

"Then I got my idea for proof. I figured" — Terry went on — "that if they were *really* my characters, I should be able to control them, affect them, just with this typewriter."

I nodded.

"Just as you proved their existence to me."

Terry grimaced.

"I sat down at the typewriter and wrote a sentence ordering them to lie down on the floor and roll over."

"And," I said, "of course they did?"

Terry nodded.

"But I was still unconvinced. So I put in additional character touches. I gave Pierre a streak of gray at his temples. Made Snipe a little heavier around the midriff, and put an extra set of wrinkles around Lady Ashington's brow. When I looked, all the changes were there, just as written!"

It was my turn to shudder.

Terry shook his head sadly.

"There was only one thing to do. I got roaring drunk, immediately and without further ado!" His voice was growing shaky again. "Which," he concluded, "was the worst thing in the world I ever could have done."

I sensed that the explanation of the theft of the Coanor Diamond was approaching, and waited for him to continue.

"I woke about four o'clock the following morning," he said hoarsely, "and found myself tied to my chair!"

"Tied?"

Terry nodded.

"Tied to my chair, and I noticed, too, that the strange typewriter had been locked on me. All three of my char-

acters were gone!" He sighed deeply. "They had sensed that I was able to hold control of them so long as I was at the typewriter. They had sensed that, and tied me up deliberately, locking the typewriter as an extra precaution." His voice trembled. "They never could have done it, if I hadn't been so stinking swaffed!"

I WAS beginning to see the thing take shape.

"Hours later they returned and untied me," Titwillow resumed. "But it was too late for me to repair the damage done, and they knew it. For they had been running loose throughout the city for fully forty-eight hours. Forty-eight hours, Danny," his voice rose hysterically, "while those lunatics, creatures of this infernal typewriter, ran riot!"

"And during that time," I managed to say, "Pierre stole the Coanor Diamond?"

Terry nodded.

"He stole the Coanor and everything else around Chicago that appealed to him. *He has over a half-million dollars in jewels lying in a suitcase in my study, Danny!*"

"Good God!" I blurted.

There were tears in Titwillow's eyes as he continued.

"You haven't been listening to the radio, Danny, or reading the papers?"

"No," I confessed, "I haven't read a paper in the last forty-eight hours, and the only radio broadcast I heard was the announcement of the Coanor theft, while I was on my way here."

Terry rose, and walked over to his desk. Opening it, he pulled forth a stack of newspapers. He returned and threw these into my lap.

"This should give you a running account of what my creations managed to accomplish while they were loose."

I looked at the first paper, a headline from the *Chicago Trib* standing forth, "CITY IN GRIP OF ASTONISHING CRIME WAVE!" My hand flipped the *Trib* over, found a copy of the *Daily News*, "LAKE FOREST HOMES PILLAGED; GEMS STOLEN!" The *Daily Times* declared, "McCORMICK JEWEL COLLECTION HEISTED!"

"All this is the work of Pierre?" I asked. How any one person could have lifted so much in such a short time was beyond my ken.

"Don't forget," Terry said hoarsely, "that I made Pierre the *perfect* crook. His instincts for crime are flawless!"

"How about Lady Ashington," I wondered. "Where does she come into this picture?"

"Lady Ashington, as you'll recall, was a female fence in all my novels," Terry replied, holding forth another paper. "She was the gal who disposed of all crime loot for Pierre!"

I scanned the paper he handed me, a copy of the *Herald-American*. "Police On Trail Of Gem Thief," ran the first streamer. "Link Trail To That Of Female Fence," the second streamer declared.

"A drunken dowager-duchess type of woman, riding a milk horse and singing bawdy ballads through the loop, early in the morning hours, yesterday, tried to force her way into five of Chicago's largest jewelry stores.

Passersby who noticed her, told police that she insisted she carried untold loot which she wanted to sell to the proprietors. No one made any effort to stop her, and the stores all being closed, the strange woman rode away singing drunkenly before the police arrived."

"THIS," I gasped, "is awful! Supposing the police find out that Lady Ashington's trail leads here?"

Titwillow looked gray at the corners of his mouth.

"They haven't as yet, and I'm hoping they won't." He held forth another

paper. "If they do," he moaned, it will be because of this sort of thing. Read it."

The paper was the *Trib* again, a later issue. The drop read, "MYSTERIOUS STRANGER CALLS POLICE TO GIVE TIPS ON CRIME WAVE." The story went as follows:

"Police today are narrowing down a number of telephone tips received in connection with the forty-eight hour crime wave ravaging the city. A cultured-voiced young man has made ten such calls to the Central Detective Bureau, offering his assistance in the solution of the crime wave. So far, police have been unable to trace the calls to their source. Last-minute leads indicate that they may have further information on this within twenty-four hours."

"Snodbury Snipe?" I said, knowing damned well that it was.

Terry nodded.

"Yes. He says that he can offer his valuable sleuthing abilities to the local constabulary and solve the thing in more than record time. He says he's merely waiting until the moment when they are completely stymied. Then he will step into the mystery, very dramatically, in the best tradition of my novels, and unsnarl the thing for them!"

"But," I said, not realizing how asinine I must have sounded, "this is awful!"

"Do you realize," he squealed, and all of the old hysteria was returning to his voice, "do you realize what this will mean to me, what it will do to my reputation, my career?"

"But *why* did they do it?"

"They said that they were disgusted with me," he moaned. "My own characters, disgusted with me!"

"Disgusted?"

"Yes, they said that my plots were growing more and more silly with every succeeding novel. Said they were tired of doing such childish things as I made them do!"

"They said they wanted some real,

honest-to-goodness, red-blooded action. They said I was a character writer, and nothing better. They wanted to humiliate me, Danny. They deliberately went to work to create such a horrible mess that a genius couldn't unsnarl it!"

"I can agree with that," I muttered.

"And then," Terry rose to his feet, and as he rose his voice did likewise, "*they defied me to unsnarl the muddle they'd made!*"

TERRY was sobbing now, and his small, fat shoulders shook tremulously.

"So that's how you're going to be able to help me, Danny!" he groaned at last. "That's why I called you. You may be a hack, but you have an unholy adroitness at plotting. Your plots have always been superb, Danny!"

"But I don't see," I protested, ignoring the unflattering remarks about my hack tendencies, "how I can help you. What under the sun can I do?"

Terrence Titwillow lifted his head from his tear-stained paws.

"Don't you see?" he bleated. "The only way I can control these . . . these characters, is on this infernal type-writer. But I'm exhausted, Danny, I'm losing what little control I did have over them. And in addition to that, I'll need super-colossal plotting to get them out of their horrible mess!"

"You want *me* to plot them out of this?" It was suddenly dawning on me.

He nodded, his round, tear-stained face fixed anxiously on me. Anxiously, with a pleading-dog expression.

Every instinct, from that of self-preservation on, warned me to get out of this mess while the getting was good. They were his characters, not mine. It was his misfortune. I could leave now, and it would never affect my life again.

But maybe it was due to Titwillow's unconsciously dirty crack about me being a hack, or it might have been his flattery and respect for my plotting. I don't know. At any rate, I suddenly made my decision. I took the challenge

"Okay," I said. "Let's get down to work on this thing. It's going to be an age-old battle of the literary world—plotting versus sharp characterization!"

CHAPTER IV

Lady Ashington Complicates Matters

TERRENCE TITWILLOW grabbed my hand, while crocodile tears rolled down his fat cheeks.

"Danny," he muttered huskily, "Danny, I'll never forget this."

I was smiling, in a superior sort of way, I'm afraid, for in the back of my brain I could already see the solution beginning to shape. Terry must have caught the cat-ate-the-canary look on my phizz, for he blurted:

"Danny, good Lord, Danny. What is it? Have you got—"

"A solution?" I broke in. "Absolutely, old bean. I've a solution that's so remarkably simple, it's a pity you didn't think of it sooner."

I fished into my pocket for a cigarette. This was a moment I relished.

I lighted the cigarette, timing the words as dramatically as I could.

"Kill them," I said simply. "Just kill them, that's all you have to do, Terry."

"Danny!"

I looked full at him, expecting to find rapt admiration accompanying his ejaculation. Looked at Terrence Titwillow and got the shock of my life. Horror was written on his face.

"Danny," he repeated, aghast. "I

can't *kill* them. Why, the very thought is horrible. They're *alive*, Danny. Don't you understand? I'm the reason why they're alive. Even on a typewriter, killing them now would be like murdering actual people."

There was such unspoken indictment in his tones that I suddenly felt like a combination of Bluebeard and Jack the Ripper. And I knew then that my hack solution would never do. He would never condone the willful murder of his characters. However, I tried one last angle.

"What have they done for you? What have they done for you, except make trouble?"

Tears were starting afresh in the eyes of Terrence Titwillow. He shook his head sadly from side to side.

"Danny," he murmured. "I could never bring myself to such an action, never. I know that they've brought me nothing but trouble. I'm aware that they deliberately made this mess to jam me up. But I could *never* kill them."

"Let me, then," I offered. "I'll bump them off on the typewriter without so much as blinking an eye. They wouldn't be the first characters I've killed off when my plots got too jammed up."

He shook his head again.

"No, Danny. I could never permit it. No."

"Then what the hell do you expect to do? The cops are going to track those three morons back to your apartment sooner or later. The loot will be found here, and you're going to be in a helluva mess!"

And at that moment Snodbury Snipe chose to saunter back into the room. His gray eyes swept carelessly over the scene, but he didn't say a word. Just walked over to the telephone.

I was about to say something to him,

but he started dialing a number. Something held me motionless while I watched him. Then he was speaking into the phone.

"Hello," said Snodbury Snipe, "hello, old boy. Is this the police department?"

I MUST have leaped across the room in a split second, grabbing the telephone from Snodbury's hand and slamming it back on the hook.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Snipe gave me a frosty look.

"I have decided," he said, "to lend my invaluable assistance to the stupid police of this metropolis."

I was across the room to Titwillow's typewriter in an instant. My fingers flew across the keys. A moment later and I looked down at what I had written.

"Snodbury Snipe abandoned any idea of telephoning the police."

"There," I gasped, "that ought to hold you."

Snipe looked undecidedly at the telephone a moment, then shrugged his well-tailored shoulders and walked out of the room once more.

"Terry," I fairly shouted, rushing over to the couch and grabbing him by the shoulder. "I can control your characters, too."

He just looked up at me dully.

"Of course," he said. "There's not much trick to it. They're creations of my brain, but they respond to this damnable typewriter."

As he was speaking, I heard a sharply indrawn breath behind me and wheeled to face Pierre, the personable Parisian. He had entered the room and come up behind me so softly that I hadn't been aware of it.

"*Monsieur*," Pierre bowed gallantly from the waist, "when are the police coming?"

"The police?" I was shocked to think that this knave could speak so calmly of the cops after what he'd done.

"*Oui*, the *gendarmes*. When are they coming to surround the apartment?"

"Surround the apartment?"

"*Precisement*, when are they coming?"

Monsieur Titwillow always has the *gendarmes* surrounding me in apartments."

"Oh," I said, not knowing what else to say. "Oh, he does, does he?"

"*Oui*, and, of course, *Monsieur*, I always escape *zem*."

"Well, that's nice," I answered.

"That's very nice. But I don't think there'll be any police for a while yet, Pierre."

He looked hurt and slightly disappointed.

"But *Monsieur*, I 'ave stolen so much!"

"Nevertheless," I said firmly, "there won't be any police for a while yet. Get Snipe to surround you, if you really feel the need for such a thing."

"Snipe," there was open disgust in Pierre's voice, "pah! Eet is to laugh. He can do nozing. *I*, Pierre, the personable Parisian, am a super-crook!"

With that he turned and panthered out of the room, tail feathers rustling like a peacock's. I watched him leave, while at the back of my brain another thought was plucking. It was becoming plain that upon the slim shoulders of Pierre, the personable Parisian, rested the cause, effect and solution of this problem. But I wasn't able to get it straight. Not then.

TERRY was still slumped mournfully on the couch, so I turned on the radio, for want of something better to do. Listening to the radio had often been a great help in twisting out plot snarls. I lighted another cigarette and tried to think.

It was obvious that we couldn't just

sit around waiting for something to happen. If we did so, the cops would pour in on us so fast that we'd be out of luck entirely. Action was necessary, immediate action. But what kind? And how?

Here was a mess proper. A fortune in jewels lying around the house, a super thief getting restless because of inactivity. A damned fool society sleuth beginning to get the urge to turn us all in to the forces of law and order, and a drunken female fence who had some bright ideas of turning over a neat bit of profit on the stolen stuff just as soon as she could contact a dishonest jeweler.

For figments of an author's imagination, these characters were certainly causing enough trouble. They could be controlled on the typewriter, but it was too late for that now. During the time when they'd done all their mischief, Titwillow had been drunk, and they'd run riot. Now what good would controlling them do?

So far, it had done nothing but postpone the inevitable. I found myself wishing again that Titwillow would let me kill them all and be done with it. Many an editor had been less squeamish about the bumping off of characters. They never seemed to mind, why should he?

But he did, and this line of reasoning was getting me nowhere in a great hurry.

It occurred to me, then, that the biggest problem at the moment was the loot. It was in the apartment, and would serve as impossibly damning evidence, should anyone trace the three characters.

"Terry," I gave him a shake, and he looked up at me from his brooding. "Show me where the jewels are."

He shook his head.

"It's no use, Danny, no use. You'd

better leave. I've resigned myself to my fate. I've been thinking it all over, fellow. There's nothing to do but call the police and have it done with."

Titwillow, it was suddenly apparent, had funk'd out at last. Given the thing up. Broken under the strain. I couldn't let this happen. I was determined by now that we'd see it through. How, I didn't know. But somehow.

"Look," I said, "snap out of it, man. There's some way of getting out of this. You got me up here. I agreed to see it through. I'm in it now, up to my neck. The least you can do is stand by!"

He sighed, a deep long, tremulous sigh. Then he rose.

"Okay, Danny," he said without too much enthusiasm, "I won't quit. Come with me and I'll show you the loot."

"IT'S in the study," he said a moment later, as we stood before the closed door of his den. From inside, voices speaking hotly drifted out to us. One was thickly accented, Pierre's, and the other was that of Snodbury Snipe.

"All they do is wrangle about their relative supremacy," Terry explained. "Been at it for hours."

He opened the door and we entered. Pierre and Snipe, who faced each other in two easy chairs, subsided into silent glaring, paying not the slightest attention to Terry or me.

"It should be over here, in Pierre's briefcase," Terry observed, walking to a table and picking up a leather portfolio.

"What is it *Monsieur* seeks?" asked Pierre, looking up suddenly.

"The loot you lifted," I snapped at him. "Where is it?"

Pierre looked at Snodbury Snipe, and the suave playboy sleuth grinned. Something unspoken passed between them. I could hear Terry, at the table,

exclaim in surprise.

"It's not here," he gasped hoarsely.

"Where is it, Pierre?" I demanded.

"Have you hidden it under a rug?"

Pierre shrugged, while Titwillow's soft moaning again filled the air. I turned to Snodbury Snipe.

"Okay, super-sleuth, what's happened to the swag?"

Snipe studied his well-manicured nails, an irritating characteristic Titwillow had given him four novels ago, then spoke languidly.

"Really, old boy, I believe Lady Ashington has them."

"Lady Ashington!" Terry was beside me, glaring down at Snipe. "Where is the old she-fool?"

"She 'as fled zee coop, *phfffft!*" Pierre declared.

"Gone?" I bleated, "you mean she's gone?"

"*Precisement*," observed Pierre with relish. "Now maybe the *gendarmes* will surround me, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Oh God," Terrence groaned huskily. "Oh God, that drunken old fool is probably out on the street at this very moment trying to peddle the jewels and the Coanor diamond!"

CHAPTER V

Where Is Lady Ashington?

"THIS is the end," Titwillow was moaning over and over again. "The cops are going to pick her up trying to get rid of those jewels." He shuddered. "Then they'll trace it to here, and what will become of me? Leave, Danny. Leave while you have a chance."

"Nuts," I snapped. "I started to unravel this thing and I'm at least going to have a try at it. Buck up. We've got to stop Lady Ashington before the police do. So get your coat on and

bring that typewriter along. We might need it. Thank goodness all the jewelry stores are closed. We may have a fighting chance."

Titwillow hesitated, bewildered by my sudden surge of action.

"Get a move on," I barked. "Grab your coat and the typewriter."

"But my pajamas," he gasped, "I'll have to cha—"

"Change them hell," I rasped. "Throw an overcoat on and no one will know the difference. We haven't too much time."

Pierre and Snodbury were watching me with visible bewilderment.

I turned on them.

"You two got coats?"

They nodded in unison.

"Good. Get 'em on. We're going places."

Pierre flushed.

"But, Monsieur, I cannot leave. I must wait for zee gendarmes. They will surround ze apartment shortly—"

"Get your coat," I ordered, and the tone of my voice was more forceful than a typewriter order would have been. Titwillow had left the room in search of his coat, and I could hear him in the living room packing the typewriter.

In a moment later, Pierre stood beside me in an Inverness cape and a slouch hat. Snodbury Snipe had donned his topper and a Chesterfield plus white gloves and muffler. They looked like the last scene in a crime movie.

I steered them out into the living room, where Titwillow, overcoat over his pajamas, typewriter in his hand, was waiting bewilderedly, yet hopefully, for us.

"Okay, children," I ordered. "Now let's get out of here!" I grabbed my own coat and hat as we marched through the hall and out of the door. We stepped into the self-running elevator and pressed the button.

On the way down in the elevator no one said a word. We must have been one of the oddest assortments imaginable. A harassed, plump little bald man, wearing an overcoat over his pajamas and clutching a typewriter and sheafs of paper; a leering, sleek and suave, wax-moustached Frenchman, dressed in a cape and slouch hat; an incredibly well-groomed young man about town, wearing top hat, white tie; and yours truly.

We were some collection.

"Okay, kiddies," I said, as the elevator stopped at the lobby. "Let's get organized. We haven't any time to lose." I turned to Terry. "Get your car, it's bigger, faster than mine—and incidentally a helluva lot more comfortable."

"But Danny, what's this—"

"Never mind," I broke in. "Get your car. You'll find out later."

HE hesitated, looking down at his plump pajama-clad shanks peeping from beneath his overcoat. Then he gritted his teeth and moved across the lobby of the apartment building. I watched him step out of the door that led to the garage, then turned to Snodbury Snipe and Pierre.

"Did the old bat say anything about where she intended to go?" I asked.

"You mean Lady Ashington, of course," Snipe observed.

"That's right. She must have had something in mind when she packed out with the loot. Did she say anything?" I insisted.

"Non," Pierre put his two cents in, "ze Lady Ashington she ees too damn drunk to say anything."

I heard a horn toot out in the driveway, so I steered my two charges out through the lobby door, where Terrence Titwillow was waiting in his long black limousine. I shoved in beside him.

"Get around on the other side," I ordered. "I'll drive. You're gonna be plenty busy with that typewriter."

He got out and came around to the other side, while I slipped behind the wheel. Our two figmentary chums were still standing nonchalantly beside the car, had made no effort to get in.

"You two," I ordered, "pile in, pronto."

They made no move.

"I say, old bean," Snipe said, "don't think we'll go with you. Things to do. Thanks just the same."

I looked at Titwillow.

"Order them in," I demanded.

He slid the cover off his typewriter and twisted a sheet of paper into the roller. With the machine on his lap, he then clacked off a brief sentence. I smiled in satisfaction as Snodbury Snipe and Pierre climbed into the rear of the car without another word.

Then I threw the car into gear, and in another moment we were barrelling wildly down Michigan Boulevard, headed for the Loop. The clock on the dash board set the time as shortly after midnight. That was just as well, for there wouldn't be any jewelry stores open. I was gambling on Lady Ashington's desire to peddle the stuff to the more well established gem houses, as she had done previously. Which would mean that we'd probably catch up with her somewhere in the Loop.

At Randolph and Michigan, we veered sharply to the right and roared under the "L" structure going west toward the center of the Loop. We'd take a look at State Street, first, I reasoned.

"Danny," Terry had gripped my arm, "slow down, Danny! Can't you hear the sirens?"

I let up a bit on the accelerator. He was right. I must have been deaf, for sirens were wailing wildly behind us,

and a spot threw its flash on the rear of our limousine, its glare blinding me in the rear vision mirror.

"Damn," I moaned, "if we're pinched for speeding, we *will* be out of luck!" "*Voilà!*" exclaimed Pierre, who had been holding his tongue up until now. "*Voilà! Eet is ze gendarmes* come to surround me! I am so 'appy I could shed tears."

I ignored his wishful thinking, and slowed perceptibly, drawing close to the curb. The siren screamed louder, the spot flashed ahead of us, and to my utter amazement two squad cars raced *past* us, cutting sharply to the left at the corner of State Street!

"**W**HEEEEW," I gasped. "Close call. Evidently they didn't want us." Then the moan of sirens dashing across the other side of the Loop came wailing to our ears.

"Lord, Danny," Terry exclaimed, "something must be popping. Hear those sirens? There must be over a dozen cars racing through the Loop!"

"Yeah," I said, "yeah. But we've got to find Lady Ashington. We haven't any time for problems that aren't re—" I stopped short, as a horrible premonition burst loose beneath my thinking cap.

"Omigawd!" I cried, "those sirens might be, could be, more than likely *are*, for Lady Ashington!"

"*Voilà!*" exulted Pierre, "*ze gendarmes* are hot on *ze* scent!"

"Could have solved the crime long ago," Snodbury Snipe grouched, "if they'd asked *me* in on the case!"

I looked sharply at Terry, who's face had gone deathly white. But he didn't say a word. Smashing my foot down on the accelerator again, I swung the car out from the curb and shot the block from Wabash to State Street in less than a hair-split-second.

"We're going to follow those cars!" I gritted. "And I hope to Jeudas that we won't find what I think we're going to find."

Three seconds later we were wheeling down State, and in less than a minute I'd jammed on the brakes. The squad cars, close to eight of them so far, were massed in front of a State Street jewelry store!

Sirens still moaned, indicating the approach of other squads. People had already filled the streets, stopping traffic, and above the tumult could be heard a throaty basso, somehow feminine, bellowing an entirely indecent *ballade d'amour*. Lady Ashington!

"Ohhhhhhhh," Titwillow's gasp was soft, like that of a man who sees the last straw bobbing away on a wave.

"Come on," I blurted, opening the door of the car, "let's find out what is happening!"

I was out in the street, waiting for him to come puffing around to where I stood. Snipe had stepped out beside me, and Pierre, too, had piled out.

We were right at the fringes of the crowd, and it was immediately apparent that we'd have to do a lot of elbowing to force our way through to the circle of activity in front of the jewelry store.

"*Zis is magnifique!*" breathed Pierre, showing his white teeth in a flashing smirk beneath his waxed moustache. "*Voilà! I meet ze police,*" he fished into his pocket, "with *zis!*"

I looked at what Pierre had drawn forth, and gasped. He held a shining, keen-edged knife in his hand!

Terry was with us now, and he paled. "Jeeeeudas, Danny," he breathed, "make him put that away. I taught him how to use it too well!"

There was no time for quibbling. No time for typewritten commands. Pierre wanted to meet the cops in combat, had waited eagerly for it. That was enough

for us. We most certainly did not want Pierre to meet them. Not right now, anyway. I swung, efficiently, if I do say so.

Pierre went out like the Lindbergh Beacon, toppling face forward to the pavement. The knife slid along the pavement to a gutter. Terry and I bent simultaneously and picked him up like a sack of wheat. In another few moments—with the aid of my necktie and several belts—he was temporarily out of the picture, trussed up neatly in the back of the car.

THEN we were shoving through the crowd, elbowing, thrusting, until we were near the center of excitement.

A Black Maria rolled clanging up to the scene, while cops, swinging nightsticks expertly, paved a path for it through the crowd. Terry and I were forced to retreat about ten yards to get out of the range of those nightsticks.

And all this time the bellowing voice of Lady Ashington could be heard singing lustily above the uproar. Finally, the crowd parted enough to give us a view of the proceedings.

I had to clutch Terry by the arm to keep him from falling over in a dead faint at what he saw. There were two horses on the scene, the first being the disarranged and bellowing Lady Ashington, and the second being an actual animal of that species, looking as though it might have been stolen from a milk truck!

Lady Ashington, still in control of the situation, was astride the milk horse!

In her hand, swinging unerringly, about at the heads of the sweating policemen who were trying to drag her down, was the case carrying the stolen jewelry, including the Coanor Diamond! A second glance revealed that the dowager had evidently tried to ride the terrified animal through the plate

glass window of the jewelry store. For the window was utterly shattered, and the milk horse was rearing majestically about in fragments of splintered glass.

"Danny," Terry moaned. "Do you see her?"

"See her? How can I help it!"

"What are we going to do, Danny?" he bleated.

The cops were finally, through the strength of sheer numbers, winning in the battle against horse and dowager. Lady Ashington was slipping from the back of her mount. I could see that it would be just a matter of moments before they had her in the paddy wagon.

"There's only one thing to do," I answered, grabbing him by the arm and turning him back toward the car. "That's get out of here!"

We turned, then, and pushed as rapidly as we could away from the scene. A voice, shrilling excitedly in our ears, told us that it hadn't been too soon.

"They've got her," screamed the voice excitedly, "and now they're tossing her into the wagon!"

"And they'll find the jewels the minute they open the case," moaned Terry.

Finally, it must have been fully three minutes later, we were back at the side of the car. A quick inspection told us that Pierre was still out as cold as yesterday's gravy in the back of the limousine.

"Climb in," I ordered. "Everything has been shot to hell. We've got to put some distance between ourselves and the gentlemen of the law. Give us time to figure out another angle—that is, if there are any angles left to this mess!"

I was in the car and Terry was beside me when he grabbed my arm frantically. "Danny! Where's Snodbury Snipe?"

In the excitement we had forgotten

our society sleuth!

"Lord, I thought he was beside us all that time!"

I jumped out of the car and dove into the crowd again, Terry right on my heels. One thing was certain. Things were bad, terrible, but they would be plenty worse if Snipe got loose among the coppers!

Three minutes later one fact was obvious. No Snodbury Snipe! My stomach was turning cartwheels and my neck was turned into Niagara in miniature, what with the perspiration rolling down my collar. It was hard to believe that five minutes before had seemed like the climax to our misery.

I grabbed one of the bystanders. I recognized him as having been up at the front of the trouble when Snipe was with us.

"Where did the fellow who was with us a moment ago disappear to?" I demanded. The look in his eyes told me he didn't get it.

"Huh?"

"A chap with a top hat, dressed formally, y' know. Remember seeing him?" I was shaking the hapless sap, now.

"Yeah, mister. He was with youse two."

"Where did he go?" I repeated.

"Why," the bystander looked at me as though I was loony, "he went over there," he pointed toward the line of squad cars. Then his eyes lighted. "See," he bleated. "There he is, now. Just getting into one of them squad cars with the cops!"

I turned, while my heart tried to kick its way through the soles of my shoes. Turned, and saw the tailcoat of Snodbury Snipe vanishing into a squad car!

"Terry," I screeched. "Look!"

But I might as well have saved my lungs. For Terrence Titwillow had seen, and keeled over in a faint!

CHAPTER VI

The Stranger Again

THE respiration work necessary to revive Terrence Titwillow took a little better than five minutes, during which time the Black Maria bounced majestically away carrying Lady Ashington and followed by a squad car detail in which Snodbury Snipe was riding.

The remaining coppers dispersed the crowd as rapidly as they could, and just before several bluecoats were about to descend on Terry and me, I brought him around and helped him into the car.

"Tell me," Terry begged, as I was starting the car, "tell me that this is all a ghastly nightmare, Danny!"

"Do you have to be told?" I snapped, for by now I was growing more than a trifle irritated. "Why," I demanded as an afterthought, "couldn't you have been a writer for the kiddy magazines? Or a scribe for a religious journal? The next time you create characters, my fat chum, please create decent, normal, god-fearing ones."

"I'm sorry Danny. I guess I've dragged you into a pretty devilish mess. You can step out if you want to."

"Step out?" Now I *was* burned. "Step out?" I repeated. "After all I've had to go through in the last few hours? Don't be funny. I'm going to see this thing through if it lands us all in Alcatraz!"

"Thanks, Danny," Terry mumbled humbly. "I won't forget all you've done."

I didn't answer, just threw the car into gear and shot ahead along State, going south. Moans from the back of the car indicated that Pierre was coming out of the fog.

"Where are we going, Danny?" he asked.

I had been doing some fast and furious weighing of problems during the past five or ten minutes, and now I had another angle.

"Look," I told him. "The situation is about like this. The police have Lady Ashington and the swag. Our pal Snodbury Snipe has followed them to the lockup to put in his two cents' worth. Between Snipe's amateur efforts to make a name for himself as a Sherlock, and the damning evidence of the Coanor Diamond and those other expensive trifles, we haven't a chance in the world. Right?"

"Right."

"Okay. We're in a hot spot no matter what happens. There's just one chance in a hundred of getting through this thing."

"What's that?" Terry hissed hopefully.

"If we follow them to the station," I speculated aloud, "we might have a chance of shutting up Ashington or Snipe, or both, before they spill the soy beans."

"But how'll we get near them? Surely the police are going to be grilling Lady Ashington the moment they find the loot in that bag."

"Once upon a time," I answered, "I used to work for a living. As a police reporter. Remember?"

Terry nodded.

"I spent most of my time around the Central Bureau, at 11th and State. That's where they're rushing Lady Ashington. I know a number of the coppers there. The Desk Sergeant owes me a favor. I hushed a nasty little mess for him at one time. We can get into the grilling easily enough," I answered.

"*Mon Dieu!*" The exclamation came to us from the back seat, indicating that Pierre had finally come around.

"What are we going to do about him?" Terry asked in a shaky voice.

"Take me to ze peeg police!" demanded our charge venomously. "I 'ave a zing or two to settle with zem!"

"Shut up!" I snapped at Pierre over my shoulder. Then to Terry. "We can stop at a pawn shop a few blocks down. I've a chum who will sell me a pair of bracelets. We can snap them on the frenzied Frenchy just to make sure he doesn't follow us into the midst of the coppers."

THREE minutes later I was climbing into the car once more, a nice set of handcuffs stuffed in my side pocket. Three minutes more and we pulled up in front of the Central Bureau, at 11th and State.

I was just starting to clamber out of the car when a smooth, suavely familiar voice purred in my ear:

"Pleeze, do not move, *mon vieux*."

This was the last straw. I turned slowly and looked into Pierre's beaming black eyes and smiling face. In his hand he held nonchalantly, a small pearl handled revolver.

"You got loose," I said stupidly.

"But certainly," Pierre beamed good-naturedly. "Am I not Pierre? Am I not ze supreme, ze invincible, ze masterful crook of crooks?"

"You am," I said disgustedly.

Terrence Titwillow was staring at his brain child in undisguised dismay.

"I forgot," he stammered, "about the revolver. I put in a special holster in his sleeve in my last book."

"Dandy time to remember that," I said sourly.

"Pleeze," Pierre held up a slim hand in admonition, "we must not quarrel. Geeve me ze handcuffs pleeze."

"What for?" I asked stubbornly.

Pierre wagged a finger playfully.

"You shall see." He motioned with the revolver. "Pleeze, ze handcuffs."

There wasn't anything I could do. I

passed them over to him. Then, to Titwillow's and my intense humiliation, he wound our arms through the spokes of the steering wheel and cuffed them together at the wrists. We were definitely going to sit that one out together.

Pierre stepped from the car and bowed gracefully to us.

"Since ze stupid gendarmes weel not surround Pierre, *voilà!* Pierre he surround zem."

He turned then with another suave bow and slung his Inverness cape about his shoulders. Pulling his black slouch hat low over his eyes he slunk up the steps of the precinct station and disappeared behind its massive iron doors.

"That does it," I said despairingly, "with your three looney characters running at the mouth to John Law, your goose is cooked. They'll be at your apartment for you inside of a half hour. They'll probably hold me as an accessory after the fact."

"I shouldn't have got you into this," Terrence groaned. "It was my problem. I had no right to mix anybody else up with it. This damnable typewriter and that screwy salesman are my worry. I should have kept it that way."

As he spoke something popped in my brain. It wasn't an idea or a definite plan of action. It was one of those wild unbelievable, screwy hunches that afflict the best of us.

Titwillow's terrible typewriter was between Terrence and me on the seat. I twisted it around until the keyboard faced Terrence. He was looking at me in slight bewilderment.

"Write," I commanded him, "write every blessed thing you can remember about that crazy typewriter salesman. Don't miss a thing. His tortoise shell glasses, his sad smile, how his voice sounded, everything. And hurry!"

"But Danny," Terrence protested

weakly, "I don't see—"

"Write!" I almost shouted the word. "Forget about what you can or can't see."

SULKILY, muttering under his breath, Terrence complied with my wild request. To tell the truth, as, I listened to the keys clattering under the nimble fingers of his free hand, I had serious doubts myself as to just what I was trying to do or prove.

Terrence typed for five or six minutes while I sat there stewing helplessly. Inside the Central Bureau, Pierre and Snipe and Lady Ashington were sealing our doom. But if my half-formed, incredibly wild idea worked we might have a chance, a bare thousand-to-one chance.

Terrence had stopped typing.

"I can't think of another thing," he said. "I've got it all here. I've got him on paper to the best of my memory."

I realize then, with a hopeless sinking feeling, that my vague plan had been unimaginably preposterous.

"What was the idea behind that brain storm, Danny," Terrence asked rather suspiciously.

"What difference does it make," I answered gloomily. "It was just one of those crazy impossible ideas that—"

I broke off abruptly, every muscle suddenly tensing.

For behind us in the back seat, *a discreet cough had sounded!*

For an instant I was too stunned to act and then I wheeled about in the seat as fast as my fettered condition would allow. Terrence Titwillow turned almost simultaneously with yours truly.

My eyes bugged out about a full inch at the sight they beheld and for a terrible instant my heart stopped altogether.

For sitting calmly in the back seat of Terrence Titwillow's limousine, was

a tall gaunt stranger, dressed completely in black and wearing tortoise shell glasses over the bridge of his nose.

Terrence's strangled cry split the shocked silence.

"*You!*" he cried hysterically. "How did you get here?"

"My hunch was right," I crowed jubilantly. "You brought him here, Terrence. Or rather the typewriter did. That was my idea. That typewriter, by some fantastic process, which I don't even pretend to understand, materializes anyone it writes about. So here we have the guy that got you into the mess in the first place. If anybody can get us out, it's he."

"That sounds logical," Terrence said breathlessly, hardly daring to begin to hope. "He's the boy who's going to straighten this mess out."

"I refuse," the black-clad creature said in a hollow voice. "Get out of this mess yourself. I refuse to assist you in the least."

"Now be reasonable," Terrence said tearfully. "I'm in a terrible jam. You've got to help me. You're the only one that can."

The tall man shook his head with finality.

"I refuse."

"Is that so?" I snapped. "Well maybe I can change your mind."

I was getting desperate, and another wild idea had just popped into my head. I should be able to control this black-clad stranger on the typewriter, just as I had been able to control Snodbury Snipe and the others. It was reasonable and if I could—

I swung the typewriter in front of me, wriggled one free hand to the keyboard.

"Is that your last word?" I asked him.

"Absolutely," he answered with emphasis.

I TYPED one sentence as rapidly as I could. Before I finished there was a wild yell from the back seat. I peered quickly in the direction of the terror-torn scream and my hopes began to rise. For the inscrutable typewriter salesman was crouched in a corner of the seat—as naked as the day he was born.

"Look Terry," I yelped, "I can control His Nibs with the greatest of ease. The sentence I wrote just described him without any clothes and presto! *Voilà!* as Pierre would say. It is done."

"W-what good will that do?" Terrence asked bewilderedly.

"Give me back my clothes," our tortoise-shelled chum cried unhappily. "I—I feel cold."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," I told him sternly. "We're in front of the police station right now and I'm going to send you in there. I'm going to send you into the policewomen's washroom—just as you are. After you've spent a few minutes with the ladies of the law you'll be glad enough to come back here and be a little more co-operative."

I started to type again but before I had clacked out three letters a frantic hand gripped my shoulder, spun me around.

"No, no," our naked nemesis gasped in terror, "you—you wouldn't do that."

I started to type again.

"*Wait!*" he shrieked. "Stop. I'll help you. S-stop typing, please."

I stopped, but I kept my fingers on the keys.

"I'll give you five seconds. At the end of that time—in you go."

"All right, all right," he gasped. "Do as I say. Type down the names of those people who were animated by the machine."

"You mean Pierre, Lady Ashington and Snipe?" I asked.

I didn't wait for his pendulous head

to bob on his long neck. I went ahead and typed out the names.

"What now?" I asked.

Skin-and-bones didn't answer. He leaned over the back of the front seat and with his forefinger he poked one key of the typewriter so fast that it sounded like a miniature machine gun banging against the paper.

I peered down at the paper in the machine and saw that our chum had merely typed diagonals through the three names, as follows:

~~Edy/Lovington~~
~~Sidney/Sally~~
~~Pierre/Peter~~

For a minute I couldn't speak. I was completely stunned with the magnificent simplicity of his solution.

"You mean, you mean," I gasped, like a double-talking radio comedian, "that that's all there is to it?"

"All?" he echoed in an injured tone, "isn't that enough?"

"What's it all about, Danny?" Terrence Titwillow said dazedly. "I feel like I came in in the middle of the picture."

I held up my hand.

"Listen!" From the top of the Central police building a banshee siren had started to moan through the darkness and silence.

"What's that for?" Terrence asked uneasily.

"Escaped prisoner," I told him happily.

AT that instant the heavy doors of the Bureau building burst open and a dozen or so blue-uniformed officers streamed out. One of them, conspicuous by a dash of gold on his sleeve, hurried to the side of our car.

"See anybody come out here?" he demanded. "See anything of two screwy looking guys and a screwier looking dame?"

"I shook my head.

"Nope officer, didn't see a soul. Why? Somebody get away?"

"You might as well know," he said bitterly, "the reporters have got the story by now. That woman we found with the Coanor Diamond got away. Disappeared without a trace. So did that young fellow in the dress suit who was helping the D.A. question her. On top of that a nutty Frenchman disappeared from a padded cell in the basement. He was wearing a straightjacket at the time, so it must've been an inside job. I'm telling you though, we won't quit looking till we find 'em."

"Good hunting," I said.

When he had gone, Terrence began to sob with relief. His fat shoulders shook spasmodically.

"We're out of the woods, Danny," he cried, almost hysterically. "We're safe. They've gone, gone, gone."

"Can I have my clothes now?" It was the somewhat plaintive voice of our thin-shanked deliverer.

I turned and looked at him.

"I don't seem to remember your name," I said.

"Oh," he answered, "it's Dr. Erasmus. I am a scientist. I constructed that typewriter based on my fourth dimensional experiments and I needed a writer who created fictional characters to give it a test. That is why I chose Mr. Titwillow."

"How about his fictional characters?" I asked him. "Pierre and the rest, I mean. Are they blanked out for good?"

"Until Mr. Titwillow writes more of their adventures on my machine, they are as those not born," Dr. Erasmus said coldly. "Now—my clothes, if you please."

Terrence had been picking at the typewriter, while I was talking to the Doctor and when he stopped I looked

at him. There was a funny, complacent expression on his face, like a cat let loose in a bird store.

I turned again and stared. The backseat was empty. Dr. Erasmus was very much gone. A horrible suspicion came to me and I grabbed the sheet of paper from the typewriter and stared at the last sentence. Or last words I should say, which read simply:

~~Dr. Erasmus~~

Then, before I could stop him, Terrence Titwillow hurled the typewriter from the window, into the path of a rumbling ten-ton truck which reduced it to a tangled mass of splintered wreck-

age.

"And that," he said, in a tired, but triumphant, voice, "is that!"

That was just about all there was to it. Terrence and I managed to get uncuffed and we haven't seen each other since that unforgettable night. His publishers announced that his next book would be delayed somewhat because Mr. Titwillow was doing all his work in long hand now.

As a sort of last line I might tack on a public apology to that typewriter salesman I threw down the steps the other day. I'm still a little jittery I guess.
