

*The Compleat Adventures of
Jules de Grandin
Volume Three of Three*



Dustjacket Art for *The Phantom Fighter* (Arkham House, 1966) by Frank Utpatel

The Compleat Adventures of Jules de Grandin

The Ninety-Three Memoirs of
Jules de Grandin, sometime member of *la Sûreté Général*,
la Faculté de Medicine Légal de Paris,
etc., etc.

SEABURY QUINN

Volume Three of Three



THE BATTERED SILICON DISPATCH BOX
2001

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Volume 1 (1925–1930)

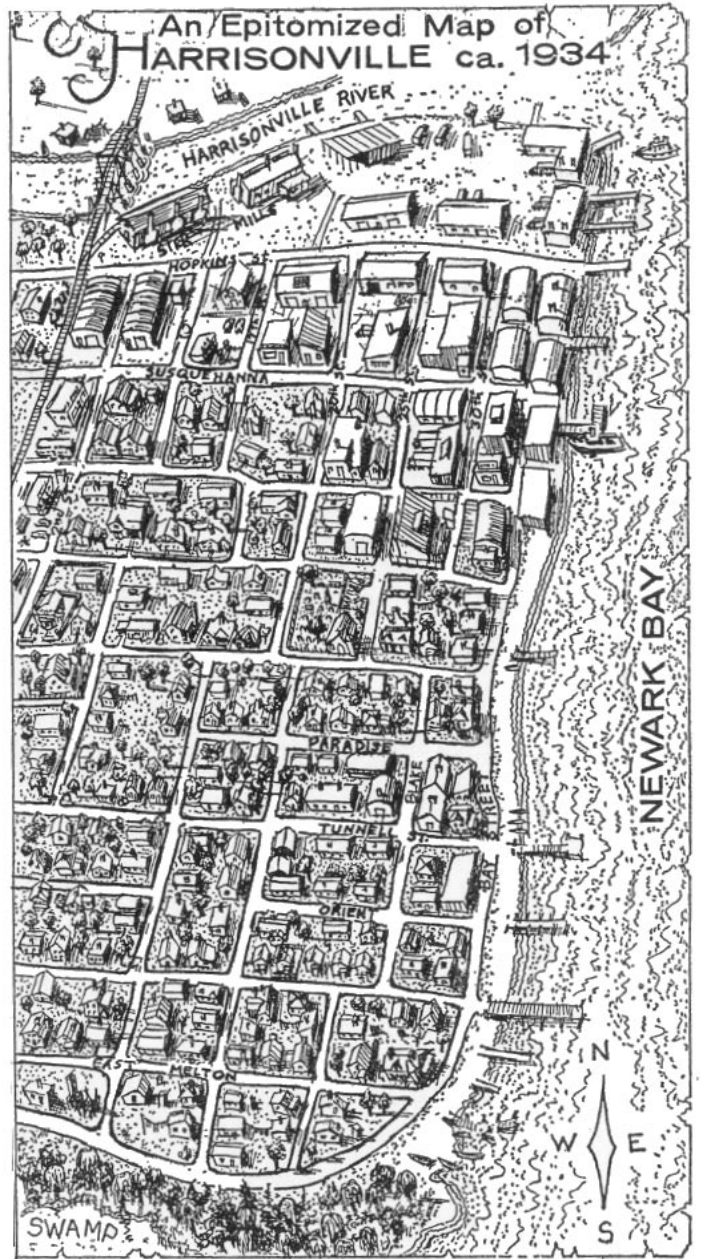
	Page
By Way of Explanation <i>by</i> Seabury Quinn	v
1925	
1. The Horror on the Links (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1925)	3
2. The Tenants of Broussac (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1925, cover by Doolin)	13
1926	
3. The Isle of Missing Ships (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1926)	27
4. The Vengeance of India (<i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1926)	44
5. The Dead Hand (<i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1926)	51
6. The House of Horror (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1926)	57
7. Ancient Fires (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1926)	66
8. The Great God Pan (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1926)	77
9. The Grinning Mummy (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1926)	83
1927	
10. The Man Who Cast No Shadow (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1927, cover by Petrie)	95
11. The Blood Flower (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1927)	106
12. The Veiled Prophetess (<i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1927)	116
13. The Curse of Everard Maundy (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1927)	125
14. Creeping Shadows (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1927)	138
15. The White Lady of the Orphanage (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1927)	147
16. The Poltergeist (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1927)	157
1928	
17. The Gods of East and West (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1928, cover by Senf)	168
18. Mephistopheles and Company, Ltd. (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1928)	181
19. The Jewel of the Seven Stones (<i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1928, cover by Senf)	195
20. The Serpent Woman (<i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1928)	210
21. Body and Soul (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1928)	221
22. Restless Souls (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1928)	232
23. The Chapel of Mystic Horror (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1928)	245
1929	
24. The Black Master (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1929, cover by Senf)	262
25. The Devil People (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1929)	275
26. The Devil's Rosary (<i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1929, cover by Rankin)	292
27. The House of Golden Masks (<i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1929, cover by Rankin)	307
28. The Corpse Master (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1929, cover by Senf)	320
29. Trespassing Souls (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1929)	329
30. The Silver Countess (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1929)	342
31. The House Without a Mirror (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1929)	353
32. Children of Ubasti (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1929)	367
1930	
33. The Curse of the House of Phipps (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1930, cover by Senf)	380
34. The Drums of Damballah (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1930, cover by Senf)	392
35. The Dust of Egypt (<i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1930, cover by Rankin)	410

Volume 2 (1930–1934)

	Page
By Way of Explanation <i>by</i> Seabury Quinn	v
1930	
36. The Brain-Thief (<i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1930, cover by Senf)	503
37. The Priestess of The Ivory Feet (<i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1930)	516
38. The Bride of Dewer (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1930, cover by Senf)	533
39. Daughter of the Moonlight (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1930)	546
40. The Druid's Shadow (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1930, cover by Rankin)	561
41. Stealthy Death (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1930)	574
42. The Wolf of St. Bonnot (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1930, cover by Rankin)	591
1931	
43. The Lost Lady (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1931, cover by Senf)	604
44. The Ghost Helper (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February-March 1931)	621
45. Satan's Stepson (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1931)	630
1932	
46. The Devil's Bride (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February-July 1932, cover by Senf)	658
47. The Dark Angel (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1932)	736
48. The Heart of Siva (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1932, cover by Brundage)	753
49. The Bleeding Mummy (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1932)	770
50. The Door to Yesterday (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1932)	783
1933	
51. A Gamble in Souls (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1933)	800
52. The Thing in the Fog (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1933, cover by Brundage)	817
53. The Hand of Glory (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1933, cover by Brundage)	838
54. The Chosen of Vishnu (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1933, cover by Brundage)	854
55. Malay Horror (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1933)	871
56. The Mansion of Unholy Magic (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1933)	883
57. Red Gauntlets of Czerni (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1933, cover by Brundage)	899
1934	
58. The Red Knife of Hassan (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1934, cover by Brundage)	914
59. The Jest of Warburg Tantavul (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1934)	927

Volume 3 (1935–1951)

	<i>Page</i>
By Way of Explanation <i>by</i> Seabury Quinn	v
1935	
60. Hands of the Dead (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1935)	1003
61. The Black Orchid (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1935)	1015
62. The Dead-Alive Mummy (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1935)	1024
1936	
63. A Rival from the Grave (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1936, cover by Brundage)	1034
64. Witch-House (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1936, cover by Brundage)	1048
1937	
65. Children of the Bat (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1937, cover by Brundage)	1063
66. Satan's Palimpsest (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1937, cover by Brundage)	1077
67. Pledged to the Dead (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1937)	1090
68. Living Buddhess (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1937, cover by Brundage)	1102
69. Flames of Vengeance (<i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1937)	1113
1938	
70. Frozen Beauty (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1938, cover by Finlay)	1127
71. Incense of Abomination (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1938, cover by Brundage)	1140
72. Suicide Chapel (<i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1938, cover by Brundage)	1152
73. The Venomed Breath of Vengeance (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1938)	1165
74. Black Moon (<i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1938)	1176
1939	
75. The Poltergeist of Swan Upping (<i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1939)	1191
76. The House Where Time Stood Still (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1939)	1207
77. Mansions in the Sky (<i>Weird Tales</i> , June-July 1939)	1223
78. The House of the Three Corpses (<i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1939)	1235
1942–1945	
79. Stoneman's Memorial (<i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1942)	1250
80. Death's Bookkeeper (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1944, cover by Tilburne)	1264
81. The Green God's Ring (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1945)	1274
82. Lords of the Ghostlands (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1945, cover by Tilburne)	1287
1946	
83. Kurban (<i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1946, cover by Tilburne)	1299
84. The Man in Crescent Terrace (<i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1946)	1311
85. Three in Chains (<i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1946)	1322
86. Catspaws (<i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1946, cover by Fox)	1334
87. Lottë (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1946)	1344
88. Eyes in the Dark (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1946)	1354
1947-1951	
89. Clair de Lune (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1947)	1364
90. Vampire Kith and Kin (<i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1949)	1373
91. Conscience Maketh Cowards (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1949)	1382
92. The Body-Snatchers (<i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1950)	1391
93. The Ring of Bastet (<i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1951)	1401



HARRISONVILLE, New Jersey, ca. 1934

The Occult Delights of Jules de Grandin

When I first became deeply interested in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach during the late 1960's, collecting every recording and reading every commentary I could find, much of the work in print about him — be it biographies, essays, critical studies or album liner-notes — still consigned the work of a majority of his contemporaries, especially the Germanic ones, to the rubbish heap. After all, the burghers of Leipzig expressed dismay at having to settle for Bach, after Georg Philipp Telemann proved unable to accept the vacant position of music director, and this alone had been enough, at one time, to consign the latter to perdition. Furthermore, these same detractors were quick to point out, the sheer volume of music Telemann produced seemed to guarantee that it was all second-rate work richly deserving the oblivion into which most of it slipped after its creator's death. Never mind that these burghers actually knew Telemann as both man and musician through his years as a student under their dear, deceased music director, Johann Kuhnau, that Bach had enough respect for the man to name him godfather to his second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, or that neither Bach nor Handel were loathe to emulate or even borrow from him. Any truly discerning lover of music was to consider his music nothing more than meretricious tripe. Of course, this was all errant nonsense. If rarely scaling the heights attained by the works of Bach, Telemann's works were and are capable of standing on their own merits. Even at his most facile, he was yet able to deliver entertaining, well-crafted work that met the tastes of the day without sacrificing individuality. His music never truly died, but the eclipse which engulfed it for so long ensured that only a few works emerged into the light, and even then only those works most resembling Bach, Handel or Vivaldi. His acceptance began in earnest only with the advent of wide-spread authentic performance practice in the 1970's. Now, his work and that of his contemporaries is finally being appreciated on the basis of its own strengths rather than as a reflection or contrast to that of Johann Sebastian Bach.

A similar eclipse has engulfed the most popular of the authors writing for *Weird Tales*. No one has yet forgiven Seabury Quinn for being more popular and earning more money than H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard or Clark Ashton Smith. For all the severity Lovecraft shows the Jules de Grandin tales, he recognized Quinn as a "brilliant figure" whose "literary ruin" was brought about by the "effect of

commerce on the writer".¹ A majority of Lovecraft's adherents, however, have striven to portray Seabury Quinn as a man capable of writing work on a mediocre level, who nonetheless chose to crank out one formulaic Jules de Grandin tale after another, mindful only of word-count and the obligatory nude scene, *i.e.* the worst kind of hack. Nor have historians and critics of supernatural fiction been less harsh in their remarks. E.F. Bleiler dismisses the contents of the Arkham House selection of these tales, *The Phantom Fighter*, with the line, "It is a sad fact that Quinn, in 90 odd tries, was never able to lift a single Grandin story above mediocrity."²

How was I, whose introduction to weird fiction began at the age of 11 with Edgar Allan Poe and the authors collected in the estimable Modern Library anthology *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural*, going to go about dealing with the most (in)famous works of Seabury Quinn, especially after the bad press accorded him by the Lovecraftians and others whose judgment I trusted? I had enjoyed "The Phantom Farmhouse," "Masquerade" and other tales by Seabury Quinn, but had ignored almost every Jules de Grandin tale I had seen in anthologies, automatically associating them with those chilly introductory lines from the Modern Library volume:

"We have read hundreds and hundreds of stories — many of them commonplace, many of them unfortunately sheer trash."³

Time considerations permitted me to continue this prejudice unchecked until, during an epistolary discussion of August Derleth's regional ghost stories, George Vanderburgh asked me to look at all 93 of Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin tales. The thought of tackling roughly 1,140,000 words of fiction I had been virtually taught to despise was daunting, to say the least, but George's gentlemanly insistence convinced me that the tales might be

¹ Letter to Catherine Lucille Moore, mid-October 1936. *Selected Letters V.* (Arkham House, 1976), p. 327.

² *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction* (Kent State University Press: 1983), p. 424.

³ Herbert A. Wise & Phyllis Fraser (eds.) *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* (Random House, 1944). p. xix.

better than they were reputed to be, and worth a perusal. I also recalled reading and enjoying “The Man in Crescent Terrace” several years before in an attempt to understand E.F. Bleiler’s praise for this tale as “one of Quinn’s better stories” on one page and his dismissal of all 90 odd Jules de Grandin tales on another.⁴ Since that tale was number 84 in the series, I doubted Mr. Bleiler disliked only the odd-numbered tales. Nor were the other sources for my aversion to this corpus necessarily infallible, no matter how exalted their pedigree. Even the landmark study of weird fiction “Supernatural Horror in Literature” reveals significant blind spots, as witness Lovecraft’s lumping together of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Wilkie Collins, H. Rider Haggard, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G. Wells and Robert Louis Stevenson in one sentence devoted to the “romantic, semi-Gothic, quasi-moral tradition.”

I considered these inconsistencies out of interest in determining the sources and reliability of my own prejudices, rather than out of any attempt to follow a prior fashion for building up one author by destroying another. Exalting one author over the ashes of another ultimately does both a disservice and sounds as desperate as the pathetic blurb once hailing Kubrick’s *The Shining* as “The 2001 of Horror Films,” one of the most startlingly stupid things it has ever been my misfortune to read, even if the film had not been a botch.

The adventures of Jules de Grandin do not read like Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, H.P. Lovecraft, Raymond Chandler or even, to cite acknowledged masters of the occult detective form, Algernon Blackwood or William Hope Hodgson for the simple reason that Jules de Grandin’s world, dark as it may on occasion appear, is not a depressive’s paradise. Like the world of the majority of Victorian ghost stories, it is basically a sanguine, merry place in which evil or injustice is an aberration or intrusion rather than a sign of the true underlying nature of things. Once the aberration has been corrected or the intrusion removed, the status quo reasserts itself and life becomes comfortable yet again.

Quinn offsets this two-dimensional world-view by leavening the tales with subsidiary narratives of a more serious tone. These intercalary tales are often of great quality and length. Although on rare occasions, these are little more than the “encyclopaedia-scrapings”⁵ Lovecraft accuses Quinn of using, and on a few others, they stand in for the

tale’s legitimate exposition or development, these are usually fascinating side-trips into other cultures, other lands, other times or differing perspectives on contemporary society. One of the most interesting and poignant of these is the history of the mysterious veiled woman told post-humously by her brother in *The Devil’s Bride*, one of the very best portions of that novel. Among many other outstanding examples are the villains’ narratives from “The Isle of Missing Ships” and “Stealthy Death,” the heroine’s description of her ordeal at the hands of “Satan’s Stepson,” the hero’s narrative of the haunted *maison* and graveyard in “Pledged to the Dead,” and the description of revolutionary Russia in “Frozen Beauty.” Although other themes are explored, one recurrent theme in these narratives is hypocrisy — in families, societal or religious institutions, tribal, revolutionary or colonial governments. Even when these touch on the underbelly of our own society, however, Quinn is careful to place them at a distance in time, or place them from the home town of Harrisonville.

Harrisonville as a city and a society is a marvelous creation, and one of the joys of reading the tales in sequence is being able to discover the city month by month, season by season as if we, like de Grandin, were also new to the region. The city and its environs, it encompasses both Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* and the bright, cold city of the hard-boiled school; the dark, superstitious forests of the old-world and a wide assortment of immigrant peoples and supernatural forces from every portion of Asia. As a result the tone of the tales is not uniform, as Quinn’s detractors would have us believe. Some of the tales, such as “The Devil People” have a gritty, hard-boiled quality to them. Others, such as “The House of Three Corpses,” mix elements of traditional and hard-boiled detection with a strong dose of humor. “Ancient Fires” has a dreamlike quality to it as does “Pledged to the Dead.”

The level of violence and the amount of suffering endured here is often extreme, even in such a touching tale as “Restless Souls.” Rather than gloating over this violence, as an author for one of the Spicy Pulps might have done, however, Quinn is capable of slipping into either a clinical mode by filtering the action or its aftermath through the eyes of a medical professional, or into a more subjective mode by revealing just as much as the shocked layman is capable of understanding through the eyes of one of his more naive, prim and proper heroes or heroines. The revelations in “Horror House” are horrendous, but Quinn neither blinks nor gloats. Only in “The House Where Time Stood Still,” a similar tale of a madman’s mutilations, does Quinn step over this line by allowing one of his characters to revel in the delights of agony and graphic degradation for their own sake.

⁴ *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction* (Kent State University Press, 1983), p. 203.

⁵ Letter to E. Hoffmann Price, May 29, 1935. *Selected Letters V*. (Arkham House, 1976), p. 169

One of the first things to strike me when I began reading all of the tales in chronological order was the ruthlessness not only of the villains, but of de Grandin himself. “The Isle of Missing Ships” offers an excellent example. Every character, except a few hapless victims, de Grandin’s amanuensis Dr. Trowbridge and the dancer, acts with remarkable viciousness. Through it all, de Grandin matches blow for blow, only his accent and the peril he shares with Trowbridge and the girl separating him at times from Goonong Besar and his crew of cannibals. It is almost like reading a novel by H. Rider Haggard filtered through the sensibility of Dashiell Hammett. This bloody-mindedness recurs throughout the stories, notably making a sardonic appearance at the conclusion of “The Man in Crescent Terrace.” Quinn’s skill at assimilating this aspect with the more scholarly, pompous, sentimental, gluttonous and bibulous aspects of de Grandin’s personality make these amoral episodes simultaneously shocking and inevitable, thereby adding piquancy to the tales.

Many of the tales are also interesting ethically. It is difficult not to feel sympathy toward many of the villains. The pair of murderers in “The Grinning Mummy” plead eloquently for a cessation to the desecration of their ancestral grave-sites. “The Isle of Missing Ships” and “Stealthy Death,” hypocritical missionaries preying on the wealth and women of the foreign peoples they have been sent to assist precipitate horrendous events off the coast of the Malay peninsula and in present-day Harrisonville respectively. The history behind the murders in the latter tale is even more horrible than the murders themselves. In “The Devil’s Rosary,” not only is the protagonist to blame for the assassinations launched against his family, but de Grandin sympathizes with the “villains” sufficiently to return their lost treasure to them and let the latest would-be assassin go free. Sometimes Quinn uses similar situations in more than one tale to show a similar theme from more than one perspective, as when he deals sympathetically with the supplantation of personality in “Ancient Fires” and “A Gamble in Souls,” but handles the same theme with horror in a number of other tales such as “Trespassing Souls,” “The Brain Thief” and a few of those dealing with ancient Egypt. Whereas the reincarnation of the second lover in “Ancient Fires” is seen as a blessing, in “The Jewel of the Seven Stones” it is viewed as a curse. Again, Quinn is able to elicit some sympathy for the villains in these pieces, because we are allowed to see what is happening not only from the victims’ viewpoint, but from the miscreant’s viewpoint as well. Like most of the Victorians, Quinn is mostly comfortable with the world as it was given him, but the creation of de Grandin also allows him to rail against the puritans, the hypocrites, the bigots, the bullies and the snobs

in that world. Conventional wisdom cast the fallen woman, those of other races, and even the most repentant miscreant into outer darkness, but de Grandin fights for the rights of anyone who needs his assistance no matter their status, their sins or their race, hurling contempt at anyone who questions him. He has no more concern about burying a black woman in a white cemetery or an unshriven strumpet whose body had been the altar for the Black Mass into consecrated ground than he has in slitting the throat of a man who treated him treacherously or spilling an old man he knows will get away with murder down the stairs to his death,

Another remarkable feature of these tales is Quinn’s talent for creating tableaux limned with such care that they live in the memory long afterward. There are too many of them to list even all of the best, but the girl enwrapped and enraptured by the deadly embrace of a titanic snake in “The Tenants of Broussac,” the butchering of the ship-wrecked survivors in “The Isle of Missing Ships,” the mummy standing silently in the room of death, its lips and staff smeared with blood in “The Grinning Mummy,” the flight from death by supernatural winds along the Himalayas in “The Devil’s Rosary,” the ghost jeering through the nursery skylight in “The Jest of Warburg Tantavul,” Amélie awaiting her lover beside her lonely tomb in “Pledged to the Dead,” the statue’s final appearance in the courtyard in “Stoneman’s Memorial” and the mummy tracking its prey by sound alone in “The Man in Crescent Terrace” are all worthy examples that give the lie to any notion that these tales are uniformly bland or carelessly written.

Not that there are not careless passages here and there. Even such a fine tale as “The Devil’s Rosary” has one passage in which de Grandin explains the radioactive decomposition of Radium by sending it through an intermediate stage as the gas Helium before becoming the solid Lead. Another tale features a scene in which de Grandin elicits a lengthy, detailed statement from a young woman who has just been blinded, had her tongue torn out and her hands cut off, because she has witnessed a murder by crucifixion. Shortly after he accomplishes this miracle by having her spell out each word, letter by letter, with her feet, “*la pauvre*,” not unsurprisingly, dies of shock and exhaustion. To make the scene even more cruel, as if the criminals had also damaged the girl’s brain before leaving her for dead, she assents to de Grandin’s fatal interrogation not by nodding her head, but by tapping out the letters Y–E–S, *i.e.* 25 taps followed by 5 taps followed by 18 taps. There is also the occasional tale wherein the *modus operandi* Quinn describes for writing these tales (see “By Way of Explanation”), becomes readily apparent — the plot in “Horror House” positively creaks. Particularly endearing is the moment when de Grandin reaches an impasse

concerning what can be done ethically about the unfortunate maimed creatures he and Trowbridge have stumbled upon. It is as if Quinn stopped the story at this same point to say, “Now, how do I write myself out of this?” Since it was through coincidence that de Grandin and Trowbridge reached the house, and another coincidence that the villain died right in front of them leading their way to these horrors, it soon becomes obvious that there is no good reason why yet another event coincident upon the same atmospheric phenomena cannot be called upon to resolve this too. Before anyone can say, “Can you hear something dripping?” the problem has disappeared.

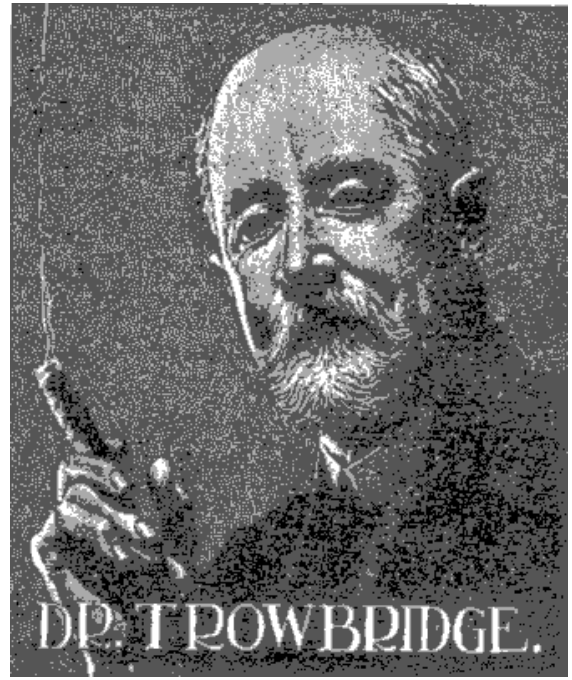
Gaffes of this magnitude are rare, and if the plots sometimes veer off on their own meandering way, the tales are the richer for it. There are even certain moments in the stories when Quinn seems to offer his readers a knowing wink by manipulating known elements from the work of other weird fiction writers. The most obvious of these are his reuse of themes from Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* in his own “The Jewel of the Seven Stones” and references to the creations and person of Manly Wade Wellman. Pastor Roggenbuck in “Conscience Maketh Cowards” seems to have stepped straight out of Wellman’s hill country. Two tales are even more interesting in this regard. In the “Black Orchid,” random elements from Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s classic vampire tale, “Carmilla” undergo strange transmutations. The threatening black woman allied mysteriously with Carmilla becomes a deceptively meek black man allied to “the Fragrant One.” Both victims suffer from a single rather than a double puncture wound which appears not on the throat, but the breast. An even more specific variant occurs when, rather than the old soldier rushing into the bedroom with drawn

sword to protect the heroine from Carmilla, the old mercenary’s daughter rushes into the bedroom with a naked sword, hoping to save her father from the embodiment of his nightmares. In “Lottë,” Quinn pays homage to the German weird writer and cabaret personality Hanns Heinz Ewers by giving a variant of his name to a German vaudeville agent in late 1930’s Buenos Aires as well. Furthermore, the tale’s *femme fatale* resembles such alluring, destructive figures as populate Ewer’s *Alraune*, “The Spider” or “The Execution of Damiens.” She is “driven almost to a frenzy by the rhythms of her own body” and sends “a thrill that was as sharp as a pang of pain” through the tale’s hero on their first meeting. Even after death, ecstasy and torment, love and degradation are one to her. Her ghost is a chilling creation, both enticing and repellant, carrying her own private hell around her as if it were a cloak.

These tales and more await you within the six covers of these books. Like the aristocrats and burghers of the Baroque who patronized Bach, Telemann and other masters, Seabury Quinn, Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge delight in fine food, good wine, beautiful women, well-made furniture and a general feeling of well-earned comfort. Sit back in a comfortable chair, pour yourself a brandy, or a fine bottle water as choice dictates, and treat yourself to an hour or two of vicarious danger and dread. Most of these 93 tales have been hidden from us for far too long, some for more than 70 years. Simply because the nature of these adventures is occult is no reason for their delights to remain hidden.

— Jim Rockhill

Dowagiac, Michigan
March 3rd, 2001



By Way of Explanation

MORE THAN once I have been asked how I happened to evolve the character of Jules de Grandin, and when I have replied I do not know I have been accused of mendacity, even of attempting to adopt an artistically temperamental pose.

Nothing could be farther from the truth; the fact is Jules de Grandin is a sort of literary combination of Topsy and Minerva, that is, he just grewed — but grewed full-panoplied, and did not have to be “evolved.”

One evening in the spring of 1925, I was in that state that every writer knows and dreads; a story was due my publisher, and there didn't seem to be a plot in the world. Accordingly, with nothing particular in mind, I picked up my pen and literally making it up as I went along — wrote the first story which appears in this book.

As with *The Horror on the Links*, so with all other adventures of de Grandin. I have never had a definite plot in mind when commencing one of his memoirs, and it is seldom that I have so much as a single well defined incident of the proposed story thought out in advance. From first to last Jules de Grandin has seemed to say, “Friend Quinn, *je suis présent. En avant*, write me!” Perhaps there's something to the Socratic theory of the daemon within, after all.

The petit Jules is now quite an old gentleman. Numerically his adventures total almost 300, chronologically they

span a quarter-century. Phil Stong in *The Other Worlds* calls him “the best known supernatural detective in weird fiction,” and as far as I have been able to ascertain he is second in longevity only to that hero of an earlier generation's adolescence, Nick Carter.

The ten tales comprising this volume have been chosen with a dual purpose: (1) to present ten typical incidents in the early career of the little phantom-fighter, and (2) to detail his methods of combating what the Catechism refers to as spiritual and ghostly enemies. He is, for example, as far as I know, the first one to electrocute a troublesome revenant, to cause a zombie to return to its grave by smuggling a bit of meat into its diet, and certainly the first to anaesthetize a vampire before administering the *coup de grâce*.

In any event, if the stories in this, the first collected sheaf of Jules de Grandin's adventures, serve to help the reader to forget some worrisome incident of the workaday world, even for an hour or two, both Jules de Grandin and I shall feel we have achieved an adequate excuse for being.

Washington, D.C.

Foreword from

The Phantom Fighter, Arkham House 1966



SEABURY QUINN 1889-1969

*The Compleat Adventures of
Jules de Grandin*

Hands of the Dead

“IF THERE were such a thing as a platinum blond tom-cat, I’m sure it would look like Doctor de Grandin.” My dinner partner, a long-eyed, sleek-haired brunette in a black-crêpe gown cut to the base of her throat in front and slashed in a V below the waist behind, gestured with her oddly oblique eyes across the table toward Jules de Grandin. “He’s a funny little fellow — rather a darling, though,” Miss Travers added. “Just see how he looks at Virginia Bushrod; wouldn’t you think she was a particularly luscious specimen of sparrow, and he—”

“Why should he watch Miss Bushrod, particularly?” I countered. “She’s very lovely, but—”

“Oh, I don’t think he’s interested in her face, pretty as it is,” Miss Travers laughed. “He’s watching her hands. Everybody does.”

I looked along the candle-lighted table with its ornate Georgian silver and lace-and-linen cloth until my eye came to rest upon Virginia Bushrod. Latest of the arrivals at the Merridews’ house party, she was also probably the most interesting. You could not judge her casually. A pale, white skin, lightly tanned on beach and tennis court, amber eyes, shading to brown, hair waved and parted in dull-gold ringlets, curled closely on the back curve of her small and shapely head. The dead-white gown she wore set off her bright, blond beauty, and a pair of heavy gold bracelets, tight-clasped about her wrists, drew notice to her long and slender hands.

They were extraordinary hands. Not large, not small, their shapeliness was statuesque, their form as perfect as a sculptor’s dream, with straight and supple fingers and a marvelous grace of movement expressive as a spoken word. Almost, it seemed to me as she raised the spun-glass Venetian goblet of Madeira, her hands possessed an independent being of their own; a consciousness of volition which made them not a mere part of her body, but something allied with, though not subservient to it.

“Her hands are rarely beautiful,” I commented. “What is she, an actress? A dancer, perhaps—”

“No,” said Miss Travers, and her voice sank to a confidential whisper, “but a year ago we thought she’d be a hopeless cripple all her life. Both hands were mangled in a motor accident.”

“But that’s impossible,” I scoffed, watching Miss Bushrod’s graceful gestures with renewed interest. “I’ve been in medicine almost forty years; no hands which suffered even minor injuries could be as flexible as hers.”

“They did, just the same,” Miss Travers answered stubbornly. “The doctors gave up hope, and said they’d have to amputate them at the wrist; her father told me so. Virginia gave Phil Connor back his ring and was ready to resign herself to a life of helplessness when—”

“Yes?” I smiled as she came to a halt. Lay versions of medical miracles are always interesting to the doctor, and I was anxious to learn how the “hopeless cripple” had been restored to perfect manual health.

“Doctor Augensburg came over here, and they went to him as a last resort—”

“I should think they would,” I interjected. Augensburg, half charlatan, a quarter quack, perhaps a quarter genius, was a fair example of the army of medical marvels which periodically invades America. He was clever as a workman, we all admitted that, and in some operations of glandular transplanting had achieved remarkable results, but when he came out with the statement that he had discovered how to make synthetic flesh for surgical repair work the medical societies demanded that he prove his claims or stop the grand triumphal tour that he was making of his clinics. He failed to satisfy his critics and returned to Austria several thousand dollars richer, but completely discredited in medical circles.

“Well, they went to him,” Miss Travers answered shortly, “and you see what he accomplished. He—”

Her argument was stilled as Jane Merridew, who acted as her brother’s hostess, gave the signal for the ladies to retire.

Chinese lanterns, orange, red, pale jade, blossomed in the darkness of the garden. Farther off the vine-draped wall cast its shadow over close-clipped grass and winding flagstone paths; there were rustic benches underneath the ginkgo trees; a drinking-fountain fashioned like a lion’s head with water flushing in an arc between its gaping jaws sent a musically mellow tinkle through the still night air. I sighed regretfully as I followed the men into the billiard room. The mid-Victorian custom of enforced separation of men and women for a period after dinner had always seemed to me a relic of the past we might well stuff and donate to a museum.

“Anybody want to play?” Ralph Chapman took a cue down from the rack and rubbed its felt-tipped end with chalk. “Spot you a dollar a shot, Phil; are you on?”

“Not I,” the youth addressed responded with a grin. “You took me into camp last time. Go get another victim.”

Young Chapman set the balls out on the table, surveyed them critically a moment, then, taking careful aim, made a three-cushion shot, and followed it with another which bunched the gleaming spheres together in one corner.

De Grandin raised a slender, well-manicured hand and patted back a yawn. “*Mon Dieu,*” he moaned to me, “it is sad! Outside there is the beauty of the night and of the ladies, and we, *pardieu,* we sit and swelter here like a pack of *sacré* fools while he knocks about the relics of departed elephants. Me, I have enough. I go to join the ladies, if—”

“May I try, Ralph?” Glowing in defiant gayety, lips wine-moist, eyes bright and wandering, Virginia Bushrod poised upon the threshold of the wide French window which let out on the terrace. “I’ve never played,” she added, “but tonight I feel an urge for billiards; I’ve got a yen to knock the little balls around, if you know what I mean.”

“Never too late to learn,” young Chapman grinned at her. “I’m game; I’ll pay you five for every kiss you make.”

“Kiss?” she echoed, puzzled.

“Kiss is right, infant. A purely technical term. See, here’s a kiss.” Deftly he brought the balls together in light contact, paused a moment, then with a quick flick of his cue repeated the maneuver twice, thrice, four times.

“O-oh, I see.” Her eyes were bright with something more than mere anticipation. It seemed to me they shone like those of a drunkard long deprived of drink when liquor is at last accessible.

“See here, you take the stick like this,” began young Chapman, but the girl brushed past him, took a cue down from the rack and deftly rubbed the cube of chalk against its tip.

She leant across the table, her smooth brow furrowed in a frown of concentration, thrust the cue back and forth across her fingers tentatively; then swiftly as a striking snake the smooth wood darted forward. Around the table went the cue ball, taking the cushions at a perfect angle. *Click-click*, the ivory spheres kissed each other softly, then settled down a little way apart, their polished surfaces reflecting the bright lamplight.

“Bravo, Virginia!” cried Ralph Chapman. “I couldn’t have made a better shot myself. Talk about beginner’s luck!”

The girl, apparently, was deaf. Eyes shining, lips compressed, she leant across the table, darted forth her cue and made an expert draw shot, gathering the balls together as though they had been magnetized. Then followed a quick volley shot, the cue ball circled round the table, spun sharply in reverse English and kissed the other balls with so light an impact that the click was hardly audible.

Again and again she shot, driving her cue ball relentlessly home against the others, never missing, making the most

difficult shots with the sure precision betokening long mastery of the game. Fever-eyed, white-faced, oblivious to all about her, she made shot follow shot until a hundred marks had been run off, and it seemed to me that she was sating some fierce craving as she bent above the table, cue in hand.

Phil Connor, her young fiancé, was as puzzled as the rest, watching her inimitable skill first with wonder, then with something like stark fear. At last: “Virginia!” he cried, seizing her by the elbow and fairly dragging her away. “Virginia honey, you’ve played enough.”

“Oh?” An oddly puzzled look gathered between her slim brows, and she shook her head from side to side, like a waking sleeper who would clear his brain of dreams. “Did I do well?”

“Very well. Very well, indeed, for one who never played the game before,” Ralph Chapman told her coldly.

“But, Ralph, I never did,” she answered. “Honestly, I never had a billiard cue in my hands before tonight!”

“No?” his tone was icy. “If this is your idea of being sporting—”

“See here, Chapman,” young Connor’s Irish blood was quick to take the implication up. “Ginnie’s telling you the truth. There isn’t a billiard table in her father’s house or mine, there wasn’t any in her sorority house; she’s never had a chance to play. Don’t you think I’d know it if she liked the game? I tell you it was luck; sheer luck—”

“At five dollars per lucky point?”

“Word of honor, Ralph,” Miss Bushrod told him, “I—”

“You’ll find my honor good as yours,” he broke in frigidly. “I’ll hand you my check for five hundred dollars in the morning, Miss—”

“Why, you dam’ rotten swine, I’ll break your neck!” Phil Connor leaped across the room, eyes flashing, face aflame; but:

“Gentlemen, this has gone quite far enough,” Colonel Merridew’s cold voice cut through the quarrel. “Chapman, apologize to Virginia. Connor, put your hands down!” Then, as the apology was grudgingly given:

“Shall we join the ladies, gentlemen?” asked Colonel Merridew.

“It was a rather shoddy trick that Bushrod girl played on young Chapman, wasn’t it?” I asked de Grandin as we prepared for bed. “He’s a conceited pup, I grant, vain of his skill at billiards, and all that; but for her to play the wide-eyed innocent and let him offer her five dollars a point, when she’s really in the championship class — well, it didn’t seem quite sporting.”

The little Frenchman eyed the glowing tip of his cigar in thoughtful silence for a moment; then: “I am not quite

persuaded," he replied. "Mademoiselle Bushrod — *mon Dieu*, what a name! — appeared as much surprised as any—"

"But, man, did you notice her dexterity?" I cut in petulantly. "That manual skill—"

"*Précisément*," he nodded, "that manual skill, my friend. Did it not seem to you her hands betrayed a — how do you say him? — a knowledge which she herself did not possess?"

I shook my head in sheer exasperation. "You're raving," I assured him. "How the deuce—"

"*Tiens*, the devil knows, perhaps, not I," he broke in with a shrug. "Come, let us take a drink and go to bed."

He raised the chromium carafe from the bedside table, and: "Name of a devil!" he exclaimed in disappointment. "The thing holds water!"

"Of course it does, idiot," I assured him with a laugh. "You wanted a drink, didn't you?"

"A drink, but not a bath, *cordieu*. Come, species of an elephant, arise and follow me."

"Where?" I demanded.

"To find a drink; where else?" he answered with a grin. "There is a tray with glasses on the sideboard of the dining-room."

The big old house was silent as a tomb as we crept down the stairs, slipped silently along the central hall and headed for the dining-room. De Grandin paused abruptly, hand upraised, and, obedient to his signal, I, too, halted.

In the music room which opened from the hallway on the right, someone was playing the piano, very softly, with a beautiful harpsichord touch. The lovely, haunting sadness of the *Londonderry Air* came to us as we listened, the gently-struck notes falling, one upon another, like water dripping from a lichen rock into a quiet woodland pool.

"Exquisite!" I began, but the Frenchman's hand raised to his lips cut short my commendation as he motioned me to follow.

Virginia Bushrod sat before the instrument, her long, slim fingers flitting fitfully across the ivory keys, the wide gold bracelets on her wrists agleam. Black-lace pajamas, less concealing than a whorl of smoke, revealed the gracious curves of her young body, with a subtle glow, as wisps of banking storm-clouds dim, but do not hide, the moon.

As we paused beside the door the sweet melody she played gave way to something else, a lecherous, macabre theme in C sharp minor, seductive and compelling, but revolting as a painted corpse already touched with putrefaction. Swaying gently to the rhythm of the music, she turned her face toward us, and in the wavering candlelight I saw her eyes were closed, long lashes sweeping against pale-gold cheeks, smooth, fine-veined eyelids gently

lowered.

I turned to Jules de Grandin with a soundless question, and he nodded affirmation. "But yes, she sleeps, my friend," he whispered. "Do not waken her."

The music slowly sank to a thin echo, and Miss Bushrod rose with lowered lids and gently parted lips, swayed uncertainly a moment, then passed us with a slow and gliding step, her slim, bare feet soundless as a draft of air upon the rug-strewn door. Slowly she climbed the stairs, one shapely hand upon the carven balustrade, the dim night-light which burned up in the gallery picking little points of brightness from her golden wristlets.

"Probably neurotic," I murmured as I watched her turn left and disappear around the pillar at the stairhead. "They say she underwent an operation on her hands last year, and—"

De Grandin motioned me to silence as he teased the needle-points of his mustache between his thumb and finger. "Quite so," he said at length. "Precisely, exactly. One wonders."

"Wonders what?" I asked.

"How long we have to wait until we get that drink," he answered with a grin. "Come, let us get it quickly, or we need not go to bed at all."

Breakfast was no formal rite at Merridews'. A long buffet, ready-set with food and gay with raffia-bound Italian glassware, Mexican pottery and bowls, daisies, chicory and Queen Anne's lace, stood upon the terrace, while little tables, spread with bright-checked peasant linen, dotted the brick paving.

De Grandin piled a platter high with food, poured himself a cup of coffee and set to work upon the viands. "Tell me, good Friend Trowbridge," he commanded as he returned from the sideboard with a second generous helping of steamed sole, "what did you note, if anything, when we caught Mademoiselle Bushrod at her midnight music?"

I eyed him speculatively. When Jules de Grandin asked me questions such as that they were not based on idle curiosity.

"You're on the trail of something?" I evaded.

He spread his hands before him, imitating someone groping in the dark. "I think I am," he answered slowly, "but I can not say of what. Come, tell me what you noticed, if you please."

"Well," I bent my brows in concentration, "first of all, I'd say that she was sleep-walking; that she had no more idea what she was doing than I have what she's doing now."

He nodded acquiescence. "Precisely," he agreed. "And—"

"Then, I was struck by the fact that though she had

apparently risen from bed, she had those thick, barbaric bracelets on her wrists.”

“*Holà, touché,*” he cried delightedly, “you have put the finger on it. It was unusual, was it not?”

“I’d say so,” I agreed. “Then — why, bless my soul!” I paused in something like dismay as sudden recollection came to me.

He watched me narrowly, eyebrows raised.

“She turned the wrong way at the stairhead,” I exclaimed. “The women’s rooms are to the right of the stairs, the men’s to the left. Don’t you remember, Colonel Merridew said—”

“I remember perfectly,” he cut in. “I also saw her turn that way, but preferred to have corroboration—”

The clatter of hoofs on the driveway cut short his remarks, and a moment later Virginia Bushrod joined us on the terrace. She looked younger and much smaller in her riding-clothes. White breeches, obviously of London cut, were topped by a white-linen peasant blouse, gay with wool embroidery, open at the throat, but with sleeves which came down to the gauntlets of her doeskin gloves. For belt she wore a brilliant knit-silk Roman scarf, and another like it knotted turbanwise around her head, its glowing reds and greens and yellows bringing out the charming colors of her vivid, laughing face. Black boots, reaching to the knee, encased her high-arched, narrow feet and slender legs.

“Hello, sleepy-heads,” she greeted as she sat down at our table, “where’ve you been all morning? Making up for night calls and such things? I’ve been up for hours — and I’m famished.”

“What will it be, *Mademoiselle*?” de Grandin asked as he leaped up nimbly to serve her; “a little toast, perhaps — a bowl of cereal?”

“Not for me,” she denied, laughing. “I want a man’s-sized breakfast. I’ve ridden fifteen miles this morning.”

As she peeled off her white-chamois gloves I caught the glint of golden bracelets on her wrists.

“We enjoyed your playing, *Mademoiselle,*” the little Frenchman told her smilingly as, obedient to her orders, he deposited a “man’s-sized” plate of food before her. “The *Londonderry Air* is beautiful, but that other composition which you played with such *verve*, such feeling, it was—”

“Is this a joke?” Miss Bushrod looked at him through narrowed eyes. “If it is, I can’t quite see the humor.”

“*Mais non*, it is no jest, I do assure you. Music is one of my passions, and although I play but poorly, I enjoy to hear it. Your talent—”

“Then you’ve mistaken me for someone else,” the girl cut in, a quick flush mounting to her face. “I’m one of those unfortunates who’s utterly tone-deaf; I—”

“That’s right,” Christine Travers, virtually naked in a sun-

back tennis blouse and shorts, emerged through the French windows and dropped down beside Miss Bushrod. “Ginnie’s tone-deaf as an oyster. Couldn’t carry a tune in a market basket.”

“But, my dear young lady,” I began, when a vicious kick upon my shin cut my protest short.

“Yes?” Miss Travers smiled her slow, somewhat malicious smile. “Were you going to tell Ginnie you’ve a remedy for tone-deafness, Doctor? Something nice and mild, like arsenic, or corrosive sublimate? If you’ll just tell her how to take it, I’ll see—”

“Doctar Trowbridge, Doctar de Grannun, suh, come quick, fo’ de Lawd’s sake!” Noah Blackstone, Merridew’s stout colored butler, burst upon the terrace, his usual serene aplomb torn to shreds by sudden terror. “Come runnin’, gen’lemens, sumpin awful’s happened!”

“Eh, what is it you say?” de Grandin asked. “Something awful—”

“Yas, suh; sumpin dreadful. Mistu — Mistu Chapman’s done been kilt. Sumbuddy’s murdered ’im. He’s daid!”

“Dead? Ralph Chapman?” Horror mounted in Virginia Bushrod’s amber eyes as she seemed to look past us at some scene of stark tragedy. “Ralph Chapman—dead!” Unthinkingly, mechanically as another woman might have wrung her handkerchief in similar circumstances, she took the heavy silver fork with which she had been eating and bent it in a spiral.

Sprawled supinely across the bed, protruding eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling Ralph Chapman lay, mouth slightly agape, tongue thrust forward. It needed no second glance to confirm the butler’s diagnosis, and it required only a second glance to confirm his suspicion of murder, for in those bulging eyes and that protruding tongue, no less than in the area of bruise upon the throat, we read the autograph of homicide.

“So!” de Grandin gazed upon the body speculatively, then crossed the room, took the dead boy’s face between his hands and raised the head. It was as if the head and body joined by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle, for there was no resistance to the little Frenchman’s slender hands as the young man’s chin nodded upward. “Ah—so-o-o!” de Grandin murmured. “He used unnecessary violence, this one; see, my friend” — he turned the body half-way over and pointed to a purpling bruise upon the rear of the neck — “two hands were used. In front we have the murderer’s thumb and finger marks; behind is ecchymosis due to counter-pressure. And so great a force was used that not only was this poor one strangled, but his neck was broken, as well.”

He passed his fingers tentatively along the outline of

young Chapman's jaw; then: "How long has he been dead, my friend?" he asked.

Following his example, I felt the dead boy's jaw, then his chest and lower throat. "H'm," I glanced at my watch, "my guess is six or seven hours. There's still some stiffening of the jaw, but not much in the chest, and the forearms are definitely hard — yes, I'd say six hours at the least, eight at the most, judging by the advance of *rigor mortis*. That would place the time of death—"

"Somewhere near midnight," he supplied. Then, irrelevantly: "They were strong hands that did this thing, my friend; the muscles of our necks are tough, our vertebræ are hard; yet this one's neck is snapped as though it were a reed."

"You — you've a suspicion?" I faltered.

"I think so," he returned, sweeping the room with a quick, stock-taking glance.

"Ah, what is this?" He strode across the rug, coming to pause before the bureau. On the hanging mirror of the cabinet, outlined plainly as an heraldic device blazoned on a coat of arms, was a handprint, long slender fingers, the mounts of the palm and the delicately sweeping curve of the heel etched on the gleaming surface, as though a hand, dank with perspiration, had been pressed upon it.

"Now," his slim black brows rose in saracenic arches as he regarded me quizzically, "for why should a midnight visitant especially if bent on murder, take pains to leave an autograph upon the mirror, good Friend Trowbridge?" he demanded.

"B-but that's a woman's hand," I stammered. "Whoever broke Ralph Chapman's neck was strong as a gorilla, you just said so. A woman—"

"Tell me, my friend," he interrupted, fixing me with that level, disconcerting stare of his, "do you not wish to see that justice triumphs?"

"Why, yes, of course, but—"

"And is it your opinion — I ask you as a man of medicine — that a man's neck offers more resistance than, by example, a silver table-fork?"

I stared at him dumfounded. Ralph Chapman had publicly denounced Virginia Bushrod as a cheat; we had seen her going toward his room about the time of the murder; within five minutes we had seen her give a demonstration of manual strength scarcely to be equaled by a professional athlete. The evidence was damning, but—

"You're going to turn her over to the police?" I asked.

For answer he drew the green-silk handkerchief peeping from the pocket of his brown sports coat, wadded it into a mop and erased the handprint from the mirror. "Come, my friend," he ordered, "we must write out our report before the coroner arrives."

The mortician to whom Coroner Lordon had entrusted Chapman's body obligingly lent his funeral chapel for the inquest. The jury, picked at random from the villagers, occupied the space customarily assigned to the remains. The coroner himself sat in the clergyman's enclosure. Witnesses were made comfortable in the family room, being called out one by one to testify. Through the curtained doorway leading to the chapel — ingeniously arranged to permit the mourning family to see and hear the funeral ceremonies without being seen by those assembled in the auditorium — we saw the butler testify to finding the body and heard him say he summoned de Grandin and me immediately.

"You give it as your medical opinion that death had taken place some six or seven hours earlier?" the coroner asked me.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"And what, in your opinion, was the cause of death?"

"Without the confirmation of an autopsy I can only hazard an opinion," I returned, "but from superficial examination I should say it was due to respiratory failure caused by a dislocation of the spinal column and rupture of the cord. The dislocation, as nearly as I could judge from feeling of the neck, took place between the second and third cervical vertebræ."

"And how was the spinal fracture caused?"

"By manual pressure, sir — pressure with the hands. The bruises on the dead man's neck show the murderer grasped him by the throat at first, probably to stifle any outcry, then placed one hand behind his head and with the other forced the chin violently upward, thereby simulating the quick pressure given the neck in cases of judicial hanging."

"It would have required a man of more than usual strength to commit this murder in the manner you have described it?"

I drew a deep breath of relief. "Yes, sir, it would have had to be such a man," I answered, emphasizing the final word, unconsciously, perhaps.

"Thank you, Doctor," said the coroner, and called de Grandin to corroborate my testimony.

As the inquisition lengthened it became apparent Coroner Lordon had a theory of his own, which he was ingeniously weaving into evidence. Rather subtly he brought out the fact that the household had retired by eleven-thirty, and not till then did he call for testimony of the quarrel which had flared up in the billiard room. The painful scene was reenacted in minute detail; six men were forced to swear they heard young Connor threaten to break Chapman's neck.

"Mr. Connor," asked the coroner, "you rowed stroke oar at Norwood, I believe?"

Phil Connor nodded, and in his eyes was growing terror.

"Day before yesterday you won a twenty-dollar bet with

Colonel Merridew by tearing a telephone directory in quarters, did you not?"

A murmur ran along the jury as the question stabbed young Connor like a rapier-thrust.

I saw Virginia Bushrod blanch beneath her tan, saw her long, slim hand go out to clutch her lover's, but my interest in the by-play ceased as the final question hurtled like a crossbow bolt:

"Mr. Connor, where were you between the hours of twelve and two last night?"

The tortured youth's face flushed, then went white as tallow as the frightened blood drained back. The trap had sprung. He rose, grasping at the chair in front of him till lines of white showed on his hands as the flexor muscles stood out pallidly against his sun-tanned skin.

"I—I must refuse to answer—" he began, and I could see his throat working convulsively as he fought for breath. "What I was doing then is no affair—"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Coroner,*" de Grandin rose and bowed respectfully, "I do not wonder that the young man is embarrassed. He was with me, and — believe me, I am grieved to mention it, and would not, if it were not necessary — he was drunk!"

"Drunk?" a slow flush stained the coroner's face as he saw his cherished case evaporating.

"Drunk?" the little Frenchman echoed, casting a grin toward the responsive jury. "But yes, *Monsieur*. Drunk like a pig; so drunk he could not mount the stairs unaided."

Before he could be interrupted he proceeded:

"Me, I am fond of liquor. I like it in the morning, I delight in it at noon; at night I utterly adore it. Last night, when I had gone to bed, I felt the need of stimulant. I rose and went downstairs, and as I reached the bottom flight I turned and saw Messieurs Connor and Chapman on the balcony above. They were in argument, and seemed quite angry. '*Holà, mes enfants,*' I called to them, 'cease your dispute and join me in a drink. It will dissolve your troubles as a cup of coffee melts a lump of sugar.'

"Monsieur Chapman would have none of it. Perhaps he was one of those unfortunates who have no love for brandy; it might have been he did not choose to drink with Monsieur Connor. At any rate, he went into his room and closed the door, while Monsieur Connor joined me in the dining-room.

"*Messieurs,*" he bent another quick smile at the jurymen, "have you ever seen a man unused to liquor making the attempt to seem to like it? It is laughable is it not? So it was last night. This one" — he laid a patronizing hand upon young Connor's shoulder — "he tipped his glass and poured the brandy down, then made a face as though it had been castor oil. Ah, but he had the gameness, as you say so quaintly over here. When I essayed a second drink he held

his glass for more, and when I took a third, he still desired to keep me company; but then he scarce knew what he did. Three glasses of good cognac" — he fairly smacked his lips upon the word — "are not for one who does not give his serious thought to drinking. No, certainly.

"Before you could pronounce the name of that *Monsieur Jacques Robinson* our young friend here was drunk. *Mordieu*, it was superb! Not in more than twenty years have I been able to achieve such drunkenness, *Messieurs*. He staggered, his head hung low between his shoulders, and rolled from side to side; he smiled like a pussy-cat who has lately dined on cream; he toppled from his chair and lay upon the floor!

"I raised him up. 'Come, *Monsieur,*' I told him, 'this is no way to do. You are like a little, naughty boy who creeps into his father's cellar and gets drunk on stolen wine. Be a man, *Monsieur*. Come to bed!'

"Ah, but he could not. He could not walk, he could not talk, except to beg me that I would not tell his fiancée about his indiscretion. And so I dragged him up the stairs. Yes, I, who am not half his size, must carry him upstairs, strip off his clothes, and leave him snoring in a drunken stupor. He—"

"Then you think he couldn't 'a' broke th' other feller's neck?" a jurymen demanded with a grin.

De Grandin left his place, walked across the chapel till he faced his questioner and leant above him, speaking in a confidential whisper which he nevertheless managed to make audible throughout the room. "My friend," he answered solemnly, "he could not break the bow of his cravat. I saw him try it several times; at last I had to do it for him."

The verdict of the jury was that Ralph Chapman came to his death at the hands of some person or persons to them unknown.

De Grandin poured a thimbleful of old Courvoiser into his brandy sniffer, rotated the glass a moment, then held it to his nose, sighing ecstatically. "You know, my friend," he told me as he sipped the cognac slowly, "I often wonder what became of them. It was a case with possibilities, that one. I can not rid my mind of the suspicion—"

"Whatever are you vapping about?" I cut in testily. "What case, and what suspicion—"

"Why, that of Mademoiselle Bushrod and her fiancé, the young Monsieur Connor. I—"

"You certainly lied Phil Connor out of the electric chair," I told him with a smile. "If ever I saw a death-trap closing in on anyone, it was the snare the coroner had laid for him. Whatever made you do it, man? Didn't *you* want to see justice triumph?"

"I did," he answered calmly, "but justice and law are not always cousins German, my friend. Justly, neither of those young folks was responsible for—"

"Beg pardon, sor, there's a lady an' gentleman askin' fer Doctor de Grandin," interrupted Nora McGinnis from the doorway. "A Misther Connor an' Miss Bushrod. Will I be showin' 'em in, I dunno?"

"By all means!" cried de Grandin, swallowing his brandy at a gulp. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, the angels whom we spoke of have appeared!"

Phil Connor looked embarrassed; a darkling, haunted fear was in Virginia Bushrod's eyes as we joined them in the drawing-room.

The young man drew a deep, long breath, like a swimmer about to dive into icy water, then blurted: "You saved my life, sir, when they had me on the spot last month. Now we've come to you again for help. Something's been troubling us ever since Ralph Chapman died, and we believe that you're the only one to clear it up."

"But I am honored!" said de Grandin with a bow. "What is the nature of your worriment, my friends? Whatever I can do you may be sure I'll do if you will take me in your confidence.

Young Connor rose, a faint flush on his face, and shifted from one foot to the other, like a schoolboy ill at ease before his teacher. "It's more a matter of your taking us into your confidence, sir," he said at length. "What really happened on the night Ralph Chapman's neck was broken? Of course, that story which you told was pure invention — even though it saved me from a trial for murder — but both Virginia and I have been haunted by the fear that something which we do not know about happened, and—"

"How do you say, you fear that something which you do not know about," he began, but Virginia Bushrod cut in with a question:

"Is there anything to the Freudian theory that dreams are really wish-fulfillments, Doctor? I've tried to tell myself there is, for that way lies escape, but—"

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin prompted as she paused.

"Well, in a misty, hazy sort of way I recollect I dreamt that Ralph was dead that night and that — oh, I might as well tell everything! I dreamt I killed him!

"It seemed to me I got up out of bed and walked a long, long way along a dark and winding road. I came to a high mountain, but oddly, I was on its summit, without having climbed it. I descended to the valley, and everything was dark; then I sat down to rest, and far away I heard a strain of music. It was soft, and sweet and restful, and I thought, 'How good it is to be here listening—'

"*Pardon, Mademoiselle*, can you recall the tune you heard?" de Grandin asked, his small mustache aquiver like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat, his little, round blue eyes intent on her in an unwinking stare.

"Why, yes, I think I can. I'm totally tone-deaf, you know, utterly unable to reproduce a single note of music accurately, but there are certain tunes I recognize. This was one of them, the *Londonderry Air*."

"Ah?" the little Frenchman flashed a warning look at me; then: "And what else did you dream?" he asked.

"The tune I listened to so gladly seemed to change. I couldn't tell you what the new air was, but it was something dreadful — terrible. It was like the shrieking and laughing of a thousand fiends together — and they were laughing at me! They seemed to point derisive fingers at me, making fun of me because I'd been insulted by Ralph Chapman and didn't dare resent it.

"I don't suppose you've ever heard of the Canadian poet Service, Doctor, but somewhere in one of his poems he tells of the effect of music on a crowd of miners gathered in a saloon:

"The thought came back of an ancient wrong,
And it stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust arose to kill — to kill ...

"That's how that dream-tune seemed to me. The darkness round me seemed to change to dusky red, as though I looked out through a film of blood, and a single thought possessed me: 'Kill Ralph Chapman; kill Ralph Chapman! He called you a low cheat before your friends tonight; kill him for it-wring his neck!'

"Then I was climbing up the mountainside again, clambering over rocks and boulders, and always round me was that angry, bloody glow, like the red reflection of a fire at night against the sky. At last I reached the summit, weak and out of breath, and there before me, sleeping on the rocks, was Ralph Chapman. I looked at him, and as I looked the hot resentment which I felt came flooding up until it nearly strangled me. I bent over him, took his throat between my hands and squeezed, pressed till his face grew bluish-gray and his eyes and tongue were starting forward. Oh, he knew who it was, all right! Before I gave his neck the final vicious twist and felt it break beneath my fingers like a brittle stick that's bent too far, I saw the recognition in his eyes and the deadly fear in them.

"I wasn't sorry for the thing I'd done. I was deliriously happy. I'd killed my enemy, avenged the slight he'd put on me, and was nearly wild with fierce, exultant joy. I wanted to call everybody and show them what I'd done; how those who called Virginia Bushrod thief and cheat were dealt with."

Her breath was coming fast, and in her eyes there shone a bright and gleaming light, as though the mere recital of the dream brought her savage exaltation. “The woman’s mad,” I told myself, “a homicidal maniac, if ever I saw one.”

“And then, *Mademoiselle*?” I heard de Grandin ask soothingly.

“Then I awoke. My hands and brow and cheeks were bathed in perspiration, and I trembled with a sort of chilled revulsion. ‘Girl, you’ve certainly been on a wish-fulfilment spree in Shut-eye Town,’ I told myself as I got out of bed.

“It was early, not quite five o’clock, but I knew there was no chance of further sleep, so I took a cold shower, got into my riding-clothes, and went for a long gallop. I argued with myself while riding, and had almost convinced myself that it was all a ghastly dream when I met you and Doctor Trowbridge having breakfast.

“When you mentioned hearing the *Londonderry Air* the night before, I went almost sick. The thought crashed through my brain: ‘Music at midnight — music at midnight — music luring me to murder!’

“Then, when the butler ran out on the terrace and told you Ralph was dead—”

“Precisely, *Mademoiselle*, one understands,” de Grandin supplied softly.

“I don’t believe you do,” she contradicted with a wan and rather frightened smile. “For a long time — almost ever since my accident — I’ve had an odd, oppressive feeling every now and then that I was not myself.”

“*Eh*, that you were someone else?” he asked her sharply.

“Yes, that’s it, that I was someone different from myself—”

“Who, by example, *Mademoiselle*?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Someone low and vile and dreadful, someone with the basest instincts, who — who’s *trying to push me out of myself*.”

De Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his mustache, leant forward in his chair and faced her with a level, almost hypnotic stare. “Explain yourself — in the smallest detail — if you will be so good,” he ordered.

“I’m afraid I can’t explain, sir, it’s almost impossible; but — well, take the episode in the billiard room at Colonel Merridew’s the night that Ralph was killed. I gave him my word then, and I give you my solemn pledge now that never before in all my life had I held a billiard cue in my hand. I don’t know what made me do it, but I happened to be standing on the terrace near the windows of the billiard room, and when I heard the balls click I felt a sudden overmastering urge, like the craving of a drug fiend for his dope, to go inside and play. It was silly, I knew I couldn’t even hit a ball, much less make one ball hit another, but something deep inside me seemed to force me on — no,

that’s not it, it was as though my hands were urging me.” She wrinkled her brow in an effort to secure a precisely descriptive phrase; then:

“It seemed as though my hands, entirely independent of me, were leading — no, *pulling* me toward that billiard table. Then, when I had picked up the cue I had a sudden feeling, amounting almost to positive conviction: ‘You’ve done this before; you know this game, no one knows it better.’ But I was in a sort of daze as I shot the balls around; I didn’t realize how long I’d been playing, or even whether I’d done well or not, till Ralph accused me of pretending ignorance of the game in order to win five hundred dollars from him.

“That isn’t all: I’d hardly been out of the hospital a month when one day I found myself in Rodenberg’s department store in the act of shoving a piece of Chantilly lace under the jumper of my dress. I can’t explain it. I didn’t realize I was doing it — truly I didn’t — till all of a sudden I seemed to wake up and catch myself in the act of shoplifting. ‘Virginia Bushrod, what *are* you doing?’ I asked myself, then held the lace out to the sales girl and told her I would take it. I didn’t really want it, had no earthly use for it; but I knew instinctively that if I didn’t buy it I would steal it.”

Abruptly she demanded: “Do you approve of brightly-colored nails?”

“*Tenez, Mademoiselle*, that depends upon the time and place and personality of the wearer,” he responded with a smile.

“That’s it, the personality,” she answered. “Bright carmine nails may be all right for some; they’re not becoming to my type. Yet I’ve had an urge, almost in irresistible desire, from time to time to have my nails dyed scarlet. Last week I stopped in Madame Toussaint’s for a manicure and pedicure. When I got home I found the nails of both my hands and feet were varnished brilliant red. I never use a deeper shade than rose, and was horrified to find my nails all daubed that way; yet, somehow, there was a feeling of secret elation, too. I called the salon and asked for Héloïse, who’d done my nails, and she said, ‘I thought it strange when you insisted on that vivid shade of red, Miss Bushrod. I didn’t like to put it on, but you declared you wanted it.’

“Perhaps I did; but I don’t remember anything about it.”

De Grandin eyed her thoughtfully a moment; then:

“You have spoken of an accident you had, *Mademoiselle*. Tell me of it, if you please.”

“It was a little more than a year ago,” she answered. “I’d been over to the country club by Morristown, and was hurrying back to keep a date with Phil when my car blew out a tire. At least, I think that’s what happened. I remember a sharp, crackling *pop*, like the discharge of a small rifle,

and next instant the roadster fairly somersaulted from the road. I saw the earth rush up at me; then” — she spread her shapely hands in a gesture of finality — “there I was, pinned beneath the wreckage, with both hands crushed to jelly.”

“Yet you recovered wholly, thanks to Doctor Augensburg, I understand?”

“Yes, it wasn’t till every surgeon we had seen had said he’d have to amputate that Father called in Doctor Augensburg, and he proved they all were wrong. I was in the hospital two months, most of the time completely or partly unconscious from drugs, but” — her delicate, long-fingered hands spread once again with graceful eloquence — “here I am, and I’m not the helpless cripple they all said I’d be.”

“Not physically, at any rate,” de Grandin murmured softly; then, aloud:

“*Mademoiselle*, take off your bracelets!” he commanded sharply.

Had he hurled an insult in her face, the girl could not have looked more shocked. Surprise, anger, sudden fear showed in her countenance as she repeated: “Take—off—”

“*Précisément*,” the little Frenchman answered almost harshly. “Take them off, *tout promptement*. I have the intuition; what you call the hunch.”

Slowly, reluctantly, as though she were disrobing in the presence of a stranger, Miss Bushrod snapped the clasps of the wide bands of gold which spanned her slender wrists. A line of untanned skin, standing out in contrast to her sun-kissed arms, encircled each slim wrist, testifying that the bracelets had been worn on beach and tennis court, as well as in her leisure moments, but whiter still, livid, eldritch as the mocking grin of broken teeth within the gaping mouth-hole of a skull, there ran around each wrist a ring of cicatrice an inch or so above the styloid process’ protuberance. Running up and down a half an inch or so from the encircling band of white were vertical scar-lines, interweaving, overlapping, as though the flesh had once been cut apart, then sewn together in a dove-tailed jointure.

Involuntarily I shrank from looking on the girl’s deformity, but de Grandin scrutinized it closely. At length:

“*Mademoiselle*, please believe I do not act from idle curiosity,” he begged, “but I must use the fluoroscope in my examination. Will you come with me?”

He led her to the surgery, and a moment later we could hear the crackling of the Crookes’ tube as he turned the X-ray on.

Miss Bushrod’s bracelets were replaced when they returned some fifteen minutes later, and de Grandin wore a strangely puzzled look. His lips were pursed, as though he were about to whistle, and his eyes were blazing with the

hard, cold light they showed when he was on a man-hunt.

“Now, my friends,” he told the lovers as he glanced at them in turn, “I have seen enough to make me think that what this lady says is no mere idle vagary. These strange influences she feels, these surprising lapses from normal, they do not mean she suffers from a dual personality, at least as the term is generally used. But unless I am more mistaken than I think, we are confronted by a situation so bizarre that just to outline it would cast a doubt upon our sanity. *Alors*, we must build our case up from the ground.

“Tell me,” he shot the question at young Connor, “was there anything unusual — anything at all, no matter how trivial, which occurred to *Mademoiselle* Bushrod a month — two months — before the accident which crushed her hands?”

The young man knit his brow in concentration. “No-o,” he replied at length. “I can’t remember anything.”

“No altercation, no unpleasantness which might have led to vengeful thoughts, perhaps?” the Frenchman prompted.

“Why, now you speak of it,” young Connor answered with a grin, “I did have a run-in with a chap at Coney Island.”

“Ah? Describe it, if you please.”

“It really wasn’t anything. *Ginnie* and I had gone down to the Island for a spree. We think the summer’s not complete without at least one day at Coney — shooting the chutes, riding the steeplechase and roller coasters, then taking in the side shows. This afternoon we’d just about completed the rounds when we noticed a new side show with a Professor *Mysterioso* or *Mefisto*, or something of the sort, listed as the chief attraction. He was a hypnotist.”

“Ah?” de Grandin murmured softly, “and—”

“The professor was just beginning his act when we went in. He was extraordinarily good, too. Uncannily good, I thought. All dressed in red tights, like *Mefistofeles*, he was, and his partner — ‘subject’ you call it, don’t you? — was a girl dressed in a white gown with a blond wig, simulating *Marguerite*, you know. He did the darndest things with her — put her in a trance and made her lie stretched between two chairs, with neck on one and heels on the other, no support beneath her body, while men stood on her; told her to rise, rose up three feet in the air, as drawn by invisible wires; finally, he took half a dozen long, sharp knitting-needles and thrust them through her hands, her forearms, even through her cheeks. Then he withdrew them and invited us to search her for signs of scars. It was morbid, I suppose, but we looked, and there wasn’t the faintest trace of wounds where he had pierced her with the needles, nor any sign of blood.

“Then he called for volunteers to come up and be hypnotized, and when no one answered, he came down

among the audience. ‘You, Madame?’ he asked Ginnie, stopping in front of her and grinning in her face.

‘When she refused he persisted; told her that it wouldn’t hurt, and all that sort of thing; finally began glaring into her eyes and making passes before her.’

‘That was a little bit too much. I let him have it.’

‘Bravo!’ de Grandin murmured softly. ‘And then?’

‘I expected he’d come back at me, for he picked himself up and came across the floor with his shoulders hunched in a sort of boxer’s crouch, but when he almost reached me he stopped short, raised his hands above his head and muttered something indistinctly. He wasn’t swearing, at least not in English, but I felt that he was calling down a curse on us. I got Virginia out before we had more trouble with him.’

‘And that was all?’ de Grandin asked.

‘That was all.’

‘*Parbleu*, my friend, I think it is enough to be significant.’ Then, abruptly: ‘This feminine assistant. Did you notice her?’

‘Not particularly. She had a pretty, common sort of face, and long, slim graceful hands with very brightly painted nails.’

De Grandin pinched his pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and finger. ‘Where did Doctor Augensburg repair your injured hands, *Mademoiselle*?’ he asked.

‘At the Ellis Sanitarium, out by Hackensack,’ she answered. ‘I was in Mercy Hospital at first, but the staff and Doctor Augensburg had some misunderstanding, so he took me out to Ellis Clinic for the operation.’

The little Frenchman smiled benignly on the visitors. ‘I can understand your self-concern, *Mademoiselle*,’ he told Miss Bushrod. ‘This feeling of otherhood, this impression that a trespasser-in-possession is inside of you, displacing your personality, making you do things you do not wish to do, is disconcerting, but it is not cause for great alarm. You were greatly hurt, you underwent a trying operation. Those things shock the nervous system. I have seen other instances of it. In the war I saw men make what seemed complete recovery, only to give way to strange irregularities months afterward. Eventually they regained normality; so should you, within, let us say’ — he paused as though to make a mental calculation — ‘within a month or so.’

‘You really think so, Doctor?’ she asked, pathos looking from her amber eyes.

‘But yes, I am all confident of it.’

‘Name of a most unpleasant small blue devil!’ he swore as our visitors’ footsteps faded on the cement walk outside. ‘I must make good my promise to her, but how — death of a dyspeptic hippopotamus! — how?’

‘What?’ I demanded.

‘You know how dreams reflect the outside world in symbolic images. By example, you have kicked the covers off the bed, you are cold. But you are, still asleep. How does the dream convert the true facts into images? By making you to think that you are in the Arctic and a polar storm is raging, or, perhaps, that you have fallen in the river, and are chilled by the cold water. So it was with *Mademoiselle* Bushrod. She dreams she stands upon a mountain top, that is when she leaves her chamber. She dreams that she descends the mountain; that is when she walks downstairs. She hears a tune, of course she does, her hands, those hands which can not play a single note when she is waking, produce it. She dreams she re-ascends the mountain — climbs the stairs. *Ha*, then she sees before her her traducer, sleeping, helpless. She reaches forth her hands, and—

‘What then, my friend? Are we to trust the symbolism of the dream still farther?’

‘But,’ I began, and—

‘*But* be damned and stewed in hell eternally!’ he cut in. ‘*Attendez-moi*: Those hands, those lovely, graceful hands of hers, are not her own!’

‘Eh?’ I shot back. ‘Not — good Lord, man, you’re raving! What d’ye mean?’

‘Precisely what I say,’ he answered in a level, toneless voice. ‘Those hands were grafted on her wrists, as the rose is grafted on the dogwood tree. Her radii and ulnæ have been sawn across transversely; then other bones, processing with the wrist-joints of a pair of hands, were firmly fastened on by silver plates and rivets, the flexor muscles spliced with silver wire, the arteries and veins and nerves attached with an uncanny skill. It is bizarre, incredible, impossible; but it is so. I saw it with my own two eyes when I examined her beneath the fluoroscope.’

He left the house directly after breakfast the next morning, and did not reappear till dinner had been waiting half an hour.

‘*Sacré nom*,’ he greeted me across his cocktail glass, ‘what a day I had, my friend! I have been busy as a flea upon a dog, but what I have accomplished! *Parbleu*, he is a clever fellow, this de Grandin!’

‘I took down copious mental notes while *Mademoiselle* Bushrod talked last night, and so this morning I set out for Coney Island. *Grand Dieu des rats*, what a place!’

‘From one small show-place to another I progressed, and in between times I engaged in conversation with the hangers-on. At last I found a prize, a jewel, a paragon. He rejoices in the name of Snead — Bill Snead, to give him his full title — and when he is not occupied with drinking he proclaims the virtues of a small display of freaks. *Eh bien*, by the expenditure of a small amount of money for food,

and something more for drink, I learned from him enough to put me on the trail I sought.

“Professor Misterioso de Diablo was a hypnotist of no mean parts, I learned. He had ‘played big time’ for years, but by a most unfortunate combination of events he was sent to prison in the State of Michigan, The lady’s husband secured a divorce, *Monsieur le Professeur* a rigidly enforced vacation from the stage.

“After that his popularity declined until finally he was forced to show his art at Coney Island side shows. He was a most unpleasant person, I was told, principally noted for the way he let his fancies for the fair sex wander. This caused his partner much annoyance, and she often reproached him bitterly and publicly.

“Now, attend me carefully. It is of this partner I would speak particularly. Her name was Agnes Fagan. She was born to the theatrical profession, for her father, Michael Fagan, had been a thrower-out of undesired patrons in a burlesque theater when he was not appearing as a strong man on the stage or lying deplorably drunk in bed. The daughter was ‘educated something elegant’, my informant told me. She was especially adept at the piano, and for a time entertained ambitions to perform in concert work. However, she inherited one talent, if no other, from her estimable parent: she was astonishingly strong. Monsieur Snead had often seen her amuse her intimates by bending tableware in knots, to the great annoyance of the restaurant proprietor where she happened to perform. She could, he told me solemnly, take a heavy table fork and twist it in a corkscrew.

“*Eh bien*, the lure of the footlights was stronger than her love of music, it appears, for we next behold her as the strong woman in an acrobatic troupe. Perhaps it was another heritage from her many-sided sire, perhaps it was her own idea; at any rate, one day while playing in the city of Detroit, she appropriated certain merchandise without the formality of paying for it. Two police officers were seriously injured in the subsequent proceedings, but eventually she went to prison, was released at the same time that the professor received liberty, and became his partner, the subject of his hypnotism during his performances, and, according to the evil-minded Monsieur Snead, his mistress, as well.

“She possessed four major vanities: her musical ability, her skill at billiards, her strong, white, even teeth and the really unusual beauty of her hands. She was wont to show her strength on all occasions. Her dental vanity led her to suffer the discomfort of having a sound tooth drilled, gold-filled and set with a small diamond. She spent hours in the care of her extremities, and often bought a manicure when it was a choice of pampering her vanity or going

without food.

“Now listen carefully, my friend: About a year ago she had a quarrel with her partner, the professor. I recite the facts as Monsieur Snead related them to me. It seems that the professor let his errant fancies wander, and was wont to invite ladies from the audience to join him in his acts. Usually he succeeded, for he had a way with women, Monsieur Snead assured me. But eventually he met rebuff. He also met the fist of the young lady’s escort. He was, to use your quaint American expression, ‘knocked for a row of ash-cans’ by the gentleman.

“*La Fagan* chided him in no uncertain terms. They had a fearful fight in which she would have been the victor, had he not resorted to hypnotism for defense. ‘She wuz about to tear him into little bits, when he put ’is hand up and said, ‘Rigid’,’ Monsieur Snead related. ‘An’ there she was, stiff as a frozen statoo, wid ’er hand up in th’ air, an’ her fist all doubled up, not able to so much as bat a eye. She stood that way about a hour, I expect; then suddenly she fell down flat, and slept like nobody’s business. I reckon th’ professor gave her th’ sleepin’ order from wherever he had beat it to. He had got so used to orderin’ her about that he could control her at a distance ‘most as well as when he looked into her eyes.’

“Thereafter he was often absent from the show where he performed. Eventually he quit it altogether, and within a month his strong and pretty-handed partner vanished. Like *pouf!* she was suddenly nowhere at all.

“By the time the estimable Monsieur Snead had finished telling me these things he could impart no further information. He was, as I have heard it described, ‘stewed like a dish of prunes’, for all the while he talked I kept his tongue well oiled with whisky. Accordingly I bid him farewell and pushed my research elsewhere. I searched the files of the journals diligently, endeavoring to find some clue to the vanishment of Mademoiselle Fagan. *Cordieu*, I think I found it! Read this, if you will be so good.”

Adjusting my pince-nez I scanned the clipping which he handed me:

GIRL FALLS UNCONSCIOUS WITH
STRANGE MALADY
Collapses on Roadway Near Hackensack—
Absence of Disease Symptoms
Puzzles Doctors

Hackensack, N.J., Sept. 17—Police and doctors today are endeavoring to solve the mystery of the identity and illness of an attractive young woman who collapsed on the roadway near here shortly after noon today, and has lain unconscious in the Ellis Clinic ever since.

She is described as about 30 years old, five feet two inches tall, and with fair complexion and red hair. Her hands and feet showed evidences of unusual care, and both finger- and toe-nails were dyed a brilliant scarlet. In her upper left eye-tooth was a small diamond set in a gold inlay.

She wore a ring with an oval setting of green stone, gold earrings in her pierced ears, and an imitation pearl necklace. Her costume consisted of a blue and white polka-dot dress, white fabric gloves, a black sailor hat with a small feather, and black patent leather pumps. She wore no stockings.

Alec Carter and James Heilmann, proprietors of an antique shop facing on the road, saw the young woman walking slowly toward Hackensack, staggering slightly from side to side. She fell in the roadway across from their store, and when they reached her she was unconscious. Failing to revive her by ordinary first aid methods, they placed her in an automobile and took her to the Ellis Clinic, which was the nearest point where medical aid could be secured.

Physicians at the clinic declared they could find no cause for her prolonged unconsciousness, as she was evidently neither intoxicated nor under the influence of drugs, and exhibited no symptoms of any known disease.

Nothing found upon her offered any clue to her identity.

“Well?” I demanded as I put the clipping down.

“I do not think it was,” he answered. “By no means; not at all. Consider, if you please:

“Mademoiselle Bushrod’s accident had occurred two weeks before, she had been given up by local surgeons; Augensburg, who was at the Ellis Clinic at the time, had just accepted her case.

“This strange young woman with the pretty hands drops down upon the roadway almost coincidentally with Mademoiselle Virginia’s advent at the clinic. Do you not begin to sniff the odor of the rodent?”

“I don’t think so,” I replied.

“Very well, then, listen: The mysterious young woman was undoubtedly the Fagan girl, whose disappearance occurred about this time. What was the so mysterious malady which struck her down, which had no symptoms, other than unconsciousness? It was merely that she had been once again put under the hypnotic influence, my friend. You will recall that the professor could control her almost as well when at a distance as when he stared into her eyes? Certainly. Assuredly. She had become so used to his hypnosis that his slightest word or wish was law to her; she was his slave, his thing, his chattel, to do with as he pleased. Unquestionably he commanded her to walk along that road that day, to fall unconscious near the Ellis Clinic; to lie unconscious afterward, eventually to die. Impossible? *Mais non*. If one can tell the human heart to beat more slowly, and make it do so, under power of hypnosis, why may one not

command it to cease beating altogether, still under hypnotic influence? So far as the young Fagan person was concerned, she had no thought, no will, no power, either mentally or physically, which the professor could not take from her by a single word of command. No, certainly.

“We were told Mademoiselle Bushrod’s accident came from a tire blow-out, *n’est-ce-pas*? I do not think it did. I inquired — most discreetly, I assure you — at and near the Ellis Clinic, and discovered that *Monsieur* the hypnotist visited that institution the very day that she was hurt, had a long conference with Doctor Augensburg in strictest privacy and — when he came he bore a small, high-powered rifle. He said he had been snake-hunting. Me, I think the serpent which he shot was the tire of Mademoiselle Bushrod’s car. That was the blow-out which caused her car to leave the road and crush her hands, my friend!

“Now, again: This Professor of the Devil, as he called himself appropriately, visited Doctor Augensburg at several times. He was in the room where the unknown woman lay on more than one occasion. He was at the clinic on the day when Augensburg operated on Mademoiselle Bushrod’s hands — and on that day, not fifteen minutes before the operation was performed, the unknown woman died. She had been sinking slowly for some days; her death occurred while orderlies were wheeling our poor Mademoiselle Virginia to the operating-room.

“You will recall she was unknown; that she was given shelter in an institution which maintains no beds for charity or emergency patients? But did you know that Augensburg paid her bill, and demanded in return that he be given her unclaimed body for anatomical research, that he might seek the cause of her ‘strange’ death? No, you did not know it, nor did I; but now I do, and I damn think that in that information lies the answer to our puzzle.

“I do not have to tell you that the period between somatic death — the mere ceasing to live — and molecular, or true death, when the tissue-cells begin to die, is often as long as three or four hours. During this period the individual body-cells remain alive, the muscles react to electrical stimuli, even the pupils of the eye can be expanded with atropine. She had suffered no disease-infection, this unknown one, her body was healthy, but run down, like an unwound clock. Moreover, fifteen minutes after her death, her hands were, histologically speaking, still alive. What easier than to make the transplantation of her sound, live hands to Mademoiselle Bushrod’s wrists, then chop and maim her body in the autopsy room in such a way that none would be the wiser?

“And what of these transplanted hands? They were part and parcel of a hypnotic subject, were they not, accustomed to obey commands of the hypnotist immediately, even to have steel knitting-needles run through them, yet feel no

pain? Yes, certainly.

“Very well. Are it not entirely possible that these hands which the professor have commanded so many times when they were attached to one body, will continue to obey his whim when they are rooted to another? I think so.

“In his fine story, your magnificent Monsieur Poe tells of a man who really died, yet was kept alive through hypnosis. These hands of Mademoiselle Fagan never really died, they were still technically alive when they were taken off — who knows what orders this professor gave his dupe before he ordered her to die? Those hands had been a major vanity of hers, they were skilled hands, strong hands, beautiful hands — *hélas*, dishonest hands, as well — but they formed a large part of their owner’s personality. Might he not have ordered that they carry on that personality after transplantation to the end that they might eventually lead the poor Mademoiselle Bushrod to entire ruin? I think so. Yes.

“Consider the evidence: Mademoiselle Bushrod is tone-deaf, yet we heard her play exquisitely. She had no skill and no experience in billiards, yet we saw her shoot a brilliant game. For why should she, whose very nature is so foreign to the act, steal merchandise from a shopkeeper?

“Yet she tells us that she caught herself in such a crime. Whence comes this odd desire on her part to have her nails so brightly painted, a thing which she abhors? Last of all, how comes it that she, who is in nowise noted for her strength, can twist a silver table fork into a corkscrew?

“You see,” he finished, “the case is perfect. I know it can not possibly be so; yet so it is. We can not face down facts, my friend.”

“It’s preposterous,” I replied, but my denial lacked conviction.

He read capitulation in my tone, and smiled with satisfaction.

“But can’t we break this spell?” I asked. “Surely, we can make this Professor What’s-his-Name—”

“Not by any legal process,” he cut in. “No court on earth would listen to our story, no jury give it even momentary credence. Yet” — he smiled a trifle grimly — “there is a way, my friend.”

“What?” I asked.

“Have you by any chance a trocar in your instruments?”

he asked irrelevantly.

“A trocar? You mean one of those long, sharp-pointed hollow needles used in paracentesis operations?”

“*Précisément. Tu parles, mon vieux.*”

“Why, yes, I think there’s one somewhere.”

“And may one borrow it tonight?”

“Of course, but — where are you going at this hour?”

“To Staten Island,” he replied as he placed the long, deadly, stiletto-like needle in his instrument case. “Do not wait up for me, my friend, I may be very late.”

Horried suspicion, growing rapidly to dreadful certainty, mounted in my mind as I scanned the evening paper while de Grandin and I sipped our coffee and liqueurs in the study three nights later. “Read this,” I ordered, pointing to an obscure item on the second page:

St. George, S.I., September 30—The body of George Lothrop, known professionally on the stage as Prof. Mysterioso, hypnotist, missing from his rooming-house at Bull’s Head, S.I., since Tuesday night, was found floating in New York bay near the St. George ferry slip by harbor police this afternoon.

Representatives of the Medical Examiners’ office said he was not drowned, as a stab wound, probably from a stiletto, had pierced his left breast and reached his heart.

Employees at the side show at Coney Island, where Lothrop formerly gave exhibitions as a hypnotist, said he was of a sullen and quarrelsome disposition and given to annoying women. From the nature of the wound which caused his death police believe the husband or admirer of some woman he accosted resented his attentions and stabbed him, afterward throwing his body into the bay.

De Grandin read the item through with elevated brows. “A fortunate occurrence, is it not?” he asked. “Mademoiselle Bushrod is now freed from any spell he might have cast on her — or on her hands. Hypnotic suggestion can not last, once the hypnotist is dead.”

“But — but you — that trocar—” I began.

“I returned it to your instrument case last Tuesday night,” he answered. “Will you be good enough to pour me out a little brandy? Ah, thank you, my friend.”

The Black Orchid

UNDER the combined influence of an excellent dinner and two ounces of 1845 cognac our guest became expansive. “D’ye know,” he told us as he passed the brandy snifter beneath his nose; inhaling the fruity fragrance of the ancient liqueur, “I believe I’ve run across a new disease.”

“Ah?” murmured Jules de Grandin courteously, casting a quick wink in my direction. “You interest me, *Monsieur*. What are the symptoms of this hitherto unknown disorder?”

Young Doctor Traherne beamed upon us genially. When one is barely thirty, fresh from his internship and six months’ study in Vienna, there is a spice in being told that your discoveries interest physicians who were practising when you were in the cradle. “It’s a — a bloodless hemorrhage,” he confided.

De Grandin’s narrow brows receded nearly half an inch toward the line of his sleekly brushed blond hair. “*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*,” he begged. “I fear I do not understand the English fluently. You said — perhaps I did not hear it right? — that you had found a bloodless hemorrhage?”

Traherne applied a match to his cigar and chuckled.

“That’s it, sir,” he answered. “Six months ago they called me to attend old Mr. Sorensen. At first I thought he suffered from anemia, but a check-up on his blood convinced me the trouble was more quantitative than qualitative. The man showed every evidence of hemorrhage exhaustion, and as there was no sign of external blood escape, I naturally suspected carcinoma and internal bleeding, but when I tested him I found there was no trace of it. There he was, with no wound or lesion — absolutely no way by which he could have lost a teaspoonful of blood — bleeding to death progressively. I put him on a blood-producing diet, fed him wine and iron and liver enough to fill a fair-sized warehouse, but every morning he showed fresh evidences of prostration till I had to fall back on glucose injections, and finally resorted to transfusions.”

De Grandin’s interest showed more than merely formal courtesy as Traherne finished his description.

“And when did this one die?” he asked, a sudden cutting-edge of sharpness in his voice.

“He didn’t,” answered Traherne with a grin. “Just by luck I hit upon the idea of a cruise — thought he might as well pass out with a ship’s doctor in attendance as to have me sign the death certificate — so I shipped him off on a Caribbean trip. He was back in ninety days, hale and hearty

as ever, without a sign of the strange condition which had nearly caused his death.

“*Eh bien*, you are to be congratulated,” said the Frenchman with a smile. “Our trade is one part science and the other nine parts luck, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“But here’s the funny part,” Traherne replied. “Sorensen’s been home just six weeks, and he’s got it again. Not only that, his niece, who lives with him, has it too, and her condition’s even worse than his. Hanged if I can figure it. Whatever influence has caused this condition has undoubtedly been the same in both cases — the symptoms are so exactly similar, but there’s absolutely no normal or apparent explanation for it. Think of it, gentlemen. Here are two people, one a man near eighty, but remarkably vigorous and well preserved, without a single trace of degenerative disease of any sort, the other a young woman in her early twenties, and for no apparent reason they both begin to show positively defined symptoms of extensive hemorrhage without a sign of bleeding. They respond to conventional treatment for loss of blood, but lapse into hemorrhage prostration almost overnight. If I were a Negro or a back-county Pennsylvanian I’d say it was a case of voodoo curse or hexing, but being a physician and a man of science I can only conclude these people are victims of some strange and as yet unclassified disease. Quite probably it’s contagious, too, since the niece appears to have contracted it by contact with the uncle.”

“H’m,” de Grandin murmured thoughtfully. “Has it occurred to you, *mon collègue*, that the evil which attacks these two is really old as Egypt’s mighty pyramids or Babylon’s tall temples?”

“Oh, you mean some old disease which ravaged ancient peoples and has passed out of medical memory, like the Black Death of medieval Europe?”

“*Précisément*, the blackest of black deaths, my friend.”

“You know about it — you’ve seen such cases?” young Traherne asked, a shade of disappointment in his voice.

“I would not say that,” de Grandin answered. “I have observed such symptoms, not once, but many times, but only fools attempt a diagnosis at long distance. I should greatly like to have the chance to see the victims of this so strange illness. Could you arrange an interview?”

“Why, yes,” the other smiled. “I’m going to drop by Sorensen’s house tonight, just to see that everything is going smoothly. Would you care to come along?”

Oscar Sorensen was one of those unusual characters found in many of the small, sub-metropolitan communities which fringe New York. Almost eighty years of age, he had served a rigorous apprenticeship as soldier of fortune, and, unlike most of that breed, he had succeeded. Late in life he retired from service to a half-score countries with military decorations enough to decorate an army corps and a fortune more than large enough to let him end the quiet close of his eventful life in luxury. He had fought in Egypt, China, the Levant, in India and the troubled Balkans, as well as over every foot of Central America. Serving with the Cubans under Garcia, he left the island as a brigadier general of *insurrectos*, his pockets lined with fat commissions from Americans who had seen the wisdom of buying what they wanted. As a commandant of Boer cavalry he had thriftily secured enough tough diamonds to make the unsuccessful war the Dutchmen waged a most remunerative enterprise for him; the loot of half a dozen Spanish cities near the Caribbean Sea had somehow found its way into his pocket, whether he had served the Government or revolutionary forces.

He looked the part which Fate had cast him for. Over six feet tall and proportionately broad, his prominent cheekbones and narrow face bespoke his Viking ancestry, as did his fair skin and light eyes. His face was tanned to the shade of unstained oak by long exposure to the tropic sun, tiny wrinkles splayed out from the corners of his eyes, and a white crescent of scar-tissue outlined the path of an old knife or spear wound from right eye to temple.

Even without having seen the man before, I realized he was little better than a wraith of his former self. Violet half-moons underneath his eyes, a waxed pallor underlying the sunburn of his face and the pinched look of distress about his nose all testified eloquently to the sudden weakness which had fallen on him.

"I've heard of you, de Grandin," he acknowledged as Doctor Traherne finished introductions, "and I think it's time we had you in for consultation. I've been telling myself that what was wrong with me was nothing but a fresh recurrence of malaria, but all along I knew that it was nothing for a sawbones' treatment. You're a ghost-fighter, aren't you? Good. I've got a ghost for you to fight, and it'll take the best you've got to whip it, too!"

The little Frenchman raised his narrow, high-arched brows a trifle. "A ghost, *Monsieur*?" he countered. "But Doctor Traherne informs us that—"

"Excuse me," cut in Sorensen, "but this is no matter for scientific speculation, I'm afraid. Of course Traherne informs you it's some strange form of anemia we're suffering from. You're a doctor, too; but you've traveled. You've seen things outside the dissecting-rooms and clinics,

and laboratories. Listen:

"You've been in savage countries; you know there's something to the power that the native witches claim. Here in civilization, with gas to cook our food and electricity to light us on our way to bed, we've forgotten all the old-time powers of the witch, so we say there never was any such thing, and brand belief in it as superstition. *Valgame Dios*," he swore in Spanish, "those who've traveled the remote spots of the world know what is so and what is superstition. In Polynesia I've seen men — whites as well as natives — shrivel and die by inches just because some native witch-doctor prayed them to death. On the African West Coast I've seen owls, owls large as eagles, perch in trees by villages, and next day some dweller in the settlement would die in frightful pain. I've seen Papuan wizards dance around their night-fires till the spirits of the dead came back — yes, by Heaven, with my own eyes I saw my mother, lying twenty years and more in her grave out there in St. Stephen's churchyard, stand across a Dyak campfire from me while a native sorcerer danced about the flames to the rhythm of a tom-tom!"

"*Parbleu*, but you have right, my friend," de Grandin nodded in agreement. "The dwellers in the silent places, they know these things; they have not forgotten; they remember, and they know. Me—"

"Excuse me," Traherne cut in dryly, "I hate to interrupt these reminiscences, but would you mind telling Doctor de Grandin about the onset of your illness, Mr. Sorensen?"

The old man looked at him much as an annoyed adult might regard the impertinent interruption of a child. "You've been in Madagascar?" he demanded of de Grandin.

"But naturally," the little Frenchman answered. "And you, *Monsieur*?"

"I was there with Gallieni in 1895, serving as *sous-lieutenant* of *chasseurs*, later as commandant of a detail of native guides. It was while serving with my detachment that I met Mamba. She was the daughter of an *Andriana*, or noble, family, distantly related to Ranavalona, the native queen just deposed by the French. Her skin was black as a minorca's wing, with a blue, almost iridescent sheen; her features were small and delicate, her body as beautiful as anything ever chiseled out of marble in the Periclean age. She had tremendous influence not only with the *Hova*, or middle-class natives, but with the *Andriana* as well; for she was reputedly a witch and priestess of 'the Fragrant One', and a word from her would bring any native, noble or commoner, from miles around crawling on his belly to lick her tiny, coal-black feet, or send him charging down upon French infantry, though he knew sure death awaited from our *chassepots* and Gatling guns.

"It was good politics to cultivate her friendship, and not

at all unpleasant, I assure you. We were married in due state, and I was formally invested with all the rights and dignities of an *Andriana* noble of the highest caste. Things went smoothly at our outpost after that; till—” he paused, and for a moment closed his eyes as though in weariness.

“Yes, *Monsieur*, and then?” de Grandin prompted as the silence lengthened.

Sorensen seemed to wake up with a start. “Then I heard how things were going over in the Caribbean, and decided to resign my commission with the French and try my luck with *Cuba Libre*,” he returned.

“Mamba didn’t make a scene. Indeed, she took it more calmly than most civilized women would have done. It had never occurred to her that our little domestic arrangement wasn’t permanent; so when I told her I’d been ordered away she merely said that she would govern in my place till my return and take good care ‘our people’ gave no trouble to the French. Then, like a fool, I told her I was through.

“For a moment she looked as though she hadn’t understood me; then, when the meaning of my words sank in, she was awful in her anger. No tears, no wailing, just a long and dreadful stare, a stare that seemed to strike right through me and to shrivel everything it touched. Finally she raised both hands above her head and called down such a curse on me as no man has had heaped upon his head since Medea called the vengeance of the gods on Jason. She finished with the prophecy:

“‘At the last you shall feel Mamba’s kiss, and your blood shall waste and dry away as the little brooks in summer, yet no man shall see you bleed; your life shall slowly ebb away as the tide ebbs from the shore, and none shall give you help; flowers shall feed upon your body while you are still alive, and the thing you most adore shall waste and wither in your sight, yet you shall have no power to stay the doom which crushes her and which shall crush you, too, when she is gone. I have said.’”

Young Doctor Traherne coughed. His manner was discreet, but none too patient, as he asked, “And you think this black woman’s curse responsible for your condition, sir?”

“I don’t know,” Sorensen answered slowly. “In China they’ve a saying that the three things which age can’t soften are a sword, a stone and the hatred of a love-crossed woman. Mamba—”

“Has probably been dead for twenty years,” Traherne supplied. “Besides, there’s half the earth between you, and—”

“Listen, son,” Sorensen broke in, “I’ve been deluding myself into thinking it was a nightmare which I suffered from — possibly the prickings of a guilty conscience — and

that my subsequent illness was merely a coincidence, but I’m far from certain, now. Here’s what happened just before we called you in:

“I’d been trap-shooting over at the Gun and Rod Club, and came home thoroughly tired out. Joyce and I had dinner early and I went off to bed almost as soon as the meal was over, falling asleep immediately. How long I slept I’ve no idea, but I remember waking with a feeling of suffocation — no pain, but utter weakness and prostration — to see something hovering above my throat and to smell a smell I hadn’t smelled in years, the hot, half-spicy, half-charnel odor of the Madagascar jungle. I can’t describe the thing that hovered over me, for the darkness of the room and its very nearness obscured my vision, but I had an unaccountable but powerful impression that it was a small, black, naked human figure, the figure of a nude black woman a scant four inches high, which poised in midair over me as a hummingbird poises above the flower from which it drains the nectar. How long I lay there in that helpless sort of lethargy I’ve no idea; but suddenly I became aware of a feeling like a pulling at my throat and Mamba’s prophecy came back to me across the years: ‘Your blood shall waste and dry up as the little brooks in summer!’

“Gentlemen, I assure you I was paralyzed. Fear held me more firmly than a chain. Move I could not, nor could I cry for help. Then I think I must have fainted, for the next thing I knew it was morning.

“Weakness almost overpowered me when I tried to rise, but finally I managed to crawl from bed and stagger over to the mirror. There was no blood on my pajamas, nor any on my flesh, but on my throat there was a little wound, no larger than a needle-jab or razor-nick would make, and—”

“Tell me, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin interrupted, “this wound of which you speak, was it singular or plural?”

“Eh? Oh, I see what you mean. It was a single little puncture, so small as to be barely noticeable, and with no area of inflammation or soreness round it. At any other time I should have failed to see it, I believe, but the vividness of my nightmare made me especially careful when I looked.”

“But this is most unusual,” the little Frenchman murmured. “Those punctures, they should be multiple.”

“What’s that?”

“Nothing of importance, I assure you. I did but indulge in a foolish habit and think with my lips rather than my brain, *Monsieur*. Please be so kind as to proceed.”

“I don’t remember a recurrence of the dream, but every morning for a week I rose from heavy sleep not only not refreshed by rest, but successively and progressively weaker. Finally we called Doctor Traherne. He’s probably outlined his treatment to you.”

“You agree I took the proper measures?” Traherne asked.

“We had this condition entirely arrested; then—”

“*Précisément*,” de Grandin nodded, “that is a most unusual feature of the case, my friend; that and the nature of Monsieur Sorensen’s wound.”

“Oh, Lord!” young Traherne scoffed. “Are you finding a connection between that accidental scratch and this inexplicable pathological condition? What possible—”

“But the wound is constant, is it not?” de Grandin insisted. “It is still there? Either it or a freshly inflicted one remains, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Ye-es,” Traherne admitted grudgingly. “But I’ve never tried to heal it. Even if it is significant, it’s nothing but a symptom, and one doesn’t bother to treat symptoms.”

De Grandin faced Sorensen. “Your niece, Mademoiselle Joyce, she displays symptoms similar to those you first exhibited?” he asked.

“Yes,” the other answered. “I’ll send for her, if you wish.” He pressed a button, and when a small, exceedingly neat and almost startlingly black servant appeared in answer to the summons, ordered: “Ask Miss Joyce to come to the library, please, Marshall.”

“Would you object to showing us your throat while we are waiting for your niece to join us?” asked de Grandin.

“Not at all,” the other answered, and undoing the collar of his soft silk shirt laid bare a strongly modeled and well-muscled neck.

The little Frenchman leant forward, scanned the patient’s sunburned skin with a keen gaze, then, drawing a small lens from his pocket, held it before his eye as he pursued the examination.

“Here, *Monsieur?*” he asked, laying the tip of a small, well-manicured forefinger on Sorensen’s neck a little to the right and above the Adam’s apple. “Is this the place you first observed the wound?”

“Yes, and that’s the spot where it reappeared when I was taken ill again,” Sorensen answered.

“H’m,” the Frenchman murmured. “It is, as you have said, a single wound striking directly into the skin, not looping through it. It might be from a razor-cut or from a variety of other reasons—”

“Yes, and it wasn’t there before my first illness; it disappeared when I recovered, and it reappeared concurrently with my second attack,” Sorensen broke in.

“Precisely, exactly; quite so,” de Grandin agreed with a quick nod. “There is some connection between the puncture and your trouble, *Monsieur*, I am convinced of it, but the explanation does not leap to the eye. We shall have to think of this. If—”

A rustle at the doorway cut his conversation short as a young girl entered. She was tall and very slender,

exceedingly fair-skinned, with a wealth of yellow hair which she wore coiled simply in a figure 8 at the nape of her neck. Her nose and mouth were small and very finely molded, and her brown eyes seemed out of all proportion to her other features, for they were almost startlingly enlarged by the deep violet semicircles which lay beneath them. She walked slowly, haltingly, as though the effort cost her almost every ounce of hoarded strength, and when she spoke her voice was low, partly from the natural softness of its timbre, but more, it seemed to me, from an extremity of fatigue.

“Will you tell Doctor de Grandin about your illness, dear?” Sorensen asked, his hard blue eyes softening with affection as he looked at her. “Doctor Traherne thinks possibly Doctor de Grandin and Doctor Trowbridge may have come across something like it in their practice.”

Joyce Sorensen shuddered as though a chilly wind had suddenly blown across her shoulders, and her thin hands clasped together in her lap in a gesture that seemed to entreat mercy from fate. “Everything, Uncle Oscar?” she asked softly.

“Of course.”

“I recall my uncle’s first attack perfectly,” she began, not looking at us, but fixing a half-vacant, half-pleading gaze upon a miniature of the Madonna which hung upon the farther wall. “He’d been out shooting that afternoon and went to bed almost immediately after dinner. I had a theater engagement, and went to the Pantoufle Dorée to dance afterward. It must have been about one o’clock, when I came home. Marshall, the butler, was in bed, of course, so I let myself in and went up to kiss Uncle Oscar good-night before going to my own room. Just as I reached his door I heard him cry out, not loudly, but terribly. It sounded something like the screaming laughs maniacs give in melodramatic motion pictures — it seemed to spout up like a dreadful geyser of insane fear, then died away to a kind of gurgling, choking murmur, like water running down a drain, or a man fighting desperately for breath.

“I tried his door and it was locked — I’m sure of that. Then in terror I ran up to Marshall’s room and beat upon his door, calling out that Uncle Oscar was dying; but he gave no answer, so I ran back to the library and snatched a sword down from the wall.” She nodded to a row of brackets where mementoes of Sorensen’s grim fighting years were displayed. “I was determined to force the lock with the blade,” she went on, “but when I reached my uncle’s room again the door was partly open!

“Uncle Oscar lay upon his bed, the covers pushed to the floor, his hands flexed and his fingers digging into the mattress. His pajama jacket was open at the throat, and on the white skin of his neck, just below the line of tan, there

was a little spot of blood, no larger than a pin-head.

"I hurried back to Marshall's room, and this time he heard me right away. Together we got my uncle back beneath the covers and made him comfortable. I spoke to him and he answered sleepily, assuring me he was all right; so I assumed he must have had a nightmare and thought no more about it. It wasn't till progressive weakness made it impossible for him to rise that we became worried and called in Doctor Traherne."

As she finished her recital de Grandin rose and leant above her. "*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*" he begged, "but have you, too, by any chance, a stubborn so small wound which gives no pain, but which will not heal? You have noted something of the kind upon your throat?"

The quick blood dyed her face and forehead faintly as she turned startled eyes upon him. "Not on my throat, sir," she answered softly, "here."

She laid her hand upon her breast above the heart.

"*Eh*, death of the devil, do you say so?" he exclaimed; then, very gently: "And may we see, *Mademoiselle*?"

There was something pleading, frightened, timidly beseeching, in the eyes that never strayed from his as she undid the fastenings of her robe and bared a bosom slim as Shakespeare's Juliet's, pointing out a tiny depression which lay against the milk-white skin an inch or so below the gentle swelling of the small and pointed breast.

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured as he finished his inspection. "Trowbridge, if you please, come here and tell me what it is you see."

He passed his glass to me and, obedient to his pointing finger, I fixed my glance upon the girl's pale skin. Piercing directly downward was a tiny punctured wound, semilunar in shape and less than an eighth of an inch in length. There was no area of inflammation round it; indeed, the lips of the small aperture seemed wholly bloodless, like those of a stab-wound inflicted on a corpse.

"There is soreness?" asked the Frenchman, gently touching the skin above the wound.

"None at all," the girl replied.

"And blood?"

"A little, sometimes. Some mornings I wake feeling really rested from my sleep. On these mornings the wound seems nearly healed. Other times I am so weak I can scarcely leave my bed, and I've noticed that at such times there is a little smear of blood — oh, not more than a single drop, and that a very small one — on my skin."

"Thank you, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin nodded absently, his lips, beneath his trimly waxed mustache, slightly pursed, as though he were about to whistle. "Tell us, if you please, have you been troubled with unpleasant dreams, like that which plagued *Monsieur* your uncle?"

"Why, no; that is, I can't remember any," she replied. "Indeed, I'm perfectly all right, except for this great weakness. Do you know what the disease is, Doctor? Doctor Traherne thinks it may be caused by some strange germ—"

"I make no doubt that he is right," the little Frenchman answered. "A most strange germ, *Mademoiselle*. A very strange germ, indeed."

"Well," Traherne asked as we left the house after bidding Sorensen and his niece good-night, "what d'ye make of it, gentlemen? Have either of you ever seen anything resembling that condition, or—"

"I have," de Grandin broke in shortly. "On several occasions I have seen such things, my friend, but never with the same accompanying circumstances. If those wounds were perforated, I should be convinced. As it is, I am in doubt, but—"

"But what?" Traherne demanded as the Frenchman failed to bring his statement to conclusion.

De Grandin's voice was flat and absolutely toneless as he answered: "*Monsieur*, if I should tell you what it is I think that lies behind this so strange business of the monkey, you would scoff. You would not believe me. Your mind, *pardieu*, is far too logical. You would say to you, '*Cordieu*, I have never seen nor heard of anything like this, therefore it cannot be.' Nevertheless, I am inclined to think the cause of Monsieur Sorensen's illness, and that of his so charming niece, strikes back directly to that night in Madagascar when he pronounced divorcement on his native wife. It is, in fine, a thing which lies below the realms of logic, therefore something to be combated by perfectly illogical counter-measures."

"Humph," Traherne grunted.

"First I advise that you secure a corps of nurses, nurses you can trust implicitly. Have one in attendance on Monsieur Sorensen and another on his niece at every moment of the day and night."

"O.K.," Traherne agreed, "I've been thinking of that. They're both too weak to be about. Bed-rest is bound to help them. What next?"

"I suggest that you secure a generous supply of *ail* — how do you say him? garlic? — *allium sativum* in the pharmacopeia — and have it liberally distributed at all entrances and exits of their rooms. See, too, that their windows are kept entirely closed, and that all animals are rigorously excluded from their presence."

Traherne, I could see, was angry, but he kept his temper in control as he demanded: "Then, I suppose, you'd like to have me burn some incense in their rooms, and maybe bring in an Indian medicine man to sing to them? Really, Doctor, you're amusing."

A smile which had no mirth in it swept across de Grandin's mobile lips. "*Monsieur*," he answered acidly, "I regret my inability to reciprocate the compliment, but I do not find you amusing. No, not at all; by no means. I find you distinctly annoying. Your mind is literal as a problem in addition. You believe in something only if you know the cause of it; you have faith in remedies only if you know their application. Smallpox, diphtheria, scarlet fever? Yes, of course, you know them. Dementia præcox, yes, you know it, too. But subtle problems of the mind — a hate, which is malign thought made crystal — hard by concentration — *morbleu*, you will have none of it! 'I have not seen it, therefore there is no such thing,' you say.

"Attend me, *mon petit bonhomme*: When every button which you wore was but a safety-pin, I was studying the occult. 'Ah,' I hear you say, 'occult — magic — balderdash!' Yes, you think I speak in terms of witches riding broomsticks, but it is not so.

"On more than one occasion I have seen men sicken and die when their symptoms were strangely similar to those of Monsieur Sorensen and Mademoiselle Joyce. Yes, by blue, I have seen them die and be buried, then rise again in dreadful life-in-death. Do not laugh, *Monsieur*; I tell you that which I have seen.

"But regard me carefully: I did not say the symptoms were the same; I said that they were similar. Those little, so small wounds the patients show, those little wounds which you think unimportant, may be the key to this whole mystery. One thing disturbs me when I think of them. They are punctured, not perforated, by which I mean they strike down in the flesh but do not wholly pierce it. They have entrances but no exits. Also their form convinces me that they were made with knives or needles or some small cutting instrument, and not by teeth, as I at first suspected—"

"Teeth!" Traherne exploded in amazement. "D'ye mean to tell me you suspected someone had bitten them?"

"Some one — or some *thing*," the Frenchman answered earnestly. "Now I think the contrary, therefore I am greatly puzzled.

"Come, my friend, when doctors quarrel patients die; let us not be stubborn. I will forego the garlic in the sickroom, for a time, at least; also I shall not insist upon their sleeping with their windows closed. Do you, for your part, seek for trusty nurses who shall watch them day and night, and we shall watch them closely, too. Do you agree?"

They shook hands upon their mutual understanding.

But the patients failed to show improvement. Sorensen seemed to grow no weaker, but his strength did not return, while within a week his niece became so utterly exhausted

that the mere performance of the vital functions seemed to put too great a tax upon her waning strength. Saline infusions, finally liberal blood transfusions, were resorted to, and while these gave her temporary help, she soon lapsed back to semi-coma.

De Grandin and Traherne were desperate. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," the Frenchman told me, "there is something evil here. We have exhausted every remedy of science. Now I am convinced our treatment must pursue another pattern. Will you watch with us tonight?"

We chose the upstairs sitting-room for our headquarters. Sorensen's room lay a dozen steps beyond it to the right, his niece's was scarcely farther at the left, and we could reach either or both in twenty seconds. We made inspections of the patients every hour, and each succeeding visit heightened our morale, for both seemed resting easily, and each time the nurses reported they had shown no sign of restlessness.

"*Mordieu*, but it would seem whatever lies behind this thing knows we are here, and holds its hand in fear," de Grandin told us as the tall clock in the lower hall struck two. "This is the time when vitality is lowest, and accordingly—"

His words were broken by a strangling, choking cry which echoed through the darkened house. "Monsieur Sorensen!" he exclaimed as, with Traherne and me at his heels, he leaped across the threshold of the sitting-room and raced the little distance to Sorensen's room.

The room, which had been dimly lighted by a night lamp, was dark as Erebus, and when we found the switch and pressed it, a sharp metallic click, but no light, followed.

"*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" de Grandin swore. "Ten thousand small blue devils! What has happened to the lights in this infernal place?"

A rasping, gurgling sound, as of water gushing down a drain, or a man fighting desperately for breath, came through the darkness from Sorensen's bed, and with a string of curses which would have shamed a stevedore, de Grandin groped his way across the room, snatched a pocket flashlight from his pocket and played its beam upon the sick man.

Sorensen lay upon his bed, his bedclothes kicked to the floor, hands clenched in a rigidity like that of death, fingers digging deep into the mattress. His pajama coat was open at the throat, and on the white skin of his neck, just below the line of tan, was a ruby disk where warm blood welled up from a tiny wound. His eyes were open, staring, wide, and on his sun-burned face was such a look of mortal terror as is seldom seen outside the fantasies of a nightmare.

"*Mademoiselle!*" de Grandin challenged sharply. "Where in blazing hell's accursed name is that *sacré garde-malade?*" His flashlight swung around, picking up successive objects in the sickroom, coming finally to rest upon the

rocking-chair where sat Sorensen's night nurse.

A chilling sense of cold, as though a freezing wind had blown upon me, made me catch my breath as the flashlight's gleam illumined her. She did not stir. She sat there rigidly, as though she had been carved out of wood. Her head was held uncomfortably downward, as though she listened to something far away; her neck was fixed and firm as though she had been in a trance. She was, to all intents, turned to stone. There was no special look upon her face, no fear, no terror; nothing that might be expected of a woman. In her plight, but she sat fixed, immovable, utterly unconscious of the world about her.

"*Mademoiselle!*" de Grandin cried again.

His hand upon her shoulder brought her back to instant consciousness, and she rose quickly, winking in the strong light of his pocket torch.

"W-why, what's happened?" she demanded.

"Happened?" Doctor Traherne almost shouted. "What's happened? Nothing, only your patient almost died while you sat dozing in your chair!"

"I haven't been asleep," the girl denied vehemently. "Marshall brought me coffee a few minutes ago, and I drank a little, but just as I put the cup down you came shouting here, and—"

"Softly, *mes amis*," de Grandin bade, holding up his hand for silence. "Do not chide her, Friend Traherne, she is not culpable. And you, *Mademoiselle*, what of the coffee which the little black one brought you? Where is it, if you please?"

"Here," she answered, pointing to a half-filled cup upon the table by her chair.

He picked the little vessel up, smelled it cautiously, then, dipping the tip of his forefinger into the brown liquid, put it to his tongue. "*Mais non*," he shook his head in disappointment; then, to the girl:

"You say the Negro butler brought you this?"

"Yes, sir; he's very thoughtful. He brings me coffee every night about this time."

"U'm, one wonders. Let us have a talk with him."

He strode across the darkened room and gave the call-bell button a sharp push.

While we waited for the servant to arrive we made a quick examination of the lights. All were in working order, but each bulb had been twisted in its socket until it just missed contact with the feed line, making the switch entirely useless. "*Parbleu*, it seems there has been business of the monkey here," de Grandin told us as he screwed the bulbs in place. "Now, if we can but—"

"You rang, sir?" asked the colored butler, appearing at the bedroom door as silently as a disembodied spirit from the mists of limbo.

"Emphatically," the Frenchman said. "You brought coffee to the nurse a little time ago?"

"Yes, sir," the black answered, and I thought I caught the sparkle of sardonic humor in his eye. "I bring coffee to both Miss Tuthill and Miss Angevine about this time each night."

"Eh, and drug it, one surmises?" snapped de Grandin.

The servant turned to the nurse, his manner a curious compound of respect and insolence. "How much coffee did you drink, Miss Tuthill?" he asked.

"Not more than half a cup," she answered.

"And is this the cup?"

"Yes."

"Ah," his impudence was superb as he reached out his hand, took up the half-filled cup and drained it at a gulp.

He looked the little Frenchman in the eye, a smile of half-concealed amusement on his face. "If the coffee is drugged, as you suspect, it surely ought to act on me — sir," he announced, just enough pause between the statement and the title of respect to give his words a tone of insolent bravado.

"Sit down, my little one," de Grandin answered with surprising calmness. "We shall see what we shall see anon." He bent above Sorensen, bandaging his wounded throat. "By the way," he flung across his shoulder casually, "you are not American, are you?"

"No, sir," said the butler.

"No? Where is it you were born, then?"

"Barbados, sir."

"U'm? Very well. I apologize if I have accused you wrongfully. That will be all, at present."

Inspection of Joyce Sorensen's room showed the girl sleeping peacefully and the nurse alertly wakeful. "Have you had your coffee yet, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin asked.

"No," Miss Angevine replied. "Marshall hasn't brought it yet. I wish he'd hurry, it helps a lot."

The little Frenchman gazed at her reflectively a moment; then: "*Mademoiselle*," he ordered, "I desire that you join Miss Tuthill in Monsieur Sorensen's room. He is decidedly unimproved, and it is best that both of you stay with him. I shall undertake to watch your patient."

"What—" I began, but his upraised hand checked my question.

"Quickly, my friend," he bade, "behind the lounge!"

"Eh? Behind—"

"Species of an artichoke, conceal yourself with speed, and if you would not die in great discomfort, be sure you make no sound or move which might betray your presence. Me, I shall be the bait, you the silent spectator." He crossed the room and rang the bell; then, as he resumed his seat beside the sick girl's bed: "Remember," he repeated, "on no account are you to move until I give the signal, no matter

how great you deem the provocation.”

“You rang, sir?” Marshall asked, appearing in the doorway with his silent, ghost-like tread.

“Yes, I should like a cup of coffee, if you please. The nurse is feeling indisposed, and I have taken her responsibility.”

Something like a gleam of triumph flickered in the little black man’s eyes, but it died as quickly as it came, and with a murmured, “Very good, sir,” he vanished in the darkness of the hall.

Five minutes later he returned with a silver tray containing coffee-pot and cup.

De Grandin rose and strode across the room, pausing beside the bed and gazing thoughtfully at the sleeping girl. His back was toward the servant; the opportunity to drug his coffee was perfect, made to order, it appeared to me.

But nothing untoward happened. The butler placed the tray upon the table, stood demurely waiting further orders, then, as de Grandin failed to turn, withdrew with his usual silent tread.

Ignoring my presence completely, the Frenchman resumed his chair, drank his coffee at a draft, and picked up a magazine.

Eight, ten, a dozen minutes passed. Nothing happened. Then suddenly the tomb-like quiet of the room was broken by a gentle guttural sound. I looked out from my ambush in fascinated horror. De Grandin’s head had fallen forward, the magazine had slipped down to the floor. He was asleep — and snoring.

About to leave my place and seize him by the shoulder, I felt, rather than heard, the butler’s quick approach, and hastily retreated to my hiding-place.

Stepping softly as a cat, the servant came into the room, bearing a tray with pot and cup exactly duplicating those which stood upon the table at de Grandin’s side. Quickly he exchanged the new utensils for the old, poured out a half-cup of fresh coffee, and arranged the things so carefully that, had I not observed the substitution, I should have been prepared to swear that the cup upon the table was the one from which de Grandin had refreshed himself.

These preliminaries finished, the fellow bent and looked into de Grandin’s face; then, satisfied the Frenchman was asleep, he turned and tiptoed to the bed where Joyce Sorenson lay. For a moment he stood looking at her and a smile of wicked malice flickered on his features.

“Broken heart for broken heart, wasted life for wasted life, tears for tears and blood for blood,” he murmured. “Thus shall Mamba be avenged.”

Drawing a short, wide-bladed knife from underneath his jacket he ripped the girl’s silk sleeping-robe from neck to hem with a single quick slash.

There was something devilish in his deftness. Bending close, he drew apart the lips of the slit robe, and gently blew upon the girl’s white body. Locked in the thrall of deep, exhaustive sleep, she flinched from the current of his breath, turning slightly from him, and as she did so he tweaked the silk robe gently, pulling an inch or so of it from underneath her. Again and again he repeated the maneuver, slowly, patiently forcing her across the bed, bit by little bit withdrawing the nightgown, till at last she had shed the garment utterly and lay there like a lovely statue hewn from ivory.

I saw a spot of bright blood form and grow as he pierced the skin below her left breast with the sharp point of his knife, and had flexed my muscles for a spring when his next move struck me stone-still, with amazement.

From beneath his jacket he drew forth something like a bundle of coarse moss, dangled it before him from a silken cord and began to swing it through the air. Faster and faster, till it whirled round his head like a wheel of light, he swung the odd-appearing thing; then, as he reduced its speed and dangled it above the blood-spot on the girl’s bared breast, I saw that closely twisted tendrils had worked open, and assumed the form of two capital Y’s joined together at the base. Leaning quickly downward he dropped the object on the red-dyed wound which jeweled the whiteness of the girl’s uncovered breast, and my eyes almost started from my head in horror as I saw the tiny thing begin to show a dreadful sort of change.

One of the branches of the lower Y had touched the drop, of ruby blood which welled up from the tiny wound he had inflicted on Joyce Sorenson, and like a blotter — or a leech — it drank the ruddy fluid up, slowly swelling, growing, taking on the form of life. Like a tiny balloon, inflated by a gentle flow of breath, the shriveled Y-bars filled out gradually, took on the form of human arms and legs; a head appeared between the outspread branches of the upper Y, and, balanced like a ballet dancer on one toe, a small, black human form pirouetted over Joyce Sorenson’s heart.

Strangely life-like, oddly human in form it was, yet with something of the plant about it, too, so that as I gazed in fascination I could not determine whether it was a minute black dwarf which resembled some obscene variety of flower, or some dreadful flower which presented an indecent parody of humanity.

The sleeping girl stirred distressfully, moaning as if in torment, and her hands twitched spasmodically. It seemed as though the dancing horror balanced over her were forcing realization of its presence down through her unconsciousness.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, take him, seize him, do not let

him pass!" With a bound de Grandin was out of his chair, every trace of sleep gone from him. He leaped across the room, hands outstretched to seize the black.

With a snarl of bestial fury the little fellow dodged, hurling himself toward the door. I squirmed from my concealment and put myself in his path. As he ran straight at me I let drive my fist, catching him squarely on the point of the jaw and knocking him backward to de Grandin's waiting arms.

"*Bête, chien, chameau!*" the Frenchman whispered fiercely as he seized the undersized man's elbows in an iron grip and forced them to his sides. He slipped his hands down the butler's forearms, gripped him by the wrists and bent his arms upward in a double hammerlock. "Thou species of a spider, thou ninety-nine-times-damned example of a dead and rotten fish, take that flower of hell from *Mademoiselle*, and see that not a root is left to fester in her wound!" he ordered.

The little black man snarled like a trapped cat. "You think that you can make me?" he demanded. "Kill me, French oppressor, cut me in pieces, break my arms and drag my heart from out my breast, but you cannot save the woman. Tomorrow they will find her as she lies, unclothed for all to look on, bloodless and breathless—"

De Grandin bent the speaker's twisted arms a half-inch nearer to his shoulders. "You think so?" he demanded. "*Par les plumes d'un coq*, we shall see if you are right!"

Tiny goutts of perspiration glistened on the little black man's forehead, his mouth drew taut with agony and his eyes thrust forward in their sockets like a frog's as de Grandin slowly tightened his torturing grip upon his arms. Step by step he forced his prisoner toward the bed, hissing epithets in mingled French and English in his ear.

As they reached the couch where Joyce Sorensen lay, the captive dropped upon his knees with a short gasp of anguish.

"Let me go," he begged. "Let me go, you French beast. I'll take the flower off of her."

De Grandin eased his grip upon one arm. "Do it with one hand," he ordered.

"I need both."

The Frenchman twisted the bent arms again and the butler crumpled to the floor unconscious.

"Water, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "I am too fully occupied to get it."

I snatched a carafe from the table and dashed a glassful of chilled water in the prisoner's face.

"And now, my little truant out of hell," de Grandin whispered softly as the captive winced beneath the shock of the cold liquid and his eyelids fluttered upward, "you will please remove that thirty-thousand-times-accursed thing

from *Mademoiselle*, or I shall surely twist your arms from off your body and thrust them piecemeal down your throat!" Once again he bent his prisoner's arms until I thought that he would surely crack the bones.

One wrist freed, the black man reached out, seized the gyrating black thing and lifted it carefully from the wound in Joyce Sorensen's breast. Like a blow up bladder punctured with a pin, the infernal thing began to wilt immediately. In thirty seconds it had shrunk to half its former size; before a minute passed it had shriveled in upon itself, and was nothing but a ball of moss-like fiber from the fraying ends of which there dripped small drops of ruddy moisture.

"*Bien*," announced de Grandin as he eased his hold upon his prize. "Trowbridge, my friend, go and bid the nurse return, if you will be so kind. Me, I have a few important questions I would ask of this one — and I think I shall elicit better answers if I ask them in the privacy of the garage. I shall rejoin you soon."

"*Hola, mes enfants!*" smiling in complete self-approval, Jules de Grandin joined us in Sorensen's upstairs sitting-room. "The germ which caused this new disease our colleague Traherne found has been isolated. *Morbleu*, he is completely isolated in the *poste de police* — unless they put him in restraint in the hospital. I fear I was a trifle rough with him before his story was completed.

"Then it was a germ disease—" Traherne began, but de Grandin interrupted with a laugh.

"*Mais oui, mon brave*," he chuckled. "A small and wholly vicious germ which traveled on two legs, and bore with him the strangest orchid any botanist could dream of. Attend me, if you please:

"When Monsieur Sorensen told us of his Madagascar interlude, I thought I smelled the odor of the rat. Madagascar, *mon Dieu*, what a place! A land of mystery more terrible than Africa, more subtle than China, more vengeful than India! When our forces overthrew the native government there in 1896 they incurred the never-dying hatred of the *Andriana*, or Malagasy nobility, and that hatred still crops up in strange and inexplicable murders of the French officials.

"You will recall Monsieur Sorensen referred to his native wife as Mamba, and called her a priestess of 'the Fragrant One'? Very good. Mamba, my friends, is a native term for a terrible, strange black orchid said to infest the jungles of inland Madagascar. It is supposed to be a kind of vampire plant, or vegetable leech, and if it be placed upon an open wound it blossoms in the likeness of a human figure and nourishes itself upon the blood of its unfortunate host till he or she is dead. According to the stories I was told in

Madagascar, the habitat of this strange plant is strictly guarded by the priesthood which serves 'the Fragrant One,' which is the native name for the more or less mythical man-eating tree of which such dreadful tales are told.

"Very well. What had we before us? A man who had incurred the hatred of a native noblewoman who was also a priestess of a dark, malevolent religion, a noted sorceress, a woman whose very name was identical with that of a strange and dreadful kind of parasitic plant. This man lived beneath a curse pronounced upon him by this woman, and in the curse she foretold that he should be stricken with a malady which should cause his blood to waste away like little brooks in summer. Also that before he died he should see the one whom he loved most slowly wilt away and die.

"And what else did we see? This man was wasting steadily away; his niece, the apple of his eye, was also sinking rapidly. Was it not apparent that the curse had found him out? It seemed entirely possible.

"But, if it were a curse which worked by magic, why had he grown better when you sent him off upon a cruise? And why did his malady return when he came home? Apparently, there was some connection between his house and his disease. What was this link? Ah, that was for me to find out.

"I have seen men die when stricken by a vampire — do not laugh, Monsieur Traherne, I tell you it is so! — but the vampire bites his victim on the throat; Monsieur Sorensen's wound was from a knife or pin, not from a tooth, and a similar wound was on his niece's breast.

"I looked around, I noticed things; it is a habit which I have.

"I saw this colored butler, Marshall. This Marshall is a black man, but he is not a Negro. Neither are the Malagasy. When they are pure-bloods, unmixed with Malay or Chinese or Hindoo stock, their skin is black, but their features are small and straight and fine-cut, without a negroid trace, their hair straight and uncurled, their bodies firmly made, but small.

"Again, this Marshall, as he called himself, spoke with an English accent. I knew he was not reared in this country, but when he said he was from Barbados I also knew he lied. Negroes from Jamaica speak like Englishmen; those from Barbados, for some strange reason, speak with a strong Irish brogue. 'There is the smell of fish upon this business, Jules de Grandin,' I inform me.

"Tonight we find Miss Tuthill drugged; it is apparent, yet the butler offers a good alibi. I will test him further,' I decide, and so I send the other nurse away, ask him for coffee and pretend to fall into a drug-caused sleep. He rises to the bait. *Mon Dieu*, he rises nobly! He—"

"How did you manage to shake off the effects of the drug so quickly?" I interposed. "The nurse was absolutely paralyzed, yet you—"

"*Tiens*," he broke in with a laugh, "those who would make the fool of Jules de Grandin need to rise early in the day, my friend. Did you think I drank that coffee? *Quelle naiveté! Pah. Regardez!*"

From his pocket he drew out a handkerchief, soaking with brown stickiness.

"When one knows how, the trick is simple," he assured us. "*Le mouchoir*, I stuff him in my collar underneath my chin while my back is turned to Marshall, then *pouf!* I pour the coffee into him when I pretend to drink. *Ah bah*, it is hot, it is sticky, it is most damnably uncomfortable, but it leaves me in possession of my faculties. Yes, certainly; of course.

"Then, while he thinks I am asleep he does the thing he has done many times before, but tonight would have been the curtain for Mademoiselle Joyce. He was prepared to break Monsieur Sorensen's heart by killing his niece before administering the *coup de grâce* to him.

"*Ha*, but I slept the sleep of the pussy-cat, me! When my small, black mouse was too far from his hole to make retreat I pounced upon him with the help of good friend Trowbridge, and thereafter he had many troubles.

"It took persuasion to make him tell his story, but he finally told it, though he finished with a broken arm. He was a nephew of this Mamba, this sorceress, this priestess of 'the Fragrant One,' this orchid-woman who had put a curse on Monsieur Sorensen. Through the years he watched his opportunity, finally coming to this country, taking service with Sorensen, gaining his full confidence, waiting for his chance to plant the strange, black orchid on his throat.

"'You shall feel the kiss of Mamba,' said the Malagasy woman, and it was in truth the kiss of Mamba — Mamba the black orchid, not Mamba the black woman — which had drained him of his blood and almost caused his death when you called us in the case, Monsieur Traherne."

"Where's that black orchid now?" asked Traherne.

"It was not safe to have around. I threw it in the furnace — *morbleu*, it writhed and twisted like a tortured living thing when the flames devoured it!" answered Jules de Grandin with a grimace. "The memory of it nauseates me. Await me here, my friends, I go for medicine."

"I've some tablets in my bag—" Traherne began, but de Grandin made a gesture of dissent.

"Not that, *mon brave*," he interrupted. "The medicine I seek is in a bottle on the sideboard down below. It bears the name of Messieurs Haig & Haig."

The Dead-Alive Mummy

SHE came walking slowly toward us past the rows of mummy-cases. Not tall, but very slim she was, sheathed in a low-cut evening gown of midnight velvet which set her creamy shoulders off in sharp relief. Her hair, blue-black and glossy, was stretched without a ripple to a knot behind her neck, and contrasted oddly with her eyes of peacock blue. There was contrast, too, between the small and slightly kestrel nose and the full and sensuous mouth which blossomed moist and brilliant-red against the unrouged pallor of her narrow face. One slender-fingered hand was toying with a rope of pearls, and as she stepped there was a glint of golden links beneath the gossamer silk encasing her left ankle. Clouded, but unconcealed, the jewel-red lacquer on her toenails shone through filmy stocking-tips exposed by toeless satin sandals.

"*Mon Dieu*, but she is vital as a flame!" de Grandin whispered. "Who is she, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Dolores Mendoza," I answered, "the sister of the man who gave this collection of Egyptiana to the Harkness Museum. Old Aaron Mendoza, her father, was fanatical about ancient Egypt, and was said to have the third finest collection in the world, ranking next after the British Museum and the *Musée des Antiques* at Cairo."

The little Frenchman nodded. "So we are here," he murmured.

We were, as he had said, there for that very reason.

Aaron Mendoza, son and grandson of our city's foremost merchants, had retired from commercial life at the relatively early age of sixty, turning active management of the Mendoza Department Store over to his son Carlos and devoting himself to Egyptology with an energy amounting to a passion. Honest in all his mercantile transactions with the rigid honesty of a Portuguese-Jewish family which traced its history unbroken past the days of the Crusades, he had not scrupled to resort to any practice which would further his ambition to acquire the finest private Egyptological collection in the world. Men noted for their learning, daring and "resourcefulness" had named what fees they wanted for their services to him, and one by one they brought to him the spoils of Egypt's sands and pyramids and hidden rock-tombs — bits of art-craft wrought in gold and silver, lapis-lazuli and celadon, things whose valuations sounded like the figures of a nation's load of debt, papyri setting forth in picture-writing secrets never dreamt by modern man, desiccated bodies of kings and priests and priestesses whose intrigues shaped the destiny of nations in

the days when history was an infant in its swaddling bands.

One morning they found Aaron sitting on his bed, a vacuous grin disfiguring his handsome face, both feet thrust into one trouser-leg. He babbled like a baby when they spoke to him, and smiled at me with child-like glee when I tried to ask him how he felt. His strong, fine brain had softened to a mass of cheesy waste while he was sleeping, and within a week the helplessness of paresis had settled on him. In six months he was dead.

Scarcely had the period of formal mourning ended when Carlos Mendoza announced the gift of all his father's ancient treasures to the Harkness Museum. With antiques went a sum to build a wing for housing them and a fund for their maintenance. This evening the new wing was opened with due ceremony, and the city's notables were gathered for the rites of dedication. Somehow — possibly because I had brought him and his sister into the world and steered them through the mumps and chicken-pox and other childish ills — Carlos had included me and de Grandin in the list of guests invited, and we had traversed miles of marbled corridors, viewing the exhibits with that awe which modern man displays before the relics of the older days. Tired of the flower-scent and chatter and repeated "ohs" and "ahs" of those assembled in the main hall, we had retired to the Gallery of Mummies for a moment's respite, and stood beside the bronze-barred window at its farther end as Dolores entered.

"Would you like to meet her?" I asked as the Frenchman's interested gaze stayed fixed upon the girl.

"*Corbleu*, does the heliotrope desire to face the sun?" he answered. "Yes, my friend, present me, if you will, and I shall call you blessed.

"*Enchanté, Mademoiselle*," he assured her as he raised her fingers to his lips. "You are like a breath of life among these relics of mortality; a star which is reflected in the black tides of the Styx."

The girl looked round her with a little shudder of repulsion.

"I hate these ancient things," she told us. "Carlos wasn't sure he wanted to part with them after Father spent so many years collecting them, but I urged him to present them to the museum. I hope I never have to look at them again. The jewels are ghastly — cold and dead as the people who once wore them, and the mummies—" She paused and looked distastefully at the upright mummy which faced us through the screen of dust-proof glass.

“*Mummy and Coffin of Sit-ankh-hku, Priestess of Isis, from Hierakonpolis. Period XIXth Dynasty (circa. 1,200 B.C.)*” she read aloud from the neatly lettered card. “Can you fancy living in the house with things like that? She might have been a girl about my age, judging by the portrait on the coffin top. Every time I looked at her it was as though I looked at my own body lying in that coffin.”

The mummy and its case were usual types. In the open casket stood the mummy, barely five feet tall, swathed in closely wrapped brown cerecloth, banded latitudinally and diagonally with retaining bandages, the head a mere conical hooded protuberance above the slanting shoulders, no trace of arms apparent, feet shown merely as a horizontal shelf beneath the upright body. On the lid, which stood beside the coffin proper, had been carved a face to represent the dead. The features were small, patrician, delicately hawk-nosed and full-lipped, with narrow brows of vivid black arched over eyes of peacock blue. The ancient artist had worked well. Here was no mere mortuary portrait, typical of race and era, but lacking personality. It was, I felt on looking at it, a faithful likeness of the girl who died three thousand years ago, personalized and individual.

De Grandin studied it a moment, then: “One understands, *Mademoiselle*,” he told her. “When one looks at that face it takes small imagination to conceive that it resembles you. She had rare beauty, that old one, just as you — *sapristi*, what is it, *Mademoiselle*?”

Dolores stood before the mummy-case, staring at the painted face with a set, unwinking gaze. Her countenance was mask-like, almost totally expressionless; yet something that was lurking terror lay within her eyes, rendering them glassy, shallow. It was as if a curtain had been drawn across them from within, hiding anything that might be seen by one who looked in them and leaving only a suggestion of sheer fright and horror printed on the retina.

“*Mademoiselle Dolores!*” he repeated sharply. “What is it?” Then, as she swayed unsteadily, “Catch her, my friend,” he ordered. “She swoons!”

Even as he cried his warning the girl oscillated dizzily, with a sort of circular motion, as though her feet were fast-pivoted upon the floor, then pitched forward toward the glass-framed mummy-case, and as she toppled forward her eyes were wide and staring, fixed in fascination on the painted face upon the coffin lid. My arm went round her as she swayed, and a gasp of wonder choked my words of sympathy unuttered. From sandal-sole to head she was rigid as a frozen thing; taut, hard, unyielding as a hypnotist’s assistant in a trance.

The rigor that affected her was such that we carried her across the room as though she had lain on a litter.

“What in heaven’s name is it?” I demanded as we laid her on a Theban couch of sycamore and ivory. We could not chafe her hands, for they were set so firmly that they might have been carved wood, and when I placed my hand upon her breast to feel her heart, the flesh beneath her velvet corsage met my touch unyieldingly. It might have been a lovely waxen tailor’s dummy over which we leant rather than the vibrant girl to whom we talked a moment since.

“Perhaps I’d better get some water,” I suggested, but de Grandin stayed me with a gesture.

“*Non*,” he advised. “Stay here and watch with me, my friend. This is — *s’s’sh*, she is recovering!”

The set and horrified expression in Dolores’ eyes was giving way, and in its stead we saw what seemed to be a look of recognition, like that of one who comes upon an old and long-forgotten scene, and fails at first to place it in his memory. The rigid, hard lines faded from her cheeks and jaw, and her slender bosom fluttered with a gasp of inspiration as her lips fell open and a little sigh escaped them. The words she used I could not understand, for they were spoken in a mumbling undertone, strung together closely, like an invocation hurriedly pronounced, but it seemed to me they had a harsh and guttural sound, as though containing many consonants, unlike any tongue with which I was familiar.

She sang softly, in an eery, rising cadence, with a sharply accented note at the end of every measure, over and over the same meaningless jargon, a weird, uncanny tune, vaguely like a Gregorian chant. One single sound I recognized — or thought I did — though whether it really were a word or whether my mind broke its syllables apart and fitted them to the sound of a more or less familiar name I could not tell; but it seemed to me that constantly recurring through the rapid flow of mumbled invocation was a sibilant disyllable, much like our letter *S* said twice in quick succession.

“What’s she trying to say — ‘Isis’?” I asked, raising my eyes from her fluttering lips.

De Grandin was watching her intently, with that fixed, unwinking stare which I had seen him hold for minutes at a time when we were in the amphitheater of a hospital and a work of unique surgery was in progress. He waved an irritated hand at me, but neither spoke nor shifted the intentness of his gaze.

The flow of senseless words grew slower, thinner, as though the force of breath behind the red and twitching lips were lessening. “*Ah mon ... sss-sss ... se-rhus*—” came the softly whispered slurring syllables; then, as the faint voice ceased entirely, a gleam of consciousness came into Dolores’ eyes, and she looked from Jules de Grandin to me with a puzzled frown. “Oh, did I faint?” she asked apologetically. “It was so terribly hot in there” — she gestured toward the crowded auditorium — “I thought it

would be better here, but I suppose—” She raised her shoulders in the faint suggestion of a shrug, leaving her explanation uncompleted. Then, composedly, she swung her feet to the floor and placed her hand upon my arm.

“Will you take me to the coat room and call my car, please, Doctor?” she requested. “I think I’m about done in. Better be getting home before I have another fainting-fit.”

“That was one of the most remarkable exhibitions of autosuggestion I’ve ever seen,” I declared as we drove home.

“U’m?” said Jules de Grandin.

“It was,” I answered firmly. “I’ll admit it was uncanny as the devil, but the explanation’s logical enough. That poor child had developed such a detestation of those mummies that it amounted almost to an obsession. Tonight, while she was staring at the face upon that coffin top — you’ll recall she said it looked like her? — she suddenly went rigid as a mummy herself. Hypnosis induced by a carefully self-built-up train of thought identifying herself with the mummy of that priestess, then the fatigue of the reception, finally the ideal combination of the polished glass case reflecting a bright light and the face upon the coffin lid to focus her gaze. And, did you notice, she even mumbled some sort of gibberish while she was unconscious? Absolute identification with the character of the priestess. I don’t think Carlos got those mummies out of his house one day too soon for his sister’s mental health.”

“I agree,” de Grandin answered heartily. “Perhaps he did not move as quickly as he should. Her case will bear our observation, I believe.”

“Oh, then you don’t agree with my theory of autosuggestion and self-hypnosis?”

“*Eh bien*, they are queer things, these minds of ours,” he returned evasively. “Hypnotism, what is it? No one rightly knows. Is it the ‘animal magnetism’ of Mesmer, or the substitution of the operator’s mind for that of his subject, or, as some have hinted, the domination of one soul and spirit by another? Me, I do not know; neither do you. But he who plays with it toys with something perilously akin to magic — not always good magic, by the way, my friend.”

He paused a moment, drumming on the silver knob of his ebony opera stick with restless fingers; then, abruptly: “Do me a favor, my friend,” he begged. “Arrange that we may continue our acquaintance with Monsieur Mendoza and his so charming sister. I would observe her further, if such a thing is possible. I do not like the prospect of the future for that little lovely one.”

Mendoza’s dinner was perfection; oysters with champagne *brut*, dry sherry with the turtle soup, pheasant with

ripe Conti, Madeira with dessert and ’47 cognac with the coffee. De Grandin had been gay throughout the meal brimming with high spirits, recounting anecdote on anecdote of humorous adventure in the tropics, in the war, of student days in Paris and Vienna. When books were mentioned he was equally at home in French and English literature discussing Villon, Huysmans, Verlaine, Lamartine and Francis Thompson with impartial intimacy.

Another guest was with us, a Doktorprofessor Grafensburg whose huge square head topped with close-cut, bristling hair, square spectacles and sweeping handle-bar mustache, no less than his ponderous manner and poorly fitting dinner clothes, labeled him unmistakably a scientist of the Viennese school. He seemed quite lost among the small talk of the table, and occasionally when de Grandin let fly a particularly witty sally he would look up helplessly, as though he sought to mark the flight of some swift-moving insect through the air. Now, cigar between the pudgy fingers of one hand, liqueur glass grasped firmly in the other, he sat foursquare before the fire of blazing apple logs and looked at Mendoza with something like pathetic appeal in his protuberant blue eyes.

“Doktor Grafensburg has consented to go over some of my — some of the mummies in the Harkness Museum,” Carlos volunteered with a smile at the big Austrian. “Many of them have never been properly classified, and there’s a mass of data to be translated and catalogued.”

“*Ach*, yes,” replied the savant, his infantile eyes beaming at this chance to take the center of the stage, “there are some most unusual things which your father’s curators had completely overlooked, Herr Carlos. That little, small one, for example, the one they call the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, she had never even been unwrapped, yet in her bandages I found a something truly startling.”

“Ah?” breathed Jules de Grandin softly, as a momentary glitter shone in his small blue eyes. “What, by example, *Herr Doktor*?”

Grafensburg rose ponderously and stood before the Frenchman, legs apart, great head thrust forward between his bulging shoulders. “You are, perhaps, familiar with Egyptian beliefs?” he asked challengingly.

“I would not presume to discuss them with the *Herr Doktorprofessor* Grafensburg,” replied the Frenchman diplomatically. “Would you not be kind enough to tell us—”

“*Ja wohl*,” the Austrian broke in discourteously. “They had no idea of the things we know today, those ancient ones. They thought the arteries were full of air, the seat of the emotions was the heart, that anger generated in the spleen, *nicht wahr*?”

“So we have been told,” de Grandin nodded.

“I tell you the same, also,” rumbled Grafensburg. “Also

I tell you that they had partly grasped the truth when they said that reason resided in the brain. Now, in the wrappings of this Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, I found the customary mortuary tablet, the golden plate on which her name and titles were engraved, with the usual pious invocation to the gods, and the pious hope of final resurrection in the flesh, only it was different. You know the reason for the mummification of Egyptian dead, yes? They believed that when three thousand years had passed the soul returned to claim its body, and without a habitation of the flesh would have nowhere to go. It would have to wander bodiless and nameless in Amenti, the realm of the damned. As the little lady lived about the time of the Oppression, she should now be ready for reanimation—”

“Perfectly, *Herr Doktor*,” de Grandin nodded, “one understands, but—”

“*Ha*, little man, but you do not understand!” the Austrian thrust his cigar forward as though it had been a weapon. “Usually the tablets prayed the gods to guide the *ka*, or vital principle, back to the waiting body. This one does nothing of the kind. It asserts — asserts, if you please, asserts with positiveness — that Sit-ankh-hku will rise again with the help of one who lives, and by the power of the brain. That is most unusual; it is extraordinary. Never before in the annals of all Egyptology have we found an instance where the deceased will rise otherwise than by the help of the gods. This one will rise by the assistance of a man who lives, or perhaps of a woman, the text is not quite clear. But rise she will, by human assistance and by strength of brain. *Donnerwetter*, it is droll, *nicht wahr*? She will reanimate herself by the power of her brain, and that brain was flung into the Nile three thousand years ago, together with her blood!” he finished with a rumbling laugh.

“I do not think that it is droll, *Herr Doktor*,” de Grandin answered in a level voice. “I rather think that it is devilish. That statement which you read may go far to explain what — *grand Dieu*, look to Mademoiselle Dolores, Friend Trowbridge!”

At his shouted warning I wheeled round. Dolores stood beside the grand piano, a straight, slim silhouette in lettuce green, pearl-pale and rigid as an image. Even as I leaped to aid her the thought flashed through my mind that she was like a gallant little tree whose roots were severed by the woodsman’s ax. She swayed uncertainly a moment, then leant from the perpendicular like a toppling tower. Had I not seized her in my arms she would have fallen flat upon her face, for every nerve and muscle of her slender body had been petrified in the same awful way as on that night at the museum, and as my hands closed round her I was shaken by a feeling of repulsion at the hardness of her flesh.

“Dolores dear, what is it?” Carlos cried as he placed his

sister on a sofa.

“Is — is it epilepsy?” he asked fearfully, as he saw the girl’s pale skin and set and staring eyes.

De Grandin’s face was almost totally expressionless, but anger-lightning flashed in his small eyes as he responded tonelessly: “Monsieur Mendoza, one cannot be quite sure, but I think she is suffering from an attack of the *Herr Doktor*’s cursed *drôlerie*.”

Treatment was futile. All night Dolores lay as rigid as if petrified. As though she had been dead, her temperature was exactly that of the surrounding atmosphere, the uncanny hardness of the flesh persisted, and she was unresponsive to all stimuli, save that the pupils of her set and staring eyes showed a slight contraction when we flashed a light in them. There was practically no pulse perceptible, and when we drove a hypodermic needle in her arm to administer a dose of strychnine there was no reflex flinching of the skin, and the impression we had was more like that of thrusting a pin through some tough ceraceous substance than through yielding flesh. As far as we could see, every vital function was suspended. Yet she was not dead. Of that much we were certain.

Toward morning the dreadful stiffness, so like rigor-mortis, passed, and as at the museum, she began to hum a chant, a weird and oddly accented tune composed of four soft minor notes. This time enunciation seemed more perfect, and we could recognize a phrase which constantly recurred throughout the chant like an imperative refrain repeated endlessly: “*O Sit-ankh-hku, nehes — O Sit-ankh-hku, nehes!*”

“*Morbleu!*” exclaimed de Grandin as a light of recognition flashed in his eyes. “*Par la barbe d’un bouc vert*, do you apprehend the burden of her song, Friend Trowbridge?”

“Of course not,” I replied. “This gibberish hasn’t any meaning, has it?”

“Has it not, *ha?*” he shot back. “Me, I shall say it has. It is the tongue of ancient Egypt that she chants, my friend, and that phrase she constantly repeats means: ‘*Awake, O Sit-ankh-hku; O Sitankh-hku, awake!*’”

“Good Lord, identification with that devilish mummy again!” I exclaimed. “Confound that Grafensburg and his childish talk about the thing, he—”

“He is a species of a camel,” cut in Jules de Grandin. “May the fires of hell consume him living — he called me ‘little man’!”

Despite our every effort, Dolores failed to show improvement. Cold compresses on the head, caustics on brow and neck, and repeated stimulants alike seemed powerless to rouse her from her lethargy. Occasionally the

delirium in which she chanted thick-tongued invocations lightened the profound coma of absolute unconsciousness; but these spells came unbidden and unheralded, and we were powerless to lift her into consciousness or strike the slightest note of response from her, however much we tried.

“*Dieu de Dieu!*” de Grandin swore when three days of unavailing work had brought us close to nervous breakdown; “me, I am slowly going crazy. This *sacré* coma which has taken hold on her, I do not like it.”

“D’ye think there’s any chance of her recovering?” I asked, more for the sake of making conversation than from any hope of favorable response.

“*Tiens; le bon Dieu* and the devil know, not I,” he answered somberly, his speculative gaze upon the patient. For a space of several minutes he continued his inspection, then plucked me by the sleeve. “Do you observe it, *mon ami?*” he asked.

“Eh?”

“Her face, her hands — the whole of her?”

“I don’t think—” I began, but:

“Look at her carefully,” he ordered. “We have forced the vital functions artificially. Elimination we have had, and nourishment by forcible feeding; moreover, she has lain this way for a scant three days, but observe her if you will. Is she not more than normally emaciated?”

He was right. While some loss of weight was normally to have been expected, emaciation had progressed far past the normal point. The subcutaneous tissue seemed to have dissolved, leaving little more than unfilled skin upon the staring bones. Paper-thin, her cheeks seemed plastered to the jaw-joints of her skull, lips thin as tight-stretched parchment showed the outlines of her teeth, and her very eyeballs seemed deflated, so that the eyes were merely empty pits in a cadaverous face. Wrist processes and radii showed almost as plainly through the drum-tight skin of forearms as though they had no covering at all.

“Good heavens, yes, you’re right,” I told de Grandin. “Why, she’s desiccated as a mummy!”

“*Tu parles, mon vieux,*” he responded grimly. “Like a mummy — yes, by blue, you have put your finger on the word! Come.”

“Come?” I echoed. “What d’ye mean? Surely, you’ll not leave her—”

“But yes, of course,” he interrupted. “The *garde-malade* can watch by her. She can at least report her death, which is all that we could do if we remained. Meanwhile, there is a chance ... yes, my friend, I think there is a little so small chance....”

“To the Harkness Museum,” he ordered the taxi driver, “and hurry, if you please. There is five dollars extra for you

if you get us there within ten minutes.”

“I’m afraid Doctor Grafensburg can’t see you now, sir,” said the attendant when de Grandin panted his demand that we be taken to the Austrian at once. “He’s very busy in his office, and left strict orders—”

“*Ah bah,*” the little Frenchman cut in. “You tell me *that* when we are come upon an errand that may mean the saving of a life? Where is this pig-dog’s utterly, unmentionable office? Me, I will go to him without announcement. Only show us where he hibernates, my friend, and I shall take the full responsibility for disturbing him. Yes, certainly; of course.”

“*Kreuzsakrament!* Did I not strict orders leave that I should not be bothered?” Doktor Grafensburg’s big face turned toward us with a snarl of almost bestial fury as we wrenched aside his office door and hastened toward him. He was gowned in linen, as for an autopsy, and glared at us across a porcelain operating-table on which there lay a partly unbandaged mummy. A shiver of repulsion ran through me. With his great head hunched forward, mouth disfigured by the stream of curses which he hurled at us, he reminded me of some foul ghoul disturbed at its repast. The furious scowl lightened somewhat as he recognized us, but his effort at cordiality was plainly forced as he drew a sheet across the mummy on the table and came forward.

“So? Is it you, little man?” he asked with ponderous jocularity. “I had thought that you were busy taking temperatures and mixing pills!”

“*Sale bête!*” de Grandin murmured underneath his breath; then, aloud:

“We have just come from Mademoiselle Mendoza’s sickroom,” he explained. “Something has happened which has made our presence here imperative. Is it the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku. you are working on, *Herr Doktor?*”

Grafensburg glared at him suspiciously. “And if it is?” he countered.

“*Précisément,* if it is, we should greatly like to see what you have found, if anything. Her physical condition, the extent of preservation of her body, is of great importance to us. May we inspect it?”

“*Nein!*” the other spread his arms in a protective gesture, as though de Grandin made a threat against the mummy on the table. “She is mine, and only I may look at her. When I have my investigation made and my notes arranged, you may read what I have found; meantime—”

There was the menace of cold hatred in de Grandin’s voice as he cut in — “Meantime, *mon cher collègue,* you will kindly stand aside and let me look at that ten-thousand-times-accursed mummy, or I shall give myself the great felicity of sending your fat soul to hell.” From his shoulder

holster he snatched out a pistol and aimed it steadily at the Austrian's protruding paunch.

"*Allez — en avant,*" he ordered as the other stared at him with dilated eyes. "I do not feel inclined to argue with you, my pig-ugly one."

Muttering thick-throated curses, Grafensburg gave ground, and de Grandin reached his free hand toward the sheet, twitching it from the half-stripped mummy on the operating-table.

"Ah?" he breathed as the cotton covering came fluttering off. "Ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?"

I stared in blank amazement.

The form upon the table was no mummy. Denuded of their centuries-old bandages, the head and shoulders were exposed, and from the face Herr Grafensburg had lifted the gold mummy-mask. A pale, exquisite countenance looked up at us, clear-cut as cameo. The brow was low and broad, framed in a mass of fine, dark hair bound round the temples with a diadem of woven silver set with lapis-lazuli. The nose was small and delicately aquiline, the mouth a trifle wide and rather thin-lipped, a wilful, proud and somewhat cruel mouth, I thought. Long, curling lashes rested on the youthful, rounded cheeks. Bare, creamy shoulders gleamed beneath the little pointed chin, and from the torn and powdered wrappings, still crossed on the breast, a pair of slender, red-tipped hands peeped out like fragile lilies blooming in corruption. I gazed upon the lovely face in awed amazement, realizing that these silk-fringed eyes had looked upon the world three thousand years ago. How many men had lived and died since those pale lips had drawn the breath of life and those closed eyes had looked upon the sun-gilt, star-jeweled skies of ancient Egypt!

De Grandin drew his breath in with a sort of whistling gasp. "*Mon Dieu,*" he whispered softly, "cannot you see it, good Friend Trowbridge? Does not the likeness strike you?"

"Yes - yes!" I breathed. "You're right; she does resemble poor Dolores. One could swear that they are sisters, though they lived three thousand years apart."

"*Himmelskreuzsakrament!*" raged Doktor Grafensburg. "You come in here, you crazy, brainless *schmetterling*, and point pistols at me; you interrupt me at my work, you take from me my beautiful, incomparable one, and—"

"Calm yourself, *mon collègue,*" broke in Jules de Grandin with a smile. "We would not for the world disturb you at your work, but we desire certain information which only you can give. This is truly an amazing piece of body preservation. I have seen many mummies in my time, but never one like this. Tell me, if you will; have you some theory of the method they employed to keep her as we see her now?"

The Austrian's pale eyes blazed with enthusiasm.

"*Nein, nein,*" he answered huskily. "I was unwrapping

her when you came in. I was about to make a set of careful measurements and note them down; then I would make an autopsy to find how they performed the work to her preserve this way. By heaven, it is a marvel! It is something never seen before. *Herr Gott*, it is—"

"One agrees entirely," de Grandin nodded, "but—"

"*Nein, lieber Gott* — you do not understand!" the Austrian cut in. "You have seen mummies, *ja?* You know they are deprived of moisture-content, left with nothing but the husk of bone and tissue, *ja?* But — *Donnerwetter!* — did you ever see a mummy which could take up moisture from the air and resume the look of life it had before the old embalmers pickled it, *hein?*"

The little Frenchman's small blue eyes were dancing with excitement, his tightly waxed wheat-blond mustache seemed fairly quivering as he faced the fleshy Austrian. "*Herr Doktor,*" he asked half tremulously, "do you tell me that this mummy-thing has seemed revived—"

"*Sehr wohl,*" the Austrian broke in, "have I not told you so? When first I took that mummy from its case it was a mummy, nothing more. All moisture had been from it dried; it weighed not more than thirty pounds. I the outer layer of bindings stripped away, then stopped to read and translate the inscription on the pectoral tablet. Three days it lay here partially unwrapped. Today — *Herr Gott!* — I start to take the other bindings off, and what do I discover? Not the mummy I had left three days before, but the lovely, life-like body of a lovely woman! *Herr Gott*, she has begun to blossom like a flower in the moisture of the air! She enchants me; I love her as I never loved a woman in my life; I can scarcely wait to cut her open!"

De Grandin looked at Grafensburg a moment; then: "*Meinherr,*" he asked, "does human life mean anything to you?"

The big man stared at him as though he had been something he had never seen before, then raised his shoulders in a ponderous shrug.

"If it does," resumed the Frenchman, "you have now the chance to aid us. This body, this lovely, evil thing must be destroyed, and quickly. Believe me, life depends on it."

"*Nein!*" cried the other in a voice gone thin with sudden panic. "I cannot have it so. Not for a hundred human lives shall you lay hands upon my *liebes liebchen* till I have the autopsy performed on her. Men have died and worms have eaten them ten thousand thousand times since the embalmers of old Egypt finished with their labors on this body. Men will die until the end of time, but here we have a miracle of science. What is one paltry life compared with the disclosures an autopsy on this body will give us? Bah, you little pill-peddler, you tinkerer of broken bones, you set your stupid trade above the cause of science? You would hold the

clock-hands back that you might spare some little, worthless life a few years longer? By heaven! I say you shall not touch this body with your little finger! Out, out of my cabinet, out, before I throw you!” Pop-eyes blazing, heavy lips drawn backward in a snarl, he advanced on Jules de Grandin, heedless of the latter’s pistol as though it had been but a pointed finger.

“*Halte la!*” de Grandin cried. “I will make the bargain with you. Bring this body which you so adore to Monsieur Mendoza’s house this evening, and promise me you will perform your autopsy upon it before midnight, and I will consent. Refuse, and — it would be some loss to science if I had to shoot you dead, *Herr Doktor*, but if I must I will. Make no mistake about it.”

For a moment they glared in each other’s eyes; then, with a shrug of resignation, the big Austrian turned back. Half the other’s size, dandified, almost effeminate, de Grandin nevertheless bore the stamp of the born killer, and in the steady gaze of his little, round blue eyes the Austrian savant had seen the bare-boned face of death. For all his ponderous size and his bloodless, cold devotion to his science, Herr Doktor Grafensburg was something of a coward, and his blustering bravado melted like a snowpatch in the sun before the Frenchman’s cold determination.

“*Ja wohl,*” he finally agreed. “Leave me to my work this afternoon. I will the body have at Herr Mendoza’s house to-night at eight.”

“What the dickens does it mean?” I asked as we drove toward Mendoza’s. “Have you found some explanation for this chapter of strange incidents—”

“*Non,*” he broke in, “I am at sea, my friend. I, the clever one, the shrewd, so wily fox, am faced with a blank wall. This business of the monkey passes my experiences. I am a poor and purblind stupid fool. Let me think!”

“But—”

“Precisely — exactly, ‘but,’” he agreed, nodding. “Consider, if you please: Mademoiselle Dolores has been ill three days. She is unconscious in a coma, and we cannot waken her. She loses weight so quickly that within the little space of seventy-two hours she has become to all appearances a cadaver — a mummy, by blue! Meantime, what happens at the museum? The swinish Grafensburg partially unwraps the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, then stops to read her pectoral tablet. Three days elapse, and in their course the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku puts on the semblance of a new-dead body. What is the next step in this dual transformation, *hein?*”

“But there may be something in the theory Grafensburg advances,” I argued. “We’ve seen dehydrated food — apples, for instance. Though shrunken to a husk, and

bearing no more resemblance to their original state than a mummy resembles a fresh body, when they’re put in water they fill out and almost simulate fresh fruit. Isn’t it possible that the embalmers of old Egypt might have hit upon some process of dehydration whereby the body would take up moisture from the air when it had been unwrapped, and—”

“*Ah bah,*” he interrupted in disgust. “Grafensburg can read hieroglyphs, Grafensburg knows Egyptology, but also Grafensburg is a great fool!”

A case of leucocytopenia I had under observation at Mercy Hospital kept me later than I had expected, and preparations were complete when I reached Mendoza’s house that night. Thin, frail, emaciated, looking more like a cadaver than a living person, Dolores lay swathed in blankets on a lounge. Beside her, close as though ready for a blood transfusion, lay the blanketed body of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, and as I looked upon the two pale faces I was struck anew with the strange resemblance each bore to the other. The only light in the room was that given by a red-bowled vigil lamp which de Grandin placed about two feet from, and midway between, the two dark heads pillowed on their couches, and the flickering, fitful gleam of the little lamp’s short wick cast a shifting mottle of shadows on the equally immobile faces of the living and the dead.

Silently de Grandin crossed the room drew back the curtains at the window and looked up at the sky. “The moon is rising,” he announced at length. “It will soon be time for our experiment.”

For something like five minutes he stood at gaze; then, as a shaft of silver light stole through the window and across the floor, splashing a little pool of luminance upon the two still faces, he stepped quickly to the lamp, blew out its flame, and from beneath his jacket drew a roll of silken gossamer.

“*Lieber Gott!*” cried Grafensburg as de Grandin spread the silver tissue out, laying part of it across the dead girl’s face, the other end across Dolores’ white, still countenance. “Where — where did you get that? It is a portion of the—”

“Silence, *cochon,*” bade the little Frenchman sharply. “It is a fragment of the veil of Isis which hung before her altar-throne that the profane might not see her godhead. It will help us get in contact with the past — one hopes.”

Now the moonlight shone full on the girls’ veiled faces, touching them with argent gilding. De Grandin laid one hand upon Dolores’ brow and touched the forehead of the long-dead priestess with the finger-tips of the other. There was something measured, monotonous as a chant, in his voice as he called out softly: “Mademoiselle Dolores, you can hear me when I speak?”

A moment’s silence; then, so softly we could scarcely

hear, soft as a breath of wind among the leafless branches of a tree, but still distinct enough to understand, there came the answer: "I can hear you."

"You can hear the chiming of the sistra; you can hear the chanting of the priests?"

"I can hear them!"

"Open the eyes of your memory; look around you — tell us what it is you see. I order, I command it."

As the answer came I started violently. Was it a vagary of overwrought nerves, or did my ears deceive me? I could not surely tell, but it seemed that by some odd trick of ventriloquism the reply came not only from Dolores, but from the dead girl at her side, as well. They seemed speaking in soft chorus!

"I am in a lofty temple," came the faltering, halting answer. "Sistra ring and harps are playing, priestesses are chanting hymns. A man has come into the temple. He is young and very beautiful. He is robed in white. His head is shaven smooth. He has paused before the silver veil that hangs between the temple and the face of Isis. He has put aside the veil and gone through a low door. I can no longer see him."

We could hear the soft rustle of the April wind in the budding trees outside; somewhere in the house a clock ticked steadily, and its ticking sounded like the blows of some great hammer on a giant anvil. The sharp staccato yelp of a taxi's horn out in the street was almost deafening in the silence of that darkened room. Then there came another sound. No, not quite a sound; rather, it was like that subjective sense of ringing in the inner ear we have after taking a heavy dose of quinine, more the *impression* of a sound than any actual vibration. Bell-like it was, almost unbearably shrill, unspeakably sweet; nearly toneless, yet utterly fascinating. I felt a sense of drowsiness come stealing over me, and with it the impression of another presence in the room was borne upon me. There was another — some one — some *thing* — among us, and I shivered as though a chill hand had suddenly been passed across my cheek.

"What is the ceremony you are witnessing?" de Grandin asked, and his voice seemed faint and far away.

"A man is entering the priesthood. He is in the sanctuary of the goddess now. She will come to him and flood him with her spirit. He will be her own for time and for eternity. He will put away the love of woman and the hope of children from his heart, and devote himself for ever to the service of the great All-Mother."

"Who is this man?"

"I do not know his name, but he was born a Hebrew. He has put aside his God to take vows of Isis for love of a priestess of the goddess. She has put a spell on him; he is mad for love of her, but because she is forbid to marry by

her vows he has abjured Jehovah and become a heathen priest that he may be near her in common worship of the goddess."

"What else do you see?"

"I see nothing. All is dark."

We waited a tense moment; then: "Is it over — have you finished?" I asked, edging toward the light-switch. Somehow, I felt, with the friendly glow of electricity upon us, that sense of being in the room with something alien would fade away.

The Frenchman hushed my question with an upraised hand. "Tell us what you witness now?" he ordered, leaning forward till his breathing stirred the silver veil which lay upon Dolores' face.

"It is daylight. The sun shines brightly on a temple's painted pylon. The sacred birds are feeding in the courtyard. I see a woman cross the forecourt. It is I. I am robed in a white robe which leaves my bosom and my ankles bare. Sandals of papyrus show my feet. Jewels are on my arms and a band of silver crowns my hair. In one hand I bear a lotus bud, and a water-pot is in the other. I am going to the fountain. An old man accosts me. He is very feeble. His hair and beard are white as snow. He wears a blue robe and red turban. He is a Hebrew. He raises his hands and curses me. He tells me I have charmed his son away from God, and have made a heathen of him. He curses me in life and death. He calls the curse of Yahweh on me. I laugh at him and call him Jewish dog and slave. He curses me again and tells me I shall find no rest until atonement has been made. He swears that I must walk the earth again in penance and humility.

"Now I see the youth who took the vows of Isis. He is dead. A wound gapes like a flower in his throat. His Jewish brethren have set on him and killed him for apostasy. I bend over him and kiss him on the lips, and on the gaping, bloody wound. My tears fall on his face. I tear my hair and throw dust on my head. But he does not answer to my cries. I swear that I will join him.

"I seek out Ana the magician. He is old and wise and very wicked. I promise him what he will if he will make it so that I can join the man who forsook his race and God for me. He tells me I must be a Jewess, but I know this cannot be, for I am Egyptian. He says that when the time for my awakening comes and my *ka* comes back to seek its earthly tenement, he can make me rise a Jewess. I ask him what his fee will be, and he says it is I. So I yield myself to his embrace, and then, because I know the priests will stone me with stones until I die because I broke my vows of chastity, I throw myself into the Nile. Ana the magician takes my body and prepares it for the tomb."

Silence heavy as a cloud of darkness settled on the room as the last faint, halting sentence ended. The shaft of moonlight had vanished from the window, and the still, couched forms were barely visible. There was a queer, sharp freshness to the air, as though it had been ozonated by a thunder-storm. Almost, it seemed to me, there was a quality of intoxication in the atmosphere, and mechanically I put my hand upon my wrist to test my pulsation. My heart was almost racing, and throughout my body there tingled a feeling of physical well-being like that one feels upon a mountain-top in summer.

“Lights!” came Jules de Grandin’s hail. “*Grand Dieu* — Trowbridge, Grafensburg, make lights; it is incredible!”

I stumbled through the gloom, found the wall-switch and turned on the electricity. De Grandin stood between the silent bodies, a mute forefinger pointed at each.

“Look, observe; behold!” he ordered.

I blinked my eyes and shook my head. Surely this was some gamin trick of faulty senses. Dolores lay in quiet sleep lips softly parted, limbs relaxed, a faint but unmistakable glow of health upon her cheeks. Beside her lay the body of the priestess, and already it seemed undergoing dissolution. The once firm cheeks were sunken in, the eye-holes so depressed they were no more than hollow pits; the lips were drawn back from the staring teeth, and on the skin there lay that hideous tint of leprous gray which is the harbinger of putrefaction.

“Quickly, Grafensburg,” de Grandin bade, “if you would make your precious autopsy you had better be about it while there yet is time. Take her away. We follow you soon.”

The Herr Doktorprofessor Grafensburg stripped off his rubber gloves and looked from me to Jules de Grandin, then back again in blank bewilderment “By heaven!” he swore, “never have I a thing like this seen before. Never; never! She was a mummy first, *kollegen*, as perfect a specimen of embalming as ever I have seen, and thousands of them have I unwrapped. Then she was a woman, almost living, breathing. Next she becomes a *kadaver*, a long-dead corpse, already almost reeking. *Lieber Gott*, I cannot understand it!”

“Yet the autopsy—” de Grandin murmured, “but—”

“*Ach, ja*,” excitedly broke in the Austrian, “it showed hers was a body like the thousand others I have cut apart. *Donnerwetter*, I might have been in hospital dissecting the dead corpse of one who died in bed a little while before! Brain, heart and lungs, viscera — everything she had in life, were all in place. *Herr Gott*, she had not been embalmed at all according to Egyptian custom; only dried and bandaged! I am in the sea of doubt submerged. I cannot tell my right hand from my left; my experience is of no value here. Have you perhaps a theory?”

De Grandin shed his linen operating-gown and lit a cigarette. “I have an hypothesis,” he answered slowly, “but I would not care to dignify it by the name of theory. The other night when Mademoiselle Dolores went insensible before that mummy in the museum, she was like one hypnotized. She made a quick recovery, so we thought, but only to be seized again when you told us of the strange inscription you had found upon the pectoral tablet of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku. Why was this? one wonders.

“Me, I think I have the answer. Thoughts are things, immortal things. Thought emanations, especially those produced by violent emotions, have a way of permeating physical objects and remaining in them as the odor of the flowers lingers in the vase, or the sweet perfume of sandalwood remains for all to smell long after life departs from out the tree. Very well, consider: Too-late-awakened love, perhaps, shook this ancient priestess’ being to its very core; she would make atonement for the sin she had committed against the Jewish youth who loved her more than he adored his God. That was the thought which moved her when she struck her so abominable bargain with the wizard Ana; the thought persisted when she cast herself into the Nile. *And though her body died, the thought lived on.*

“When Ana the magician made her body ready for the tomb he mummified it by some secret process of his own, not by the technique of the *paraschites*. And, further to concentrate the thought which dominated her, he carved upon her pectoral mortuary tablet the prediction that she would arise through the agency of her brain — her thought, if you prefer — rather than by intervention of the gods.

“Mademoiselle Dolores is a psychic. As she paused before the mummy of this so unfortunate young girl the tragic history of her life and pitiable death was borne to her as the scent of mummy spices which have been borne to one less susceptible to psychical suggestion. Unwittingly Friend Trowbridge sensed the truth when he said that she ‘identified herself with the mummy.’

“My friends, she was infected with the thought-force emanating from that long-dead mummy, even as she might have taken germ-contagion from it. Sit-ankh-hku would expiate her sin of long ago by resurrection as a Jewess. Mademoiselle Dolores is a Jewess. Strangely, by coincidence, perhaps, the two resembled each other. *Voilà*, the thought-cycle was completed. Dolores Mendoza would become Sit-ankh-hku; Sit-ankh-hku would completely dominate — displace — the personality of Dolores Mendoza. Yes, undoubtedly it was so.

“These things I surmised without knowing them. It was a process of instinct rather than of reason. *Alors*, I blended the modern with the ancient. There is much to say in favor of the Freudian psychology, even though it has been made

the happy hunting-ground of pornography by some who practise it. Mademoiselle Dolores suffered from a 'complex', a series of emotionally accented ideas in a repressed state. A thought-thorn was imbedded in her personality. While it remained there it would fester. Accordingly, we must take it out, as we would take out a physical thorn from her physical body if she were not to suffer an infection.

"I had you bring the body of the olden one and lay it close beside her that she might be *en rapport* with things which happened in the long ago. For the same reason I secured the veil of Isis and laid it on her face. It, too, was pregnant with the thought-forms of an ancient day. Finally, I waited for the moon to shine upon her, for the moon was sacred to the Goddess Isis, and each little thing which brought her nearer to the past brought the past nearer us. I sent her questing spirit backward to the days of old. I bade her tell us what she saw and heard, and through her living lips dead Sit--ankh-hku disclosed the tragedy which came to her three thousand years ago.

"*Enfin*, we took the stopper from the jar of scent, and the perfume, liberated in the air, disseminated. Those old tragic thoughts, so long locked tightly in Sit-ankh-hku's little body, were set at liberty; they thinned and drifted off like vapor in a breeze — *pouf!* they were gone for ever. No longer will they ride Mademoiselle Dolores like an incubus. She is for ever freed from them. It is doubtful if she will retain the slightest memory of the sufferings she underwent while they possessed her."

"But how do you account for Dolores almost changing to a mummy, while the mummy almost came to life?" I asked.

"In Mademoiselle Dolores' case it was, as you have aptly phrased it, a case of 'identifying herself with the mummy.' Under self-hypnosis, originally induced by the thought-force

she had absorbed as she stood before the mummy of the Priestess Sit-ankh-hku, she forced herself to simulate the mummy's stark rigidity, the very physical appearance of a desiccated lich. In the mummy's case — who knows? Perhaps it was as Doktor Grafensburg suggests, that the body was so treated by the wizard Ana's art that it took up moisture from the air, became rehydrated and put on its original appearance. Me, I think it was a transfer of psychoplasm from Dolores to the mummy which drained the living girl of all life-force and gave her the appearance of a mummy, while the dead form put upon it the appearance of returning life. One cannot surely say, these are but guesses, but my opinion is strengthened by the fact that when Dolores had recounted the tragedy of Sit-ankh-hku she all at once regained her normal look, while dissolution seemed to fall upon the dead girl with the suddenness of striking fate. It was as if a tide of life flowed and ebbed from one to the other. You see? It is most simple."

An expression of bewilderment, mingled with horrified incredulity, spread over Grafensburg's broad face as de Grandin finished speaking. I could scarce refrain from laughing, he looked for all the world like William Jennings Bryan reading Darwin, or a leader of the W.C.T.U. perusing a deluxe edition of the Bartenders' Guide.

"*Lieber Himmel!*" he exclaimed. "You — you tell us this? With seriousness you say it? Yes? *Mein Gott, du bist verrückt!* Stay, stay, little man, and rave your crazy ravings. I am going to get drunk!"

A smile of almost heavenly delight lit up de Grandin's face. "*Mon cher ami, mon brave collègue,*" he exclaimed, "for a week I've known you, yet never till this instant have I heard you speak one word of sense!

"Wait till I find my seven-times-accursed hat, and I will go with you!"

Weird Tales

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

A RIVAL FROM THE GRAVE

*creeping horror!
weird terror!*

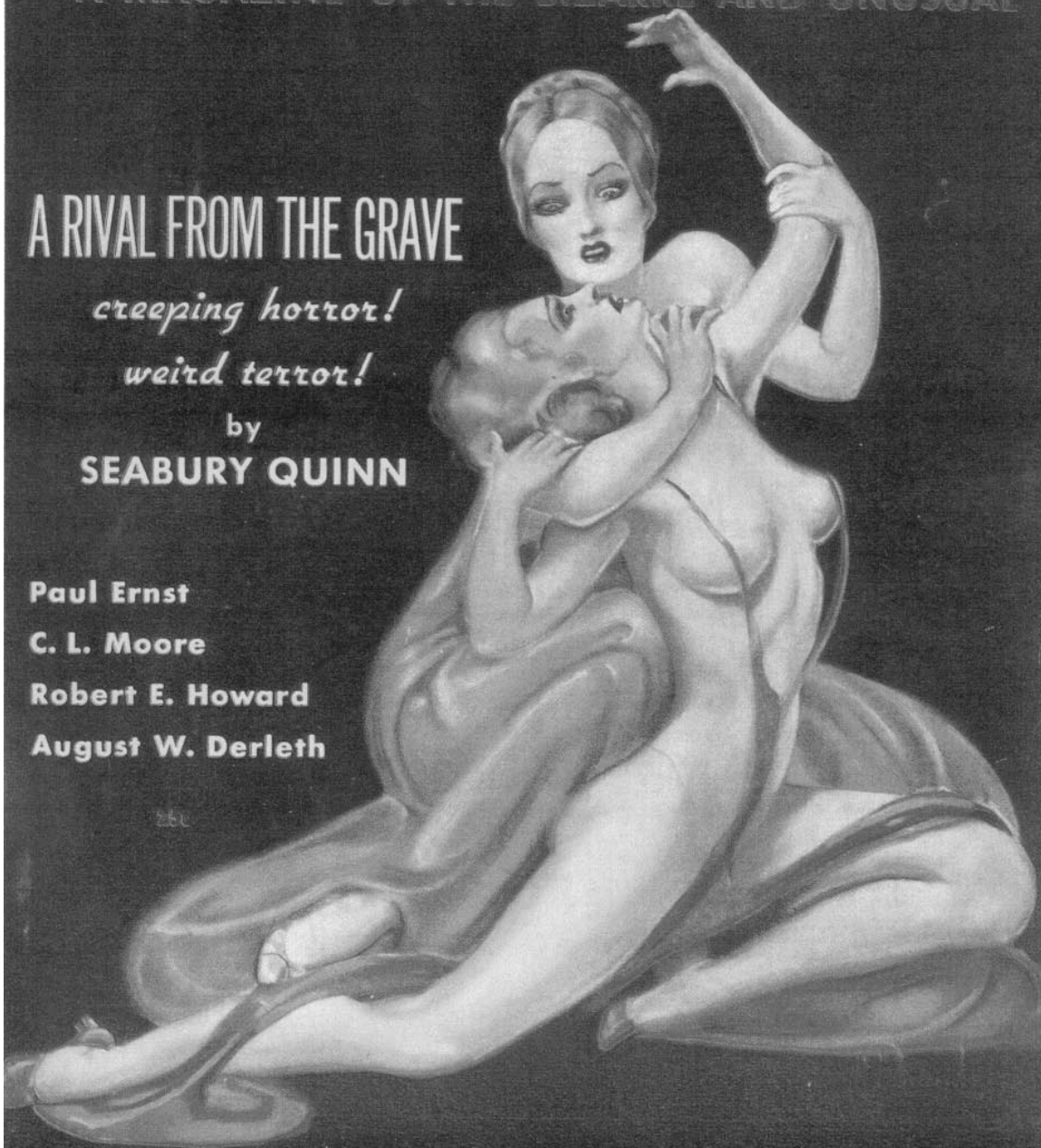
by
SEABURY QUINN

Paul Ernst

C. L. Moore

Robert E. Howard

August W. Derleth



A Rival From the Grave

“HOW MANY lobster sandwiches is that?” I demanded. Jules de Grandin knit his brows in an effort at calculation. “Sixteen, no, eighteen, unless I have lost count,” he answered.

“And how many glasses of champagne?”

“Only ten.”

“By George, you’re hopeless,” I reproved. “You’re an unconscionable glutton and wine-bibber.”

“*Eh bien*, others who considered themselves as righteous as you once said the same of one more eminent than I,” he assured with a grin as he stuffed the last remaining *canapé homard* into his mouth and washed it down with a gulp of Roederer. “Come, my friend, forget to take your pleasures sadly for a while. Is it not a wedding feast?”

“It is,” I conceded, “but—”

“And am I not on fire with curiosity?” he broke in. “Is it a custom of America to hold the celebration in the bridegroom’s home?”

“No, it’s decidedly unusual, but in this case the bride had only a tiny apartment and the groom this big house, so—”

“One understands,” he nodded, finding resting-space for his sandwich plate and glass, “and a most impressive house it is. Shall we seek a place to smoke?”

We jostled through the throng of merrymakers, passed along the softly carpeted hall and made our way to Frazier Taviton’s study. Book-cases lined the walls, a pair of Lawson sofas ranged each side the fireplace invited us to rest, a humidior of Gener cigars, silver caddies of Virginia, Russian and Egyptian cigarettes and an array of cloisonné ash-trays offered us the opportunity to indulge our craving for tobacco.

“*Exquise, superbe, parfait!*” the little Frenchman commented as he ignored our host’s expensive cigarettes and selected a vile-smelling Maryland from his case; “this room was made expressly to offer us asylum from those noisy ones out there. I think — *que diable!* Who is that?” He nodded toward the life-size portrait in its golden frame which hung above the mantel-shelf.

“H’m,” I commented, glancing up. “Queer Frazier left *that* hanging. I suppose he’ll be taking it down, though—”

“Ten thousand pestilential mosquitoes, do not sit there muttering like an elderly spinster with the vapors!” he commanded. “Tell me who she is, my friend.”

“It’s Elaine. She is — she *was*, rather — the first Mrs. Taviton. Lovely, isn’t she?”

“U’m?” he murmured, rising and studying the picture with

what I thought unnecessary care. “*Non*, my friend, she is not lovely. Beautiful? But yes, assuredly. Lovely? No, not at all.”

The artist had done justice to Elaine Taviton. From the canvas she looked forth exactly as I’d seen her scores of times. Her heavy hair, red as molten copper, with vital, flame-like lights in it, was drawn back from her forehead and parted in the center, and a thick, three-stranded plait was looped across her brow in a kind of Grecian coronal. Her complexion had that strange transparency one sometimes but not often finds in red-haired women. A tremulous green light played in her narrow eyes, and her slim, bright-red lips were slightly parted in a faintly mocking smile to show small, opalescent teeth. It was, as Jules de Grandin had declared, a fascinating face, beautiful but unlovely, for in those small features, cut with lapidarian regularity, there was half concealed, but just as certainly revealed, the frighteningly fierce fire of an almost inhuman sensuality. The sea-green gown she wore was low-cut to the point of daring, and revealed an expanse of lucent shoulders, throat and bosom with the frankness characterizing the portraiture of the Restoration. Scarcely whiter or more gleaming than the skin they graced, a heavy string of perfectly matched pearls lay round her throat, while emerald ear-studs worth at least a grand duke’s ransom caught up and accentuated the vivid luster of her jade-toned eyes.

“*Morbleu*, she is Circe, *la Pompadour* and Helen of Tyre, all in one,” de Grandin murmured. “Many men, I make no doubt, have told her, ‘I worship you,’ and many others whispered they adored her, but I do not think that any ever truthfully said, ‘I love you.’”

He was silent a moment, then: “They were divorced?”

“No, she died a year or so ago,” I answered. “It happened in New York, so I only know the gossip of it, but I understand that she committed suicide—”

“One can well believe it,” he responded as I paused, somewhat ashamed of myself for retailing rumor. “She was vivid, that one, cold as ice toward others, hot as flame where her desires were concerned. Self-inflicted death would doubtless have seemed preferable to enduring thwarted longing. Yes.”

A chorus of shrill squeals of feminine delight, mingled with the heavier undertone of masculine voices, drew our attention to the hall. As we hurried from the study we saw Agnes Taviton upon the stairs, gray eyes agleam, her lips

drawn back in laughter, about to fling her bouquet down. The bridesmaids and the wedding guests were clustered in the hall below, white-gloved arms stretched up to catch the longed-for talisman, anticipation and friendly rivalry engraved upon their smiling faces. Towering above the other girls, nearly six feet tall, but with a delicacy of shape which marked her purely feminine, was Betty Decker, twice winner of the women's singles out at Albemarle and runner-up for swimming honors at the Crescent Pool events. The bride swung out the heavy bunch of lilies-of-the-valley and white violets, poised it for a moment, then dropped it into Betty's waiting hands.

But Betty failed to catch it. A scant four feet the bouquet had to fall to touch her outstretched fingers, but in the tiny interval of time required for the drop Betty seemed to stumble sideways, as though she had been jostled, and missed her catch by inches. The bridal nosegay hurtled past her clutching hands, and seemed to pause a moment in midair, as though another pair of hands had grasped it; then it seemed to flutter, rather than to fall, until it rested on the polished floor at Betty's feet.

"Rotten catch, old gal," commiserated Doris Castleman. "You're off your form; I could 'a' sworn you had it in the bag."

"I didn't muff it," Betty answered hotly. "I was pushed."

"No alibis," the other laughed. "I was right behind you, and I'll take my Bible oath that no one touched you. You were in the clear, old dear; too much champagne, perhaps."

De Grandin's small blue eyes were narrowed thoughtfully as he listened to the girls' quick thrust-and-parry. "The *petite mademoiselle* has right," he told me in a whisper. "No one touched the so unfortunate young lady who let her hope of early matrimony slip."

"But she certainly staggered just before she missed her catch," I countered. "Everybody can't absorb such quantities of champagne as you can stow away and still maintain his equilibrium. It's a case of too much spirits, I'm afraid."

The little Frenchman turned a wide-eyed stare on me, then answered in a level, almost toneless voice: "*Prie Dieu* you speak in jest, my friend, and your fears have no foundation."

"There's a gentleman to see yez, sors," Nora McGinnis announced apologetically. "I tol' 'im it wuz afther office hours, an' that yere mos' partic'lar fer to give yerselves some time to digest yer dinners, but he sez as how it's mos' important, an' wud yez plase be afther seein' 'im, if only fer a minute?"

"*Tiens*, it is the crowning sorrow of a doctor's life that privacy is not included in his dictionary," answered Jules de Grandin with a sigh. "Show him in, *petite*" — Nora, who tipped the scales at something like two hundred pounds,

never failed to glow with inward satisfaction when he used that term to her — "show him in all quickly, for the sooner we have talked with him the sooner we shall see his back."

The change which three short months had made in Frazier Taviton was nothing less than shocking. Barely forty years of age, tall, hound-lean, but well set up, his prematurely graying hair and martial carriage had given him distinction in appearance, and with it an appearance of such youth and strength as most men fifteen years his junior lacked. Now he seemed stooped and shrunken, the gray lights in his hair seemed due to age instead of accidental lack of pigment, and in the deep lines of his face and the furtive, frightened glance which looked out from his eyes, we saw the symptoms of a man who has been overtaken by a rapid and progressive malady.

"Step into the consulting-room," I said as we concluded shaking hands; "we can look you over better there," but:

"I'm not in need of going over, Doctor," Frazier answered with a weary smile; "you can leave the stethoscope and sphygmomanometer in place. This consultation's more in Doctor de Grandin's line."

"*Très bien*, I am wholly at your service, *Monsieur*," the Frenchman told him. "Will you smoke or have a drink? It sometimes helps one to unburden himself."

Taviton's hand shook so he could hardly hold the flame to his cigar tip, and when he finally succeeded in setting it alight he paused, looking from one to the other of us as though his tongue could not find words to frame his crowding thoughts. Abruptly:

"You know I've always been in love with Agnes, Doctor?" he asked me almost challengingly.

"Well," I temporized, "I knew your families were close friends, and you were a devoted swain in high school, but—"

"Before that!" he cut in decisively. "Agnes Pemberton and I were sweethearts almost from the cradle!"

Turning to de Grandin he explained: "Our family homes adjoined, and from the time her nursemaid brought her out in her perambulator I used to love to look at Agnes. I was two years her senior, and for that reason always something of a hero to her. When she grew old enough to toddle she'd slip her baby fist in mine, and we'd walk together all around the yard. If her nurse attempted to interfere she'd storm and raise the very devil till they let her walk with me again. And the queer part was I liked it. You don't often find a three-year-old boy who'd rather walk around with a year-old girl than play with his toys, but I would. I'd leave my trains or picture books any time when I heard Agnes call, 'Frazee, Frazee, here's Agnes!' and when we both grew older it was just the same. I remember once I had to fight half a dozen fellows because they called me sissy for preferring to help Agnes stage a party for her dolls to going swimming with

them.

“We spent our summers in the Poconos, and were as inseparable there as we were in town. Naturally, I did the heavy work — climbed the trees to shake the apples down and carried home the sack — but Agnes did her share. One summer, when I was twelve and she was ten, we were returning from a fox-grape hunt. Both of us were wearing sandals but no stockings; we couldn’t go quite barefoot, for the mountain paths were rocky and a stone-bruised toe was something to avoid. Suddenly Agnes, who was walking close beside me, pushed me off the path into the bushes, and dived forward to snatch up a stick.

“‘Look out, Frazy, stay away!’ she cried, and next instant I saw the ‘stick’ she had picked up was a three-foot copperhead. It had been lying stretched across the path, the way they love to, and in another step I’d have put my unprotected foot right on it. Copperheads don’t have to coil to strike, either.

“There wasn’t time to take a club or rock to it, so she grabbed the thing in her bare hands. It must have been preparing to strike my ankle, or the pressure of her hand against its head worked on its poison-sac; anyway, its venom spilled out on her hand, and I remember thinking how much it looked like mayonnaise as I saw it spurt out on her sun-tanned skin. The snake was strong, but desperation gave her greater strength. Before it could writhe from her grasp or slip its head far enough forward to permit it to strike into her wrist, she’d thrown it twenty feet away into the bushes; then the pair of us ran down the mountainside as if the devil were behind us.

“‘Weren’t you scared, Aggie?’ I remember asking when we paused for breath, three hundred yards or so from where we’d started running.

“‘More than I’ve ever been in my life,’ she answered, ‘but I was more scared the snake would bite you than I was of what it might do to me, Frazier dear.’

“I think that was the first time in my life that any woman other than my mother called me ‘dear’, and it gave me a queer and rather puffed-up feeling.”

Taviton paused a moment, drawing at his cigar, and a reminiscent smile replaced the look of anguished worry on his face. “We were full of stories of King Arthur and the days of chivalry,” he continued, “so you mustn’t think what happened next was anyway theatrical. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to us. ‘When anybody saves another person’s life that life belongs to him,’ I told her, and went down upon one knee, took the hem of her gingham dress in my hand and raised it to my lips.

“She laid her hand upon my head, and it was like an accolade. ‘I am your liege lady and you’re my true sir

knight,’ she answered, ‘and you will bear me faithful service. When we’re grown I’ll marry you and you must love me always. And I’ll scratch your eyes out if you don’t!’ she added warningly.

“God, I wish she’d done it then!”

“*Hein?*” demanded Jules de Grandin. “You regret your sight, *Monsieur?*”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, you must examine me anon; my ears become impertinent!”

Taviton was earnest in reply: “You heard me quite correctly, sir. If I’d been blinded then the last thing I’d have seen would have been Agnes’ face; I’d have had the memory of it with me always, and — I’d never have seen Elaine!”

“But, my dear boy,” I expostulated, “you’re married to Agnes; Elaine’s dead; there’s nothing to prevent the realization of your happiness.”

“That’s what you think!” he answered bitterly.

“Listen: I believed that bunk they told us back in ’17 about it’s being a war to end all war and make the world a decent place to live in. I was twenty-three when I joined up. Ever seen war, gentlemen? Ever freeze your feet knee-deep in icy mud, have a million lice camp on you, see the man you’d just been talking to ripped open by a piece of shrapnel so his guts writhed from his belly like angleworms from a tin that’s been kicked over? Ever face machine-gun fire or a bayonet charge? I did, within three months after I’d left the campus. Soldiers in the advanced sections go haywire, they can’t help it; they’ve been through hell so long that just a little human kindness seems like paradise when they go back from the front.

“Elaine was kind. And she was beautiful. God, how beautiful she was!

“I’d gotten pretty thoroughly mashed up along the Meuse, and they sent me down to Biarritz to recuperate. It was a British nursing-station, and Elaine, who came from Ireland, was out there helping. She seemed to take to me at once; I’ve no idea why, for there were scores of better-looking fellows there and many who had lots more money. No matter, for some reason she was pleased with me and gave me every minute she could spare. Strangely, no one seemed to envy me.

“One night there was a dance, and I noticed that not many of the Scots or Irish, who were in the majority, seemed inclined to cut in on me. The English tried it, but the Gallic fellows passed us by as though we’d had the plague. Of course, that pleased me just as well but I was puzzled, too.

“I shared a room with Alec MacMurtrie, a likable young subaltern from Highland outfit who could drink more, smoke more, and talk less than any man I’d ever seen. He was in bed when I reported in that night, but woke up long enough to smoke a cigarette while I undressed. Just before we said

good-night he turned to me with an almost pleading look and told me, 'I'd wear a sprig o' hawthorn in my tunic when I went about if I were you, laddie.'

"I couldn't make him amplify his statement; so next day I talked with old MacLeod, a dour, sandy-haired and freckled minister from Aberdeen who'd come out as chaplain to as rank a gang of prayerful Scots as ever sashayed hell-for-leather through a regiment of Boche infantry.

"Mac, why should anybody wear a sprig of hawthorn in his tunic?" I demanded.

"He looked at me suspiciously, poked his long, thin nose deep in his glass of Scotch and soda, then answered with a steel-trap snap of his hard jaws: 'T' keep th' witches awa', lad. I dinna ken who's gi'en ye th' warnin', but 'tis sober counsel. Think it ower.' That was all that I could get from him.

"I was ready to go back to active duty when the Armistice was signed and everybody who could walk or push a wheelchair got as drunk as twenty fiddlers' tikes. MacMurtrie was out cold when I staggered to our room, and I was sitting on my bed and working on a stubborn puttee when an orderly came tapping at the door with a chit for me. It was from Elaine and simply said: 'Come to me at once. I need you.'

"I couldn't figure what she wanted, but I was so fascinated by her that if she'd asked me to attempt to swim the Channel without water-wings I'd have undertaken it.

"Her room was in a little tower that stuck up above the roof, removed from every other bedroom in the place, with windows looking out across the sea and gardens. It was so quiet there that we could hear the waves against the beach, and the shouting of the revelers came to us like echoes from a distant mountaintop.

"I knocked, but got no answer; knocked again, then tried the door. It was unfastened, and swung open to my hand. Elaine was lying on a sofa by the window with the light from two tall candelabra shining on her. She was asleep, apparently, and her gorgeous hair lay spread across the jade-green cushion underneath her head. You recall that hair, Doctor Trowbridge? It was like a molten flame; it glowed with dazzling brilliance, with here and there sharp sudden flashes as of superheated gold.

"She was wearing a green nightrobe of the filmiest silk crêpe, which shaded but hid nothing of her wonderfully made body. Her long green eyes were closed, but the long black lashes curled upon her cheeks with seductive loveliness. Her mouth was slightly parted and I caught a glimpse of small white teeth and the tip of a red tongue between the poinsettia vividness of her lips. The soft silk of her gown clung to the lovely swell of her small, pointed breasts, the tips of which were rouged the same rich red as

her lips, her fingertips and toes.

"I felt as if my body had been drained of blood, as if I must drop limply where I stood, for every bit of strength had flowed from me. I stood and gazed upon that miracle of beauty, that green and gold and blood-red woman, absolutely weak and sick with overmastering desire.

"She stirred lazily and flung an arm across her eyes as she moaned gently. I stood above her, still as death.

"For a moment she lay there with the blindfold of her rounded arm across her face, then dropped it languidly and turned her head toward me.

"Her glowing green eyes looked up in my face, and the pupils seemed to widen as she looked. Her breath came faster and her body tensed, as though in sudden pain. Swift, almost, as a snake's, her scarlet tongue flicked over scarlet lips and opal teeth.

"'You love me, Frazier, don't you?' she murmured in a throaty undertone which seemed to lose itself in the shadows where the candlelight had faded. 'You love me as only an American loves, with your heart and soul and spirit, and your chivalry and truth and faith?'

"I couldn't speak. My breath seemed held fast in my throat, and when I tried to form an answer only a hoarse, groaning sound escaped my lips.

"The pupils of her green eyes flared as with a sudden inward light, her lithe, slim body shook as with an ague, and she laughed a softly-purring laugh deep in her throat. 'Mine,' she murmured huskily. 'Mine, all mine for ever!'

"She raised her arms and drew me down to her, crushed my lips against her mouth till it seemed she'd suck my soul out with her stifling kiss.

"Half fainting as I was, she pushed me back, rolled up my tunic-cuff and bit me on the wrist. She made a little growling sound, soft and caressing, but, somehow, savage as the snarling of a tigress toying with her prey. Her teeth were sharp as sabers, and the blood welled from the wound like water from a broken conduit. But before I could cry out she pressed her mouth against the lesion and began to drink as though she were a famished traveler in the desert who had stumbled on a spring.

"She looked up from her draft, her red lips redder still with blood, and smiled at me. Before I realized what she did, she raised her hand and bit herself upon the wrist, then held the bleeding white limb up to me. 'Drink, beloved; drink my blood as I drink yours,' she whispered hoarsely. 'It will make us one!'

"Her blood was salty and acerb, but I drank it greedily as I had drunk champagne an hour or two before, sucked it thirstily as she sucked mine, and it seemed to mount up to my brain like some cursed oriental drug. A chill ran through me, as though a bitter storm-wind swept in from the sea; a

red mist swam before my eyes; I felt that I was sinking, sinking in a lake of bitter, scented blood.”

The speaker paused and passed a hand across his forehead, where small goutts of perspiration gleamed. “Then—” he began, but Jules de Grandin raised his hand.

“You need not tell us more, *Monsieur*,” he murmured. “In England and America there is a silly superstition that seduction is exclusively a masculine prerogative. *Eh bien*, you and I know otherwise, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

Taviton looked gratefully at the small Frenchman. “Thanks,” he muttered.

“MacLeod refused point-blank to marry us. ‘I’d sooner gie ye’r lich t’ th’ kirkyard turf than join ye wie yon de’l’s bairn,’ he told me when I asked him.

“When we asked a priest to marry us we found French law required so much red tape — getting baptismal certificates and all that nonsense — that it was impractical; so I applied for leave to London, and Elaine joined me on the ship. We were married by the master just as soon as we were out of French territorial waters.

“I cabled home for funds and we had a grand time shopping first in London, then at the Galeries LaFayette in Paris when my discharge came through.

“But I wasn’t happy. Passion may be part of love, but it’s no substitute. Elaine was like a quenchless fire; there was no limit to her appetites nor any satisfying them. She wanted me, and all that I possessed. I never saw her eat much heavy food, but the amount of caviar and oysters and pasties she consumed was almost past belief, and she drank enough champagne and brandy to have put a dipsomaniac to shame; yet I never saw her show the smallest sign of drunkenness. No kind of sport or exercise held any interest for her, but she’d dance all afternoon and until the final tune was played at night, and still be fresh when I was so exhausted that I thought I’d drop. Shopping never seemed to tire her, either. She could make the rounds of twenty stores, looking over practically the entire stock of each, then come home glowing with delight at what she’d purchased and be ready for a matinee or *thé dansant* and an evening’s session at the supper clubs.

“When I appraised her thus and realized her shallowness and the selfishness which amounted to egotism, I felt I hated her; but more than that I loathed myself for having let her make a slave of me, and against the memory of her branding kisses and the night when we had drunk each other’s blood there rose like a reproachful ghost the recollection of the evening I had said good-bye to Agnes just before I went to Dix to proceed to ship at Hoboken. How sweet and cool and comforting that last kiss seemed; there was something like a benediction in her promise, ‘I’ll be waiting for you, Frazier,

waiting if it means for time and all eternity, and loving you each minute that I wait.’

“But when I lay in Elaine’s arms so feverishly clasped it seemed our bodies melted and were fused in one, and felt the sting of her hot kisses on my mouth, or the bitter tang of her blood in my throat, I knew that I was weak as wax in her hot grasp, and that she owned me bodily and spiritually. I was her slave and thing and chattel to do with as she liked, powerless to offer any opposition to her slightest whim.

“Her blood-lust was insatiable. Five, ten, a dozen times a night, she’d wound me with her teeth or nails, and drink my blood as though it had been liquor and she a famished drunkard. The Germans have a word for it: *Blutdurst* — bloodcraving, the unappeasable appetite of the *blutsanger*, the vampire, for its bloody sustenance.

“Sometimes she’d make me take her blood, for she seemed to find as keen delight in being passive in a blood-feast as when she drank ‘the red milk’, as she called it.

“Sometimes she’d mutilate herself upon the hands and feet and under the left breast, then lie with outstretched arms and folded feet while I applied my lips to the five wounds. ‘Love’s crucifixion’, she called it, and when she felt my mouth against the cuts upon her palms and side and insteps she would make small growling noises in her throat, and almost swoon in ecstasy.

“I was weak with loss of blood within three months, but as powerless to refuse my veins to her as I was to tell her that the sums she spent in shopping were driving me to bankruptcy.

“Things were changed when I came home to Harrisonville. My parents had both died with influenza while I was away. Agnes’ father had committed suicide. He’d been in business as an importer, dealing exclusively with German houses, and the blockade of the Allies and our later entrance into the war completely ruined him. They told me when his bills were paid there was less than a hundred dollars left for Agnes.

“She made a brave best of it. Nearly everything was gone, but she furnished a small flat with odds and ends that no one bid for at the auction of her father’s things, got a place as a librarian and carried on.

“She took my treachery standing, too. Some women would have tried to show their gallantry by being over-friendly, calling on us and asserting their proprietary rights as old friends of the bridegroom. Agnes stayed away with reserve and decency until our house was opened, then came to the reception quite like any other friend. Lord, what grit it must have taken to run the gauntlet of those pitying eyes! I don’t believe there was a soul in town who didn’t know we’d been engaged and that I’d let her down.

“If there were any bitterness in her she didn’t show it. I

think that my lips trembled more than hers when she took my hand and whispered, 'I'm praying for your happiness, Frazie.'

"God knows I needed prayers."

Tears were streaming from de Grandin's eyes. "*La pauvre!*" he muttered thickly. "*La pauvre brave créature! Monsieur*, if you spend all of life remaining to you flat upon your face before *Madame* your wife, you fail completely to abase yourself sufficiently!"

"You're telling me?" the other answered harshly. "It's not for me I've come to you this evening, sir. Whatever I get I have coming to me, but Agnes loves me. God knows why. It's to try and save her happiness I'm here."

"*Tiens*, say on, *Monsieur*," the little Frenchman bade. "Relate this history of perfidy and its result. It may be we can salvage something of the happiness you let slip by. What else is there to tell?"

"Plenty," rejoined Taviton. "Elaine could not abide the thought of Agnes. 'That cold-faced baby; that dough-cheeked fool!' she stormed. 'What does she know of love? What has she to give a man — or what can she take from him? Say she's frigid, cold, unloving as a statue, icy-hearted as a fish!' she ordered. 'Say it, my lover. You won't? I'll kiss the words from you!' And when she held me in her arms again and stifled me with bloody kisses — Heaven help me! — I forswore my love, forgot the debt of life I owed to Agnes, and repeated parrotwise each wretched, lying slander that she bade me speak.

"It was a little thing that freed me from my slavery. We'd given up the house here and taken an apartment in New York. Elaine was in her element in the world of shops and theaters and night clubs; she hardly seemed to take a moment's rest, or to need it, for that matter. My old outfit was going to parade on Decoration Day in honor of the buddies who went west, and she set herself against my coming back to Harrisonville, even to participate in the parade. I don't think she cared a tinker's dam about my going, but she'd grown so used to having me obey her like a docile, well-trained dog it never seemed to occur to her that I might go when she forbade me. Perhaps, if she had pleaded or used her deadly, seductive power, she would have prevailed, but she'd grown so she had no respect for me. Seldom did she say so much as 'please' when ordering me about; I was necessary to her satisfaction — there never was a hint of any other man — but only as any other chattel that she owned. She showed no more affection for me than she might bestow upon her powder puff or lipstick. She loved the things providing creature comforts and sensory satisfaction; I was one. The endearing names she called me while she held me in her arms were purely reflex, a sort of

orchestration to a dance of Sapphic passion.

"'If you disobey me you'll be sorry all your life,' she warned as I left the house that morning.

"I went and marched with what remained of the old outfit. The excesses I'd been subject to had weakened me, and when the parade was dismissed I reeled and fell. Coroner Martin's ambulance had been assigned for public service, and they put me in it and took me to his funeral home. I thought he looked more serious than a little fainting-fit would warrant when he helped me to his private office and offered me a glass of brandy.

"'Feeling stronger now, Frazier?' he asked.

"'Yes, sir, thank you,' I replied as I handed back the glass, 'quite fit.'

"'Strong enough to stand bad news?'

"'I suppose so; I've stood it before, you know, sir.'

"He seemed at a loss for what to say, looking at his sets of record cases, at his wall safe and the telephone; anywhere except at me. Finally, 'It's Mrs. Taviton,' he told me. 'There's been an accident; she's been—'

"'Killed?' I asked him as he hesitated.

"I felt like shouting, 'That's not bad news, man; that's tidings of release!' but I contrived to keep a look of proper apprehension on my face while I waited confirmation of my hope.

"'Yes, son, she's been killed,' he answered kindly. 'They telephoned the police department an hour ago, and as you were marching then the police relayed the message to me. They knew I'd always served your family, and—'

"'Of course,' I interrupted. 'Make all necessary arrangements with New York authorities, please, and send for her as soon as possible.' I had difficulty to keep from adding, 'And be sure you dig her grave so deep that she'll not hear the judgment trumps!'

"Elaine had jumped or fallen from a window, fallen fourteen stories to a concrete pavement; but despite the fact that practically all her bones were broken Mr. Martin told me that her beauty was not marred. Certainly, there was no blemish visible as I sat beside her body on the night before the funeral.

"Mr. Martin was an artist. He had placed her in a casket of pale silver-bronze with écru satin lining and had clothed her in a robe of pale Nile green. Her head was turned a little to one side, facing me, and the soft black lashes swept her flawless cheeks so naturally it seemed that any moment they might rise and show the gleaming emerald of her eyes. One hand lay loosely on her breast, the fingers slightly curled as if in quiet sleep; the other rested at her side, and in the flickering light of the watch-candles I could swear I saw her bosom rise and fall in slumber.

"I could not take my eyes off her face. That countenance

of perfect beauty I had looked upon so often, those slim red-fingered hands and little satin-shod feet from which I'd drunk the blood at her command — it seemed impossible that they were now for ever quiet with the quietness of death.

“‘But it's release,’ I told myself. ‘You're free. Your bondage to this beautiful she-devil's done; you can—’ the thought seemed profanation, and I thrust it back, but it came again unbidden: ‘Now you can marry Agnes!’

“It was a trick of light and shadow, doubtless, but it seemed to me the dead lips in the casket curved in a derisive smile, and through the quiet of the darkened room of death there came, faint as the echo of an echo's echo, that whisper I had heard Armistice Night beside the sea at Biarritz: ‘Mine! Mine; *all mine for ever!*’

“We buried her in Shadow Lawn, and Agnes sent me a brief note of sympathy. Within a month we saw each other, in two months we were inseparable as we had been before the war. Last winter she agreed to marry me.

“I think I knew how Kartophilos felt when he was reconciled with Heaven the night that Agnes promised she would be my wife. All that I'd forfeited I was to have. The promises of childhood were to be fulfilled. I put the memory of marriage to Elaine behind me like an ugly dream, and a snatch of an old war song was upon my lips as I let myself into my bedroom:

There's a kiss with a tender meaning,
Other kisses you recall,
But the kisses I get from you, sweetheart,
Are the sweetest kisses of all ...

“That night I'd had the sweetest kiss I'd known since I went off to war; life was starting afresh for me, I was—

“My train of happy thought broke sharply. My bedroom was instinct with a spicy, heady perfume, cloying-sweet, provocative as an aphrodisiac. I recognized it; it was a scent that cut through all the odors of the antiseptics a moment before I had first seen Elaine in the convalescent section of the nursing-home at Biarritz.

“I looked wildly round the room, but there was no one there. Stamping to the nearest window I sent it sailing up, and though it was a zero night outside I left it fully open till the last faint taint of hellish sweetness had been blown away.

“Shivering — not entirely from cold — I got in bed. As the velvet darkness settled down when I snapped off the light, I felt a soft touch on my cheek, a touch like that of soft, cold little fingers seeking my lips. I brushed my face as though a noisome insect crawled across it, and it seemed I heard a little sob — or perhaps a snatch of mocking laugh — beside me in the darkness.

“I put my hand out wildly. It encountered nothing solid,

but in the pillow next my head was a depression, as though another head were resting there, and the bedclothes by my side were slightly raised as if they shrouded slimly rounded limbs and small and pointed breasts.

“I dropped back, weak with panic terror, and against my throat I felt the tiny rasping scrape of little fingernails. How often that same feeling had awakened me from sleep when Elaine's craving for a draft of ‘the red milk’ was not to be denied! And then I heard — subjectively, as one hears half-forgotten music which he struggles to remember — ‘Give me your blood, beloved, it will warm me. I am cold.’ Then, sharp and clear as the echo of a sleigh's bells on a frosty night, repeated those six words which had been my bill of sale to slavery: ‘Mine! Mine; all mine for ever!’

“I woke next morning with a feeling of malaise. Sure I'd suffered from a nightmare, I was still reluctant to rise and look into the mirror, and reluctance grew to dread when I put my hand up to my throat and felt a little smarting pain beneath my fingers. At last I took my courage in both hands and went into the bathroom. Sheer terror made me sick as I gazed at my reflection in the shaving-glass. A little semilunar scar was fresh upon my throat, the kind of scar a curved and pointed fingernail would make.

“Had Elaine come from the grave to set her seal on me; to mark me as her chattel now and ever?”

Taviton was shaking so he could not relight the cigar which had gone dead during his recital. Once again de Grandin helped him, steadying his hand as he held his briquette out; then: “And did this — shall we say phenomenon? — occur again, *Monsieur?*” he asked as matter-of-factly as he might have asked concerning a dyspepsia patient's diet.

“Yes, several times, but not always the same,” the other answered. “I had a period of two weeks' rest, and had begun to think the visitation I had suffered was just a case of nerves when something happened to convince me it was not a case of nightmare or imagination that had plagued me. Agnes and I were going to the first recital of the Philharmonic, and — I was luxuriating in renewing our old courtship days — I'd stopped off at the florist's on my way from the office and bought her a corsage of orchids. Of course, I might have had them sent, but I preferred to take them to her.

“I laid the box upon my bureau while I went in to shave. My bedroom door was closed and the bathroom door was open; no one — nothing animal or human — could have come into my room without my hearing it or seeing it, for my shaving-mirror was so placed that its reflection gave a perfect view of the entrance to the bedroom. Perhaps I was five minutes shaving, certainly not more than ten. The first thing that I noticed when I came back to my room was a heavy, spicy scent upon the air, sweet, penetrating, and a

little nauseating, too, as though the very faintest odor of corruption mingled with its fragrance.

"I paused upon the threshold, sniffing, half certain that I smelled it, half sure my nerves were fooling me again. Then I saw. On the rug before the bureau lay the box the flowers came in. It was a heavy carton of green pasteboard, fastened with strong linen cord, enclosing an inner white box tied with ribbon. Both the outer and the inside boxes had been ripped apart as if they had been blotting-paper, and the tissue which had been about the flowers was torn to tatters, so it looked as though a handful of confetti had been spilled upon the floor. The cord and ribbon which had tied the boxes were broken, not cut — you know how twine and ribbon fray out at the ends when pulled apart? The bouquet itself was mashed and torn and battered to a pulp, as though it first were torn to shreds, then stamped and trodden on.

"Again: We were going to the theater and I came home a little early to get into my dinner kit. I dressed with no mishaps and was taking down my overcoat and muffler in the hall when a vase of roses on the mantel toppled over, and absolutely drenched my shirt and collar. There was utterly no reason for that vase to fall. It stood firmly on the mantel-shelf; nothing short of an earthquake could have shaken it over, yet it fell — no, that's not so; it didn't fall! I was six or eight feet from the fireplace, and even admitting some unfelt shock had jarred the rose-vase down, it should have fallen on the hearth. If it reached me at all, it should have rolled across the floor. But it didn't. It left its place, traveled the six or eight intervening feet through the air, and poured its contents over me from a height sufficient to soak my collar and the bosom of my shirt. I'm just telling you what happened, gentlemen, nothing that I guessed or surmised or assumed; so I won't say I heard, but *it seemed to me I heard* a faint, malicious laugh, a hatefully familiar mocking laugh, as the water from that rose-jar soaked and spoiled my linen.

"These things occurred in no set pattern. There was no regularity of interval, but it seemed as if the evil genius which pursued me read my mind. Each time when I'd manage to convince myself that I'd been the subject of delusion, or that the persecution had at last come to an end, there'd be some fresh reminder that my tormentress was playing cat-and-mouse with me.

"You were at my wedding. Did you see what happened when Agnes threw her bouquet down; how Betty Decker almost had it in her hands, and how—"

"*Parbleu*, yes, but you have right, Monsieur!" de Grandin interrupted. "By damn, did I not say as much to good Friend Trowbridge? Did I not tell him that this tall young *Mademoiselle* who all but grasped the flowers which *Madame* your charming wife had thrown did not miss them

through a lack of skill? But certainly, of course, indubitably!"

"D'ye know what happened on our wedding night?" our guest demanded harshly.

De Grandin raised his shoulders, hands and eyebrows in a pained, expostulating shrug. "*Monsieur*," he muttered half reproachfully, like one who would correct a forward child, "one hesitates to—"

"You needn't," cut in Taviton, a note of bitter mockery in his voice. "Whatever it may be you hesitate to guess, you're wrong!"

"We went directly to Lenape Lodge up in the Poconos, for it was there twenty-eight years ago we'd plighted our troth the day that Agnes saved me from the snake.

"We had dinner in the little cottage they assigned us, and lingered at the meal. That first breaking of bread together after marriage seemed like something sacramental to us. After coffee we walked in the garden. The moon was full and everything about us was as bright as day. I could see the quick blood mount to Agnes' face as she bent her head and seemed intent on studying her sandal.

"'I feel something like the beggar maid beneath Cophetua's window,' she told me with a little laugh. 'I've nothing but my love to bring you, Frazier.'

"'But all of that?' I asked.

"'All of that,' she echoed in a husky whisper. 'Oh, my dear, please tell me that you love me that way, too; that nothing — *nothing* — can or will ever come between us. We've waited so long for each other, now I — I'm frightened, Frazier.'

"She clung to me with a sort of desperation while I soothed her. Finally she brightened and released herself from me.

"'Five minutes I'll give you for a final cigarette. Don't be longer!' she called gayly as she ran into the cottage.

"That five minutes seemed eternity to me, but at last it was concluded, and I went into the house. The bedroom was in shadow, save where a shaft of moonlight struck across the floor, illuminating the foot of the big old-fashioned bedstead. Under the white counterpane I could see the small twin hillocks which were Agnes' feet; then, as I stood and looked at them, my breath came faster and my pulses raced with quick acceleration. There was the outline of another pair of upturned feet beneath that coverlet. 'Agnes!' I called softly, 'Agnes, dear!' There was no answer.

"Slowly, like a man wading through half-frozen water, I crossed the room, and put my hand upon the bed. The linen sank beneath my touch. There was nothing solid there, but when I took my hand away the bedclothes rose again, showing the contour of a supine body.

"'She — it — can't do this to us!' I told myself in fury,

and disrobed as quickly as I could, then got in bed.

“My hand sought Agnes’, and I felt a touch upon it, soft as rose leaves, cold as lifeless flesh. Slim fingers closed about my own, fingers which seemed to grasp and cling like the tentacles of a small octopus, and which, like a devil-fish’s tentacles, were cold and bloodless.

“I drew back with a start ... surely this could not be Agnes, Agnes, soft and warm and loving, pulsing with life and tenderness....

“Then I almost shrieked aloud in horror — ‘almost,’ I say, because my mouth was stopped, even as I drew my lips apart to scream. A weight, light, yet almost unsupportable, lay upon my chest, my hips, my thighs. Moist lips were on my lips; small, sharp fingers ran like thin flames across my breast and cheeks; nails, small nails of dainty feet, yet sharp and poignant as the talons of a bird of prey, scratched lightly against the flesh of my legs, and a heavy strand of scented hair fell down each side my face, smothering me in its gossamer cascade. Then the quick, sharp ecstasy I knew so well, the instant pain, which died almost before it started with the anodyne of bliss, as the cut of razor-keen small teeth sank in my lips and the salty, hot blood flowed into my mouth. Slowly I could feel the nerve force draining from me. Wave on wave, a flooding tide of lethargy engulfed me; I was sinking slowly, helplessly into unconsciousness.

“When I awoke the sun was streaming in the bedroom windows. Spots of blood were on my pillow, my lips were sore and smarting with a pain like iodine on a raw wound. Agnes lay beside me, pale and haggard. On her throat were narrow purple bruises, like the lines of bruise that small strong fingers might have left. I roused upon my elbow, looking in her face with growing horror. Was she dead?

“She stirred uneasily and moaned; then her gray eyes opened with a look of haunted terror, and her lips were almost putty-colored as she told me: ‘It — she — was here with us last night. Oh, my love, what shall we do? How can we lose this dreadful earthbound spirit which pursues us?’

“We left Lenape Lodge that day. After what had happened we could no more bear to stay there than we could have borne to stay in hell. As quickly as I could I made arrangements for a Caribbean voyage, and for a short time we had peace; then, without the slightest warning, Elaine struck again.

“A ball was being given at Castle Harbor and Agnes was to wear her pearls. They had been my mother’s and Elaine had always been most partial to them. When she died I put them in a safe deposit vault, but later had them restrung and fitted with a new clasp for Agnes.

“I was dressed and waiting on the balcony outside our suite. Agnes was putting the finishing touches on her toilet

when I heard her scream. I rushed into the bedroom to find her staring white-faced at her own reflection in the mirror, one hand against her throat. ‘The pearls!’ she gasped. ‘*She* was here; she took them — snatched them from my neck!’

“It was true. The pearls were gone, and within a little while a bruise appeared on Agnes’ throat, showing with what force they had been snatched away. Naturally, as a matter of form, we hunted high and low, but there was no sign of them. We knew better than to notify the police; their best efforts, we knew but too well, would be entirely useless.

“I had a terrible suspicion which plagued me day and night, and though I didn’t voice my thought to Agnes, I could hardly wait till we got home to prove the dreadful truth.

“As soon as we were back in Harrisonville I saw the superintendent of the cemetery and arranged a disinterment, telling him I had decided to place Elaine’s body in another section of the plot. There were several obstacles to this, but Mr. Martin managed everything, and within a week they notified me that they were ready to proceed. I stood beside the grave while workmen plied their spades, and when the big steel vault was opened and the casket lifted out, Mr. Martin asked if I desired to look at her. As if I had another wish!

“He snapped the catches of the silver-bronze sarcophagus, and gently raised the lid. There lay Elaine, exactly as I’d seen her on the night before the funeral, her face a little on one side, one hand across her breast, the other resting at her side. A little smile, as though she knew a secret which was more than half a jest, was on her lips, and in the hand that rested on her breast, twined round the slender fingers like a rosary, was the string of pearls which had been snatched from Agnes’ throat that night at Castle Harbor, a thousand miles and more away!

“I don’t expect you to believe my unsupported word, but if you’ll trouble to call Mr. Martin, he’ll confirm my statement. He saw me take the pearls from her, and remarked how she seemed to cling to them, also that he had no recollection they were buried with her, and would have sworn they were not in the casket when he closed it.”

Taviton drew a long, trembling breath, and the look of settled melancholy had deepened on his stern and rather handsome face as he concluded: “And that is why I’m here tonight, Doctor de Grandin. Probably the old axiom that every man must bear the consequences of his own folly applies to me with double force, but there’s Agnes to consider. Though I don’t deserve it, she’s in love with me, and her happiness is bound inextricably with mine. I’ve heard that you know more about these psychic phenomena than anyone, so I’ve come to see you as a last resort. Do you

think that you can help us?"

De Grandin's small blue eyes were bright with interest as our caller finished his recital. "One can try," he answered, smiling. "You have been explicit in your narrative, my friend, but there are some points which I should like to be enlightened on. By example, you have seen these manifestations in the form of force a number of times, you have smelled the perfume which *Madame* your *ci-devante* wife affected. You have seen her outline under cloth, and you, as well as Madame Taviton, have felt the contact of her ghostly flesh, but have you ever seen her in ocular manifestation?"

"N-o," answered Frazier thoughtfully, "I don't believe we have." Suddenly he brightened. "You think perhaps it's not Elaine at all?" he asked. "Possibly it's one of those strange cases of self-imposed hypnosis, like those they say the Hindoo fakirs stimulate among their audiences to make it seem they do those seemingly impossible—"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*, I think nothing at all, as yet" the little Frenchman interrupted. "I am searching, seeking, trying to collect my data, that I may arrange it in an orderly array. Suppose I were a chemist. A patron brings me a white powder for analysis. He cannot tell me much about it, he does not know if it is poisonous or not, only that it is a plain white powder and he wishes to be told its composition. There are a hundred formulae for me to choose from, so the first step is to segregate as many as I can; to find out what our so mysterious powder is definitely not before I can determine what it is. You could appreciate my difficulty in the circumstances? Very well, we are here in much the same predicament. Indeed, we are in worse case, for while chemistry is scientifically exact, occultism is the newest of the sciences. less than half emerged from silly magic and sillier superstition. It has not even a precise nomenclature by which one occultist can make his observations fully understood by others. The terminology is so vague that it is almost meaningless. What we call 'ghosts' may be a dozen different sorts of things. 'Spirits?' Possibly. But what sort of spirits? Spirits that are earthbound, having shed their fleshly envelopes, yet being unable to proceed to their proper loci? If so, why do they linger here? What can we do to help them on their way? Or are they possibly the spirits of the blessed, come from Paradise? If so, what is their helpful mission? How can we assist them? Spirits of the damned, perhaps? What has given them their *passeport jaune* from hell? By blue, *Monsieur*, there are many things we must consider before we can commence to think about your case!"

"I see," the other nodded. "And the first thing to consider is—"

"Mrs. Taviton, sor!" announced Nora McGinnis from the study doorway.

She came walking toward us rapidly, the tips of silver slippers flashing with swift intermittence from beneath the hem of her white-satin dinner frock. Time had dealt leniently with Agnes Taviton. The skin of her clear-cut oval face was fresh and youthful as a girl's, despite her almost forty years; her short, waved hair, brushed straight back from her broad forehead, was bright as mountain honey, and there were no telltale wrinkles at the corners of her frank gray eyes. Yet there was a line of worry in her forehead and a look of fear in her fine eyes as she acknowledged my quick introduction and turned to Frazier.

"Dear," she exclaimed, "the emeralds, they're — she—"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Madame*," de Grandin interrupted. "*Monsieur* your husband has recounted how your pearls were taken; now, are we to understand that other jewels—"

"Yes," she answered breathlessly, "to-night! My husband gave the emerald earrings to me — they had been his great-great-grandmother's — and as the stones were so extremely valuable I didn't dare have them reset in screws. So I had my ears pierced, and the wounds have been a little slow in healing. Tonight was the first time I felt I dared take out the guard-rings and try the emeralds on. I'd brought them from the safe and put them on my dresser; then as I raised my hands to disengage the guard-ring from my left ear I felt a draft of chilly air upon my shoulders, something seemed to brush past me — it was like the passage of a bird in flight, or perhaps that of an invisible missile — and next instant the velvet case in which the emeralds rested disappeared."

"*Eh, disappeared, Madame?*" de Grandin echoed.

"Yes, that's the only way that I can put it; I didn't actually see them go. The chill and movement at my back startled me, and I turned round. There was nothing there, of course, but when I turned back to my bureau they were gone."

"Did you look for them?" I asked with fatuous practicality.

"Of course, everywhere. But I knew it was no use. They went the same way that the pearls did — I recognized that sudden chill, that feeling as if something — *something evil* — hovered at my shoulder, then the rustle and the disappearance. And," she added with a shuddering sigh, "those emeralds went to the same place the pearls went, too!"

"Thank Heaven you'd not put them in your ears!" broke in her husband. "You remember how she bruised your throat that night she snatched the pearls—"

"Oh, let her have them!" Agnes cried. "I don't want the vain things, Frazier. If hoarding jewelry like a jackdaw gives her restless spirit peace, let her have them. She can have—"

"Excuse me, if you please, *Madame*," de Grandin interrupted in a soft and toneless voice. "Monsieur Taviton has placed your case with me, and I say she shall not have

anything. Neither your jewelry, your husband, your peace of mind — *corbleu*, she shall not have so much as one small grave to call her own!”

“But that’s inhuman!”

The Frenchman turned a fixed, unwinking stare on her a moment; then, “*Madame*,” he answered levelly, “that which pursues you with the threat of ruined happiness also lacks humanity.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Agnes. “She stole Frazier from me; now she takes the jewels, not because she has a use for them, but because she seems determined to take everything I have. Please, Doctor de Grandin, please make sure she doesn’t take my husband, whatever else she takes.”

I had a momentary feeling of uncertainty. Were these three sane and grownup people whom I listened to, these men and woman who talked of a dead woman’s stealing jewelry, discussing what she might have and what she might not take, or were they children playing gruesome make-believe or inmates of some psychopathic ward in some mysterious way brought to my study?

“Don’t you think we’d better have a glass of sherry and some biscuit?” I suggested, determined to negotiate the conversation back to sanity.

De Grandin sipped his sherry thoughtfully, taking tiny bites of biscuit in between the drinks, more for the sake of appearance than from any wish for food. At length: “Where are the pearls which were abstracted from *Madame* your wife’s throat?” he asked Taviton.

“I put them in the safe deposit vault,” the other answered. “They’re still there, unless—”

“Quite so, *Monsieur*, one understands. It is highly probable they are still there, for these prankish tricks *Madame la Revenante* is fond of playing seem concerned more with your personal annoyance than your valuables. I would that you have imitations of those pearls made just as quickly as you can. Be sure they are the best of duplicates, and match the gems they copy both in weight and looks. You apprehend?”

“Yes, of course, but why—”

“*Tiens*, the less one says, the less one has cause for regret,” the Frenchman answered with a smile.

Although I had retired from obstetrics several years before, there were times when long association with a family made me break my resolution. Such a case occurred next evening, and it was not till after midnight that I saw the red and wrinkled voyageur on life’s way securely started on his earthly pilgrimage and his mother safely out of danger. The house was dark and quiet as I put my car away, but as I paused in the front hall I saw a stream of light flare from

beneath the pantry door.

“Queer,” I muttered, walking toward the little spot of luminance; “it’s not like Nora to go off to bed with those lights burning.”

A blaze of brightness blinded me as I pushed back the door. Seated on the kitchen table, a cut loaf of bread and a partially dismembered cold roast pheasant by his side, was Jules de Grandin, a tremendous sandwich in one hand, a glass of Spanish cider bubbling in the other. Obviously, he was very happy.

“Come in, *mon vieux*,” he called as soon as he could clear his mouth of food. “I am assembling my data.”

“So I see,” I answered. “I’ve had a trying evening. Think I’ll assemble some, too. Move over and make room for me beside that pheasant, and pour me a glass of cider while you’re at it.”

“*Mon Dieu*,” he murmured tragically, “is it not enough that I come home exhausted, but I must wait upon this person like a slave?” Then, sobering, he told me:

“I am wiser than I was this morning, and my added wisdom gives me happiness, my friend. Attend me, if you please. First to Monsieur Martin’s I did go all haste, and asked him the condition of the body of that pretty but extremely naughty lady who pursues Monsieur and Madame Taviton. He tells me it showed signs of slight desiccation when they opened up the casket to retrieve the pearls, that it was like any other body which had been embalmed, then sealed hermetically in a metallic case. Is that not encouraging?”

“Encouraging?” I echoed. “I don’t see how. If a corpse buried eighteen months doesn’t look like a corpse, how would you expect it to look — like a living person?”

His eyes, wide and serious, met mine above the rim of his champagne glass. “But certainly; what else?” he answered, quite as if I’d asked him whether three and two made five.

“You recall how I compared myself to an analyst last night? *Bon*, this is the first step in my analysis. I cannot say with certainty just what we have to fight, but I think that I can say with surety what it is not we find ourselves opposed to. You asked me jestingly if I had thought to find a body seemingly alive and sleeping in that casket. Frankly, I shall say I did. Do you know what that would have portended?”

“That Martin was either drunk, crazy or a monumental liar,” I answered without hesitation.

“*Non*, not at all, unfortunately. It would have meant that we were dealing with a vampire, a corpse undead, which keeps itself sustained by sucking live men’s blood. There lay a dreadful danger, for as you doubtless know, those whom the vampire battens on soon die, or seem to die, but actually they enter in that half-world of the dead-alive, and are vampires in their turn. From such a fate, at least, Monsieur

and Madame Taviton are safe. *Eh bien*, I have but started on my work. It is now incumbent on me to determine what it is we fight. I was considering the evidence when you came in:

“From what we know of Madame Taviton the first, she was a person of strong passions. Indeed, her whole existence centered on her appetites. It was not for nothing that the Fathers of the Church classed lust among the seven deadly sins. And she had so surrendered to her passions that she might be called one single flaming, all-consuming lust wrapped in a little envelope of charming flesh. *Tiens*, the flesh is dead, snuffed out of life in all its charm of evil beauty, but the lust lives on, quenchless as the fires of hell. Also hate survives, and hate is a very real and potent force. As yet this evil thing of lust and hate and vanity has not found strength to take material form, but that will come, and soon, I think, and when it comes I fear she will be bent on working mischief. Hatred is a thing that gains in strength while it feeds upon itself.”

“But according to Taviton she came first as a perfume, then made him feel her fierce sadistic kisses,” I objected. “That’s pretty near materialization, isn’t it?”

“Near, but not quite,” he answered. “Everything which this one wants she takes. When she came as a perfume she had not strength to make her presence physically felt, but by *willing* him to smell the scent she turned his thoughts on her. Thoughts are things, my friend, make no mistake concerning that. Once Monsieur Taviton was thinking of her, she was able from the psychoplasm he thus generated to construct the invisible but able-to-be-felt body with which she fondled and caressed him, ever concentrating his thoughts more strongly on her memory, thus gaining greater strength.”

“I don’t follow you,” I countered. “You say she made him think of her, and merely from that—”

“Entirely from that, *mon vieux*. This psychoplasm, which we cannot certainly define any better than we can electricity, is something generated by the very act of thinking. It is to the mind what ectoplasm is to the body. Apparently it is more substantial than mere vibrations from the body, and seems, rather, to be an all-penetrating and imponderable emanation which is rapidly dissipated in the atmosphere, but in certain circumstances may be collected, condescended and energized by the will of a skilled spiritualist medium — or an active discarnate intelligence. Generally in such cases it becomes faintly luminous in a dark room; again, when very strongly concentrated, it may be made the vehicle to transmit force — to hurl a jar of roses or snatch a strand of pearls, by example.”

“Or to inflict a bite?”

“Most especially to inflict a bite,” he nodded. “That adds fuel to the ready-blazing fire, more power to the dynamo which already hums with power-generation. The Scriptures

speaking more categorically than is generally realized when they affirm the blood is the life. With the imbibition of the emanations of big rich, warm blood she gained the strength to make it possible for her to thrust herself between him and his bride upon their wedding night, to choke poor Madame Agnes senseless, and to play the sadist wanton with him after death as she had done so many times in life. But her very wanton wickedness shall put her in our power, I damn think.”

“How’s that?”

“She follows such a pattern that her acts can be predicted with a fair degree of certainty. She hates poor Madame Agnes so that she will go to any length to plague her. She stole her pearls, she stole her emeralds. Now the pearls have been recovered. If Madame Agnes were to put them on again, do not you think that she could come and try to repossess them?”

“It’s possible.”

“Possible, *pardieu*? It is more than possible; it is likely!”

“Well—”

“Yes, my friend, I think that it is well. Ghostly manifestations, materializations of spirit-forms, are peculiarly creatures of the darkness and the twilight. Bright sunlight seems to kill them as it kills spore-bearing germs. So do certain forms of sound-vibration, the sonorous notes of church bells and of certain kinds of gongs, for instance. High-frequency electric currents, the emanations of radium salt or the terrific penetrative force of Roentgen rays should have the same effect, *n’est-ce-pas*?”

“I suppose so, but I can’t say that I understand.”

“No matter, that is not essential, But if you will wait I’ll show you what I mean before you are much older. Meantime, the hour is late, the bottle empty and I have much to do tomorrow. Come let us go to bed.”

“All is prepared,” he informed me the next night at dinner. “I had some little difficulty in assembling my armament, but at last I have it all complete. We are ready to proceed at your convenience.”

“Proceed? Where?”

“To Monsieur Taviton’s. He telephoned me that the imitation pearls are ready, and — *corbleu*, I think that we shall see what we shall see tonight!”

The Tavitons were waiting for us in their drawing-room. Always poised and calm, Agnes nevertheless displayed something of that look of mingled hope and apprehension shown by relatives when someone dear to them has undergone a major operation. Looking at her pleading eyes, I almost expected to hear the old familiar “How is he doing, Doctor?” as I took her hand in greeting. Frazier was plainly on the rough edge of collapse, his movements jerky, eyes

furtive, voice sharpened to the point of shrillness.

“You’re sure that it will work?” he asked de Grandin.

“As sure as one can be of anything — which is, *hélas*, not very sure at all,” the Frenchman answered. “However, we can make the effort, eh, my friend?”

“What—” I began, but he motioned me to silence.

“*Madame*,” he bowed to Agnes in his courtly foreign fashion, “you are ready?”

“Quite, Doctor,” she replied, rising to cross the hall and spin the handles of the wall-safe. The tumblers clicked, the little door fell open, and from the strongbox she removed a long jewel-case of night-black plush. For a moment she regarded it half fearfully, then snapped it open, drew out the strand of gleaming pearls it held and clasped it round her throat.

“Why, those are surely not an *imi*—” I began when a brutal kick upon my shin warned me de Grandin wished me to keep silent.

Scarcely whiter than their wearer’s slender throat, the seagems glinted luminously as Agnes joined us in the drawing-room, cast an apprehensive glance around, then sank down in a chair beside the empty fireplace.

“Brandy or cream?” she asked matter-of-factly, busying herself with the coffee service on the table at her knee.

“Brandy, *s’il vous plaît*,” de Grandin answered, rising to receive his cup and snapping off the light-switch as he did so.

We were playing at the social amenities, but the very air was pregnant with expectancy. The rumble of a motor truck bound for the Hudson Tunnels seemed louder than an earthquake’s roar; the howling of a dog in the next yard was eery as the wailing of a banshee. I could hear the little French-gilt clock upon the mantelpiece beat off the seconds with its sharp, staccato tick, and in the hall beyond the more deliberate rhythm of the floor clock. In my waistcoat pocket I could hear my own watch clicking rapidly, and by concentrating on the varied tempos I could almost make them play a fugue. Autumn was upon us; through the open window came a gust of chilling air, fog-laden, billowing out the silk-net curtains and sending a quick shiver down my neck and spine. De Grandin took a lump of sugar in his spoon, poured brandy over it and set the flame of his briquette against it. It burned with a ghastly, bluish light. The dog in the next yard howled with a quavering of terror, his ululation rising in a long crescendo.

The strain was breaking me. “Confound that brute—” I muttered, rising from my chair, then cut my malediction off half uttered, while a sudden prickling came into my scalp and cheeks, and a lump of superheated sulfur seemed thrust in my throat. At the farther corner of the room, like a pale reflection of the alcoholic flare which burned above de

Grandin’s coffee cup, another light was taking form. It was like a monster pear, or, more precisely, like a giant water-drop, and it grew bright and dim with slow and pulsing alternations.

I tried to speak, but found my tongue gone mute; I tried to warn de Grandin with a sign, but could not stir a muscle.

And then, before I had a chance to repossess my faculties, it struck. Like a shot hurled from a catapult something sprang across the room, something vaguely human in its shape, but a dreadful parody on humankind. I heard Frazier give a startled cry of terror and surprise as the charging horror dropped upon his shoulders like a panther on a stag, flinging him against the floor with such force that his breath escaped him in a panting gasp.

Agnes’ scream was like an echo of her husband’s startled cry, but the spirit of the little girl who dared the snake to save her youthful sweetheart still burned gallantly. In an instant she was over Frazier, arms outstretched protectingly, eyes wide with horror, but steady with determination.

A laugh, light, titillating, musical, but utterly unhuman, sounded in the dark, and the visitant reached out and ripped the pearls from Agnes’ throat as easily as if they had been strung on cobweb. Then came the ripping sound of rending silk, the flutter of torn draperies, and Agnes crouched above her man as nude as when the obstetrician first beheld her, every shred of clothes rent off by the avenging fury.

Birth-nude, across the prostrate body of the man they faced each other, one intent on horrid vengeance, one on desperate defense.

Agnes’ lissome body was perfection’s other self. From slender, high-arched feet to narrow, pointed breasts and swaying golden hair she was without a flaw, as sweetly made and slender as a marble naiad carved by Praxiteles.

Her opponent was incarnate horror. Hideous as a harpy, it still was reminiscent of Elaine as an obscene caricature recalls the memory of a faithful portrait. Where red-gold hair as fine as sericeous web had crowned Elaine’s small head, this phantom wore an aureole of flickering tongues of fire — or hair which blew and fluttered round the face it framed in the blast of some infernal superheated breeze. The eyes, which glowed with virid phosphorescence, started forward in their sockets, lids peeled away until it seemed that they had broken with the pressure of the eyeballs. The mouth was squared in a grimace of fury, and the white, curved teeth gleamed pale against the blowzed and staring lips like dead men’s bones drowned in a pool of blood. Fingers, strictly speaking, there were none upon the hands, but a thick and jointless thumb and two bifurcations of the flesh made beast-paws at the end of either wrist, curved claws like vultures’ talons growing at their tips. Upon each heel there grew a

horny, spur-like knob, and the knotty-jointed toes were mailed with claws like digits of some unclean carrion fowl. The body was well formed and comely, but the breasts were long and pendulous, like pyriform excrescences hanging half-deflated from the thorax.

I put my hand across my eyes to shut the horrid vision out, for in an instant I was sure the dreadful, claw-armed thing would tear the quivering flesh from Agnes' bones as it had rent the clothing from her body.

A rumbling, like the moving of a heavy piece of furniture, sounded at my back, and as I turned around I saw de Grandin trundling a dental X-ray stand across the floor. As an artillerist prepares his piece for action, the Frenchman swung the lens of his contrivance into line, and next instant came a snapping crackle as the high potential current set the cathode rays to darting through the Crookes' tube.

"*Ha, Madame la Revenante*, you see that Jules de Grandin is prepared!" he announced, the elation of the killer who takes pleasure in his task shining in his small blue eyes and sounding in his voice.

As the Roentgen ray fell on the clawing horror it let out a shriek that pierced my eardrums like a white-hot wire.

As though the devilish form were painted on the atmosphere and de Grandin held a powerful eraser, it was wiped away — obliterated utterly — while he turned the flanged lens of his apparatus back and forth, up and down, like a gardener directing water from a hose.

The last faint vestige of the dreadful apparition vanished, and he snapped down the trigger which controlled the current.

"Look to Madame Agnes, my friend, *elle est nue comme la main!*" he commanded, rushing from the room to seize the telephone, dial a number in hot haste and call, "*Allo*, is Monsieur Martin there? *Très bien, Monsieur*, proceed at once, we wait on you!"

I advanced a step toward Agnes, mute with sheer embarrassment, but I might have been a chair or sofa, for all the notice she gave me. Unconscious of her nudity as though the very beauty of her body were sufficient raiment, she bent above her husband and clasped his head against her bosom. "My dear," she murmured crooningly, like a mother who would soothe her fretful babe, "my poor, sweet, persecuted dear, it's all right now. She's gone, beloved, gone for ever; nothing more shall come between us now!"

"Come away, thou species of a cabbage plant!" de Grandin's whisper sounded in my ear. "That conversation, it is sacred. Would you eavesdrop, *cochon?* Have you no delicacy, no decency at all, *cordieu?*"

With due reverence Jules de Grandin raised the bottle with its green-wax seal flaunting the proud N of the Emperor and

poured a scant two ounces of the ancient cognac into the bell-shaped brandy snifters. "But it was simple, once I had the cue," he told me smilingly. "First of all, my problem was to find what sort of thing opposed us. Monsieur Martin's assurance that the body was a naturally-dead one greatly simplified my task. Very well, then, I must proceed not against a vampire or a vitalized corpse but against a thing which had a psychoplasmic body. *Ha*, that was not so difficult, for I knew all surely that the powerful vibrations of the Roentgen ray would batter it to nothingness if I could but contrive to lure it within range of my machine.

"Good, then. Madame Elaine is cruel, vicious, lustful. Also she is panting for revenge on Madame Agnes, and perhaps she tires of making savage love to Monsieur Frazier, and will do him violence, too. So I contrive my plan. With an imitation of the pearls we lured her to the house. She comes, all fitted with fury to wreak a horrid vengeance on Monsieur and Madame Taviton. She strikes, *mon Dieu*, how savagely she strikes! But so do I, by blue! I have rented from the dental *dépôt* a small X-ray apparatus, one which can be aimed as though it were a gun. When her fierce specter rises in our midst I meet it with my X-ray fire. I wither her, I break her up, *parbleu*, I utterly destroy her, me!

"Meanwhile, I have arrangements made with Monsieur Martin. He has disinterred her body, has it ready at the crematory, waiting my instructions. The minute I have triumphed with my X-ray gun, I call him on the telephone. Immediately into the retort of the crematory goes all that is mortal of Madame Elaine. Into nothingness goes that spirit-form she has constructed with such labor. Body and spirit, she is through, completed; finished! Yes, it is so."

"But d'ye mean to tell me you can destroy a ghost with Roentgen rays?" I asked incredulously.

"Tell me, my friend," he answered earnestly, "were you in the Taviton drawing-room this evening?"

"Why, of course, but—"

"And did you see what happened when I turned the X-ray on that spectral horror?"

"I did, but—"

"Then why ask foolish questions? Are not your own two eyes sufficient witnesses?"

Silenced, I ruminated for a moment; then: "Elaine was beautiful," I mused aloud, "yet that thing we saw tonight was—"

"The death mask of her soul!" he supplied. "The body she was born into was beautiful, but her soul and mind were hideous. When she was no longer able to dwell in her natural body, she made herself a second body out of psychoplasm. And it matched the mind which fashioned it as a plastic cast will duplicate the model to which it is applied. The creature which the world saw while she was in the flesh was a false-

face, the whitewashed outside of the reeking charnel which was she. Tonight we saw her as she truly was. *Tiens*, the sight was not a pretty one, I think.”

“But—”

“*Ah bah!*” he interrupted with a yawn. “Why speculate? I have told you all I know, and much that I surmise. Me, I am tired as twenty horses. Let us take a drink and go to sleep my friend. What greater happiness can life give tired men?”

Weird Tales

NOVEMBER

WITCH-HOUSE

an intriguing and thrilling
story about Jules de Grandin,
master of the supernatural
By SEABURY QUINN

*All
Stories
Complete*

Paul Ernst
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Witch-House

STREET LIGHTS were coming on and the afterglow was paling in the west beneath the first faint stars as we completed our late dinner and moved to the veranda for coffee and liqueurs. Sinking lazily into a wicker deck chair, Jules de Grandin stretched his womanishly small feet out straight before him and regarded the gleaming tips of his brightly polished calfskin pumps with every evidence of satisfaction.

“*Morbleu*,” he murmured dreamily as he drained his demitasse and set his cigar glowing before he raised his tiny glass of *kaiserschmarrn*, “say what you will, Friend Trowbridge, I insist there is no process half so pleasant as the combination of digestion and slow poisoning by nicotine and alcohol. It is well worth going hungry to enjoy — ah, *pour l’amour d’une souris verte*, be quiet, great-mouthed one!” he broke off as the irritable stutter of the phone bell cut in on his philosophizing. “*Parbleu*, the miscreant who invented you was one of humankind’s worst enemies!”

“Hullo, Trowbridge,” hailed a voice across the wire, “this is Friebergh. Sorry to trouble you, but Greta’s in bad shape. Can you come out right away?”

“Yes, I suppose so,” I replied, not especially pleased at having my postprandial breathing-spell impinged on by a country call. “What seems to be the matter?”

“I wish I knew,” he answered. “She just came home from Wellesley last week, and the new house seemed to set her nerves on edge. A little while ago her mother thought she heard a noise up in her bedroom, and when she went in, there was Greta lying on the floor in some sort of fainting-fit. We don’t seem able to rouse her, and—”

“All right,” I interrupted, thinking regretfully of my less than half-smoked cigar, “I’ll be right out. Keep her head low and loosen any tight clothing. If you can make her swallow, give her fifteen drops of aromatic ammonia in a wine-glassful of water. Don’t attempt to force any liquids down her throat, though; she might strangle.”

“And this Monsieur Friebergh was unable to give you any history of the causal condition of his daughter’s swoon?” de Grandin asked as we drove along the Albemarle Road toward the Friebergh place at Scandia.

“No,” I responded. “He said that she’s just home from college and has been nervous ever since her arrival. Splendid case history, isn’t it?”

“*Eh bien*, it is far from being an exhaustive one, I grant,” he answered, “but if every layman understood the art of diagnosis we doctors might be forced to go to work, *n’est-*

ce-pas?”

Though Greta Friebergh had recovered partial consciousness when we arrived, she looked like a patient just emerging from a lingering fever. Attempts to get a statement from her met with small response, for she answered slowly, almost incoherently, and seemed to have no idea concerning the cause of her illness. Once she murmured drowsily, “Did you find the kitten? Is it all right?”

“What?” I demanded. “A kitten—”

“She’s delirious, poor child,” whispered Mrs. Friebergh. “Ever since I found her she’s been talking of a kitten she found in the bathroom.

“I thought I heard Greta cry,” she added, “and ran up here to see if she were all right. Her bedroom was deserted, but the bathroom door was open and I could hear the shower running. When I called her and received no answer I went in and found her lying on the floor. She was totally unconscious, and remained so till just a few minutes ago.”

“U’m?” murmured Jules de Grandin as he made a quick inspection of the patient, then rose and stalked into the bathroom which adjoined the chamber. “Tell me, Madame,” he called across his shoulder, “is it customary that you leave the windows of your bathroom screenless?”

“Why, no, of course not,” Mrs. Friebergh answered. “There’s an opaque screen in — good gracious, it’s fallen out!”

The little Frenchman turned to her with upraised brows. “Fallen, *Madame*? It was not fastened to the window-casing, then?”

“Yes, it was,” she answered positively. “I saw to that myself. The carpenters attached it to the casing with two bolts, so that we could take it out and clean it, but so firmly that it could not be blown in. I can’t understand—”

“No matter,” he broke in. “Forgive my idle curiosity, if you please. I’m sure that Doctor Trowbridge has completed his examination, now, so we can discuss your daughter’s ailment with assurance.”

To me he whispered quickly as the mother left the room: “What do you make of the objective symptoms, *mon ami*? Her pulse is soft and frequent, she has a fluttering heart, her eyes are all suffused, her skin is hot and dry, her face is flushed and hectic. No ordinary fainting-fit, you’ll say? No case of heat-prostration?”

“No-o,” I replied as I shook my head in wonder, “there’s certainly no evidence of heat-prostration. I’d be inclined to

say she'd suffered an arterial hemorrhage, but there's no blood about, so—"

"Let us make a more minute examination," he ordered, and rapidly inspected Greta's face and scalp, throat, wrists and calves, but without finding so much as a pin-prick, much less a wound sufficient to cause syncope.

"*Mon Dieu*, but this is strange!" he muttered. "It has the queerness of the devil, this! Perhaps she bled internally, but — *ah-ha, regardez-vous, mon vieux!*"

Searching further for some sign of wound, he had unfastened her pajama jacket, and the livid spot he pointed to seemed the key which might unlock the mystery that baffled us. Against the smooth white flesh beneath the gentle swell of her left breast there showed a red and angry patch, such as might have shone had a vacuum cup been pressed some time against the skin, and in the center of the ecchymosis were four tiny punctures spaced so evenly apart that they seemed to make an almost perfect square three-quarters of an inch or so in size.

The discolored spot with its core of tiny wounds seemed insignificant to me, but the little Frenchman looked at it as though he had discovered a small, deadly reptile coiled against the girl's pale skin.

"*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" he murmured softly to himself. "Can such things be here, in New Jersey, in the twentieth centennial of our time?"

"What are you maundering about?" I asked him irritably, "She couldn't possibly have lost much blood through these. Why, she seems almost drained dry, yet there's not a spot of blood upon those punctures. They look to me like insect bites of some kind; even if they were wide open they're not large enough to leak a cubic centimeter of blood in half an hour."

"Blood is not entirely colloidal," he responded slowly. "It will penetrate the tissues to some slight extent, especially if sufficient suction be employed."

"But it would have required a powerful suction—"

"*Précisément*, and I make no doubt that such was used, my friend. Me, I do not like the look of this at all. No, certainly." Abruptly he raised his shoulders in a shrug. "We are here as physicians," he remarked. "I think a quarter-grain of morphine is indicated. After that, bed-rest and much rich food. Then, one hopes, she will achieve a good recovery."

"How is she, Trowbridge?" Olaf Friebergh asked as we joined him in the pleasant living-room. He was a compact, lean man in his late fifties, but appeared younger, and the illusion of youth was helped by the short mustache, still quite dark, the firm-cheeked, sunburned face and hazel eyes which, under clear-cut brows, had that brightness which betokens both good health and an interest in life.

"Why, there's nothing really serious the matter," I answered. "She seems quite weak, and there's something rather queer—"

"There's something queer about the whole dam' case," he cut in almost brusquely. "Greta's been on edge since the moment that she came here; nervous as a cat and jumpy and irritable as the very devil. D'ye suppose hysteria could have caused this fainting-fit?"

De Grandin eyed him speculatively a moment; then: "In just what way has Mademoiselle Greta's nervousness been noticeable, *Monsieur?*" he asked. "Your theory of hysteria has much to recommend it, but an outline of the case might help us greatly toward a diagnosis.

Friebergh stirred his highball thoughtfully a moment; then, "D'ye know about this house?" he asked irrelevantly.

"But no, *Monsieur*; what has it to do with *Mademoiselle* your daughter?"

"Just what I'm wondering," Friebergh answered. "Women are weird brutes, Doctor, all of 'em. You never know what fool tricks nerves will play on 'em. This place belonged to one of my remotest ancestors. You're probably aware that this section was originally settled by the Swedes under William Usselinx, and though the Dutch captured it in 1655 many of the Swedish settlers stayed on not caring much who governed them as long as they were permitted to pursue their business in peace. Oscar Friebergh my great-great-grandfather's half-brother, built this house and had his piers and warehouses down on Raritan Bay. It was from here he sent his ships to Europe and even to the Orient, and to this house he brought the girl he married late in life.

"Theirs was quite a romance. Loaded with silks and wine, the *Good Intent*, my uncle's fastest ship, put in at Portugal for a final replenishment of victuals and water before setting sail for America on the last Sunday in June, 1672. The townsfolk were making holiday, for a company of witches and wizards, duly convicted by ecclesiastical courts, had been turned over to the secular arm for execution, and a great fire had been kindled on the Monte Sao Jorge. My uncle and the master of the ship, together with several of the seamen, were curious to see what was going on, so they ascended the hill where, surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, a perfect forest of stakes had been set up, and to each of these were tied two or three poor wretches who writhed and shrieked as the faggots round their feet took fire. The tortured outcasts' screams and the stench of burning flesh fairly sickened the Swedish sailors, and they were turning away from the accursed place to seek the clear air of the harbor when my uncle's attention was attracted to a little girl who fought desperately with the soldiers to break through to the flaming stakes. She was the daughter of a witch and a warlock who were even then roasting at the same stake, chained back to

back as they were said to dance at meetings of the witches' coven. The soldiers cuffed her back good-naturedly, but a Dominican friar who stood by bade them let her through to burn, since, being of the witch-folk, her body would undoubtedly burn soon or later, just as her soul was doomed to burn eternally. The sailormen protested vigorously at this, and my uncle caught the wild girl by the wrists and drew her back to safety.

"She was a thin little thing, dressed in filthy rags, half starved, and unspeakably dirty. In her arms she clutched a draggled-looking white kitten which arched its back and fluffed its tail and spat venomously at the soldiers and the priest. But when my uncle pulled the girl to him both child and kitten ceased to struggle, as if they realized that they had found a friend. The Spanish priest ordered them away with their pitiful prize, saying she was born of the witchpeople and would surely grow to witchcraft and work harm to all with whom she came in contact, but adding it was better that she work her wicked spells on Englishmen and heretics than on true children of the Church.

"My, uncle lifted the child in his arms and bore her to the *Good Intent*, and the moment that he set her down upon the deck she fell upon her knees and took his hands and kissed them and thanked him for his charity in a flood of mingled Portuguese and English.

"For many days she lay like death, only occasionally jumping from her bunk and screaming, '*Padre, Madre — el fuego! el fuego!*' then falling back, hiding her face in her hands and laughing horribly. My uncle coaxed and comforted her, feeding her with his own hands and waiting on her like a nurse; so by degrees she quieted, and long before they raised the coast of Jersey off their bow she was restored to complete health and, though she still seemed sad and troubled, her temper was so sweet and her desire to please everybody so apparent that every man aboard the ship, from cabin boy to captain, was more than half in love with her.

"No one ever knew her real age. She was very small and so thin from undernourishment that she seemed more like a child than a young woman when they brought her on the *Good Intent*. None of the seamen spoke Portuguese, and her English was so slight that they could not ask her about her parents or her birthplace while she lay ill, and when she had recovered normal health it seemed her memory was gone; for though she took to English with surprising aptitude, she seemed unable to remember anything about her former life, and for kindness' sake none would mention the *auto da fé* in which her parents perished. She didn't even know her name, apparently, so my uncle formally christened her Kristina; using the Lutheran baptismal ceremony, and for surname chose to call her Beacon as a sort of poetical commem-

oration of the fire from which he saved her when her parents had been burnt. It seems she—"

"My dear chap," I broke in, "this is an interesting story, I'll admit, but what possible connection can it have with—"

"Be silent, if you please, my friend," de Grandin ordered sharply. "The connection which you seek is forming like the image as the sculptor chips away the stone, or I am a far greater fool than I have reason to suspect. Say on, *Monsieur*," he ordered Friebergh, "this story is of greater import than you realize, I think. You were informing us of the strange girl your uncle-several-times-removed had rescued from the Hounds of God in Portugal?"

Friebergh smiled appreciation of the little Frenchman's interest. "The sea air and good food, and the genuine affection with which everyone on shipboard regarded her had made a great change in the half-starved, half-mad little foundling by the time the *Good Intent* came back to Jersey," he replied. "From a scrawny little ragamuffin she had grown into a lovely, blooming girl, and there's not much doubt the townsfolk held a carnival of gossip when the *Good Intent* discharged the beautiful young woman along with her cargo of Spanish wines and French silks at the quay.

"Half the young bloods of the town were out to court her; for in addition to her beauty she was Oscar Friebergh's ward, and Oscar Friebergh was the richest man for miles around, a bachelor and well past fifty. Anyone who got Kristina for his wife would certainly have done himself a handsome favor.

"Apparently the girl had everything to recommend her, too. She was as good and modest as she was lovely, her devoutness at church service was so great it won the minister's unstinted praise, her ability as a housekeeper soon proved itself, and my uncle's house, which had been left to the casual superintendence of a cook and staff of Negro slaves, soon became one of the best kept and most orderly households in New Jersey. No one could get the better of Kristina in bargain. When cheating tradesmen sought to take advantage of her obvious youth and probable inexperience, she would fix her great, unfathomable eyes on them, and they would flush and stammer like schoolboys caught in mischief and own their fault at once. Besides her church and household duties she seemed to have no interest but my uncle, and the young men who came wooing met with cool reception. Less than a year from the day she disembarked, the banns for her wedding to my uncle were posted on the church door, and before the gossip which her advent caused had time to cool, she was Mistress Friebergh, and assumed a leading place in the community.

"For nineteen years they lived quietly in this house, and while my uncle aged and weakened she grew into charming,

mature womanhood, treating the old man with a combination of wifely and daughterly devotion, and taking over active management of his affairs when failing sight and memory rendered him incompetent.”

Fribergh paused and drew reflectively at his cigar. “I don’t suppose you’d know what happened in New England in 1692?” he asked de Grandin.

The Frenchman answered with a vigorous double nod. “*Parbleu*, I do, indeed, Monsieur. That year, in Salem, Massachusetts, there were many witchcraft trials, and—”

“Quite so,” our host broke in. “Parish and the Mathers set the northern colonies afire with their witchcraft persecutions. Fortunately, not much of the contagion spread outside New England, but:

“Old Oscar Fribergh had been failing steadily, and though they cupped and leeches him and fed him mixtures of burnt toads, bezoar stone, cloves, and even moss scraped from the skull of a pirate who had been hanged in chains, he died in a coma following a violent seizure of delirium in which he cursed the day that he had taken the witch’s brat to his bosom.

“Oscar had sworn his crew to secrecy concerning Kristina’s origin, and it seems that they respected the vow while he lived; but some few of them, grown old and garrulous, found their memories suddenly quickened over their glasses of grog after the sexton had set the sods above old Oscar’s grave, and evinced a desire to serve gossip and scandal rather than the memory of a master no longer able to reproach them for oath-breaking. There were those who recollected perfectly how the girl Kristina had passed unharmed through the flames and bid her burning parents fond farewell, then came again straight through the flames to put her hand in Oscar Fribergh’s and bid him carry her beyond the seas. Others recalled how she had calmed a storm by standing at the ship’s rail and reciting incantations in a language not of human origin, and still others told with bated breath how the water of baptism had scalded her as though it had been boiling when Oscar Fribergh poured it on her brow.

“The whole township knew her singing, too. When she was about her household tasks or sewing by the window, or merely sitting idly, she would sing, not loudly, but in a sort of crooning voice; yet people passing in the road before the house would pause to listen, and even children stopped their noisy play to hear her as she sang those fascinating songs in a strange tongue which the far-voyaged sailor folk had never heard and which were set to tunes the like of which were never played on flute or violin or spinet, yet for all their softness seemed to fill the air with melody as the woods are filled with bird-songs in late April. People shook their heads

at recollection of those songs, remembering how witches spoke a jargon of their own, known only to each other and their master, Satan, and recalling further that the music used in praise of God was somber as befitted solemn thoughts of death and judgment and the agonies of hell.

“Her kitten caused much comment, too. The townsfolk recollected how she bore a tiny white cat beneath her arm when first she tripped ashore, and though a score of years had passed, the kitten had not grown into a cat, but still as small as when it first touched land, frisked and frolicked in the Fribergh house, and played and purred and still persisted in perpetual, supernatural youth.

“Among the villagers was a young man named Karl Pettersen, who had wooed Kristina when she first came, and took the disappointment of refusal of his marriage offer bitterly. He had married in the intervening years, but a smallpox epidemic had robbed his wife of such good looks as she originally had, and continued business failures had conspired to rob him of his patrimony and his wife’s dowry as well; so when Oscar Fribergh died he held Karl’s notes of hand for upward of five hundred pounds, secured by mortgages upon his goods and chattels and some farming-land which had come to him at marriage.

“When the executors of Oscar’s will made inventory they found these documents which virtually made the widow mistress of the Pettersen estate, and notified the debtor that he must arrange for payment. Karl went to see Kristina late one evening, and what took place at the interview we do not know, though her servants later testified that he shrieked and shouted and cried out as though in torment, and that she replied by laughing at his agony. However that might be, the records show that he was stricken with a fit as he disrobed for bed that night, that he frothed and foamed at the mouth like a mad dog, and made queer, growling noises in his throat. It is recorded further that he lay in semi-consciousness for several days, recovering only long enough to eat his meals, then lapsing back again into delirium. Finally, weak but fully conscious, he sat up in bed, sent for the sheriff, the minister and the magistrate, and formally denounced Kristina as a witch.

“I’ve said that we escaped the general horror of witch persecution which visited New England, but if old records are to be believed we made up in ferocity what we lacked in quantity. Kristina’s old and influential friends were dead, the Swedish Lutheran church had been taken over by the Episcopacy and the incumbent was an Englishman whose youth had been indelibly impressed by Matthew Hopkins’ witch-findings. Practically every important man in the community was a former disappointed suitor, and while they might have forgotten this, their wives did not. Moreover, while care and illness and multiple maternity had left their

traces on these women, Kristina was more charmingly seductive in the ripeness of maturity than she had been in youth, What chance had she?

“She met their accusations haughtily, and refused to answer vague and rambling statements made against her. It seemed the case against her would break down for want of evidence until Karl Pettersen’s wife remembered her familiar. Uncontradicted testimony showed this same small animal, still a kitten, romped and played about the house, though twenty years had passed since it first came ashore. No natural cat could live so long; nothing but a devil’s imp disguised in feline shape could have retained its youth so marvelously. This, the village wise ones held, was proof sufficient that Kristina was a witch and harbored a familiar spirit. The clergyman preached a sermon on the circumstance, taking for his text the twenty-seventh verse of the twentieth chapter of Leviticus: ‘A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death.’

“They held her trial on the village green. The records say she wore a shift of scarlet silk, which is all her persecutors would allow her from her wardrobe. Preliminary search had failed to find the devil’s mark or witch-teat through which her familiar was supposed to nourish itself by sucking her blood; so at her own request Mistress Pettersen was appointed to the task of hunting for it *coram judice*.

“She had supplied herself with pricking-pins, and at a signal from the magistrate ripped the scarlet mantle from Kristina, leaving her stark naked in the center of a ring of cruel and lustful eyes. A wave of smothering shame swept over her, and she would have raised her hands to shield her bosom from the lecherous stares of loafers congregated on the green, but her wrists were firmly bound behind her. As she bent her head in a paroxysm of mortification, the four-inch bodkin in the Pettersen woman’s hand fleshed itself first in her thigh, then her side, her shoulder, her neck and her breast, and she writhed in agonizing postures as her tender flesh was stabbed now here, now there, while the rabble roared and shouted in delight.

“The theory, you know, was that at initiation into witchhood the devil marked his new disciple with a bite, and from this spot the imp by which the witch worked her black magic drew its sustenance by sucking her blood. This devil’s mark, or witch-teat was said to be insensible to pain, but as it often failed to differ in appearance from the rest of the body’s surface, it was necessary for the searcher to spear and stab the witch repeatedly until a spot insensible to pain was found. The nervous system can endure a limited amount of shock, after which it takes refuge in defensive anesthesia. This seems to have been the case with poor Kristina; for

after several minutes of torment she ceased to writhe and scream, and her torturer announced the mark found. It was a little area of flesh beneath the swell of her left breast, roughly square in shape and marked off by four small scars which looked like needle-wounds set about three-quarters of an inch apart.

“But the finding of the mark was inconclusive. While a witch would surely have it, an innocent person might possess something simulating it; so there remained the test of swimming. Water was supposed to reject a witch’s body; so if she were tied and thrown into a pond or stream, proof of guilt was deemed established if she floated.

They cross-tied her, making her sit tailor-fashion and binding the thumb of her right hand so tightly to the great toe of her left foot that the digits soon turned blue for lack of circulation, then doing the same with her left thumb and right great toe, after which she was bundled in a bed-sheet which was tied at the corners above her head, and the parcel was attached to a three-fathom length of rope and towed behind a rowboat for a distance of three-quarters of a mile in Raritan Bay.

“At first the air within the sheet buoyed up the bundle and its contents, and the crowd gave vent to yells of execration. ‘She floats, she floats, the water will have none of her; bring the filthy witch ashore and burn her!’ they shouted, but in a little while the air escaped from the wet sheet, and though Kristina sank as far down in the water as the length of rope permitted, there was no effort made to draw her up until the boat had beached. She was dead when finally they dragged her out upon the shingle.

“Karl Pettersen confessed his error and declared the devil had misled him into making a false accusation, and, her innocence proved by her drowning, Kristina was accorded Christian burial in consecrated ground, and her husband’s property, in which she had a life estate, reverted to my ancestor. One of the first things he did was to sell this house, and it went through a succession of ownerships till I bought it at auction last autumn and had it reconditioned as a summer home. We found the old barn filled with household goods, and had them reconditioned, too. This furniture was once Kristina Friebergh’s.”

I looked around the big, low-ceilinged room with interest. Old-fashioned chintz, patterned with quaint bouquets of roses, hung at the long windows. Deep chairs and sofas were covered with a warm rose-red that went well with the gray woodwork and pale green walls. A low coffee table of pear wood, waxed to a satin finish, stood before a couch; an ancient mirror framed in gilt hung against one wall, while against another stood a tall buhl cabinet and a chest of drawers of ancient Chinese nanmu wood, brown as withered

oak leaves and still exhaling a subtly faint perfume. Above the open fireplace hung an ancient painting framed in a narrow strip of gold.

“That’s Kristina,” volunteered our host as he nodded toward the portrait.

The picture was of a woman not young, not at all old; slender, mysterious, black hair shining smoothly back, deep blue eyes holding a far-off vision, as though they sensed the sufferings of the hidden places of the world and brooded on them; a keen, intelligent face of a clear pallor with small, straight nose, short upper lip and a mouth which would have been quite lovely had it not been so serious. She held a tiny kitten, a mere ball of white fluffiness, at her breast, and the hand supporting the small animal was the hand of one in whom the blood of ancient races ran, with long and slimly pointed fingers tipped with rosy nails. There was something to arrest attention in that face. The woman had the cold knowledge of death, ominous and ever present, on her.

“*La pauvre!*” de Grandin murmured as he gazed with interest at the portrait. “And what became of Monsieur Pettersen and his so highly unattractive wife?”

Frierbergh laughed, almost delightedly. “History seems to parallel itself in this case,” he answered. “Perhaps you’ve heard how the feud resulting from the Salem persecutions was resolved when descendants of accusers and accused were married? Well ... it seems that after Kristina drowned, executors of Oscar Frierbergh’s will could not find clue or trace of the notes and mortgages which Pettersen had signed. Everybody had suspicions how they came to disappear, for Mistress Pettersen was among the most earnest searchers of Kristina’s private papers when they sought a copy of the compact she had signed with Satan, but — in any event, Karl Pettersen began to prosper from the moment that Kristina died. Every venture which he undertook met with success. His descendants prospered, too. Two years ago the last male member of his line met Greta at a Christmas dance, and” — he broke off with a chuckle — “and they’ve been that way about each other from the first. I’m thinking they’ll be standing side by side beneath a floral bell and saying ‘I do’ before the ink on their diplomas has had much chance to dry.”

“All of which brings us back three centuries, and down to date — and Greta,” I responded somewhat sharply. “If I remember, you’d begun to tell us something about her hysterical condition and the effect this house had on her, when you detoured to that ancient family romance.”

“*Précisément, Monsieur,* the house,” de Grandin prompted. “I think that I anticipate you, but I should like to hear your statement—” He paused with interrogatively raised brows.

“Just so,” our host returned. “Greta has never heard the

story of Kristina, and Karl Pettersen, I’m sure, for I didn’t know it very well myself till I bought this house and started digging up the ancient records. She’d certainly never been in the house, nor even seen the plans, since the work of restoration was done while she was off to school; yet the moment she arrived she went directly to her room, as if she knew the way by heart. Incidentally, her room is the same one—”

“Occupied by Madame Kristina in the olden days!” supplied de Grandin.

“Good Lord! How’d you guess?”

“I did not guess, *Monsieur,*” the little Frenchman answered levelly; “I knew.”

“Humph. Well, the child has seemed to hate the place from the moment she first entered it. She’s been moody and distraught, complaining of a constant feeling of malaise and troubled sleep, and most of the time she’s been so irritable that there’s scarcely any living with her. D’ye suppose there’s something psychic in the place — something that the rest of us don’t feel, that’s worked upon her nerves until she had this fainting-fit tonight?”

“Not at all,” I answered positively. “The child’s been working hard at school, and—”

“Very likely,” Jules de Grandin interrupted, “Women are more finely attuned to such influences than men, and it is entirely possible that the tragedy these walls have witnessed has been felt subconsciously by your daughter, Monsieur Frierbergh.”

“Doctor Trowbridge, I don’t like this place,” Greta Frierbergh told me when we called on her next day. “It — there’s something about it that terrifies me; makes me feel as though I were somebody else.”

She raised her eyes to mine, half frightened, half wondering, and for a moment I had the eerie sensation of being confronted with the suffering ghost of a girl in the flesh.

“Like someone else?” I echoed. “How d’ye mean, my dear?”

“I’m afraid I can’t quite say, sir. Something queer, a kind of feeling of vague uneasiness coupled with a sort of ‘I’ve been here before’ sensation came to me the moment I stepped across the threshold. Everything, the house, the furniture, the very atmosphere, seemed to combine to oppress me. It was as if something old and infinitely evil — like the wiped-over memory of some terrifying childhood nightmare — were trying to break through to my consciousness. I kept reaching for it mentally, as one reaches for a half-remembered tune or a forgotten name; yet I seemed to realize that if I ever drew aside the veil of memory my sanity would crack. Do you understand me, Doctor?”

"I'm afraid I don't, quite, child," I answered. "You've had a trying time at school, and with your social program speeded up—"

Something like a grimace, the parody of a smile, froze upon de Grandin's face as he leant toward the girl. "Tell us, *Mademoiselle*," he begged, "was there something more, some tangibility, which matched this feeling of malaise?"

"Yes, there was!" responded Greta.

"And that—"

"Last night I came in rather late, all tired and out of sorts. Karl Pettersen and I had been playing tennis in the afternoon, and drove over to Keyport for dinner afterward. Karl's a sweet lad, and the moonlight was simply divine on the homeward drive, but—" The quick blood stained her face and throat as she broke off her narrative.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*, but?" de Grandin prompted.

She smiled, half bashfully, at him, and she was quite lovely when she smiled. It brightened the faintly sad expression of her mouth and raised her eyes, ever so little, at the corners. "It can't have been so long since you were young, Doctor," she returned. "What did you do on moonlight summer nights when you were alone with someone you loved terribly?"

"*Morbleu*," the little Frenchman chuckled, "the same as you, *petite*, no more, I think, and certainly no less!"

She smiled again, a trifle sadly, this time. "That's just the trouble," she lamented. "I couldn't."

"*Hein*, how is it you say, *Mademoiselle*?"

"I wanted to, Lord knows my lips were hungry and my arms were aching for him, but something seemed to come between us. It was as if I'd had a dish of food before me and hadn't eaten for a long, long time, then, just before I tasted it, a whisper came, 'It's poisoned!'"

"Karl was hurt and puzzled, naturally, and I tried my best to overcome my feeling of aversion, but for a moment when his lips were pressed to mine I had a positive sensation of revulsion. I felt I couldn't bear his touch, his kisses seemed to stifle me; if he hadn't let me go I think that I'd have fainted.

"I ran right in the house when we got home, just flinging a good-night to Karl across my shoulder, and rushed up to my room. 'Perhaps a shower will pull me out of it,' I thought, and so I started to disrobe, when—" Once more she paused, and now there was no doubt of it: the girl was terrified.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*, and then?" the Frenchman prompted softly.

"I'd slipped my jumper and culottes off, and let down my hair, preparatory to knotting it up to fit inside my shower cap, when I chanced to look into the mirror. I hadn't turned the light on, but the moonlight slanted through the window

and struck right on the glass; so I could see myself as a sort of silhouette, only" — again she paused, and her narrow nostrils dilated — "only it wasn't I!"

"*Sacré nom d'un fromage vert*, what is it that you tell us, *Mademoiselle*?" asked Jules de Grandin.

"It wasn't I reflected in that mirror. As I looked, the moonlight seemed to break and separate into a million little points of light, so that it was more like a mist powdered with diamond dust than a solid shaft of light; it seemed to be at once opaque yet startlingly translucent, with a sheen like that of flowing water, yet absorbing all reflections. Then suddenly, where I should have seen myself reflected in the mirror, I saw another form take shape, half veiled in the sparkling mist that seemed to fill the room, yet startlingly distinct. It was a woman, a girl, perhaps, a little older than I, but not much. She was tall and exquisitely slender, with full-blown, high-set breasts and skin as pale as ivory. Her hair was black and silken-fine and rippled down across her shoulders till it almost reached her knees, and her deep-blue eyes and lovely features held a look of such intense distress that I thought involuntarily of those horribly realistic mediæval pictures of the Crucifixion. Her shoulders were braced back, for she held her hands behind her as though they had been tied, and on her breast and throat and sides were numerous little wounds as though she had been stabbed repeatedly with something sharp and slender, and from every wound the fresh blood welled and trickled out upon the pale, smooth skin."

"She was—" began de Grandin, but the girl anticipated him.

"Yes," she told him, "she was nude. Nothing clothed her but her glorious hair and the bright blood streaming from her wounds.

"For a minute, maybe for an hour, we looked into each other's eyes, this lovely, naked girl and I, and it seemed to me that she tried desperately to tell me something, but though I saw the veins and muscles stand out on her throat with the effort that she made, no sound came from her tortured lips. Somehow, as we stood there, I felt a queer, uncanny feeling creeping over me. I seemed in some way to be identified with this other girl, and with that feeling of a loss of personality, a bitter, blinding rage seemed surging up in me. Gradually, it seemed to take some sort of form, to bend itself against a certain object, and with a start I realized that I was consumed with hatred; dreadful, crushing, killing hatred toward someone named Karl Pettersen. Not my Karl, especially, but toward everybody in the world who chanced to bear that name. It was a sort of all-inclusive hatred, something like the hatred of the Germans which your generation had in the World War. 'I can't — I won't hate Karl!' I heard myself exclaiming, and turned to face the

other girl. But she was not there.

“There I stood alone in the darkened, empty room with nothing but the moonlight — ordinary moonlight, now-slanting down across the floor.

“I turned the lights on right away and took a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia, for my nerves were pretty badly shot. Finally I got calmed down and went into the bathroom for my shower.

“I was just about to step into the spray, when I heard a little plaintive *mew* outside the window. When I crossed the room, there was the sweetest little fluffy white kitten perched on the sill outside the screen, its green eyes blinking in the light which streamed down from the ceiling-lamp and the tip of its pink tongue sticking out like the little end of thin-sliced ham you sometimes see peeping from behind the rolls in railway station sandwiches. I unhooked the screen and let the little creature in, and it snuggled up against my breast and puffed and blinked its knowing eyes at me, and then put up a tiny, pink-toed paw and began to wash its face.

“‘Would you like to take a shower with me, pussy?’ I asked it, and it stopped its washing and looked up at me as if to ask, ‘What did you say?’ then stuck its little nose against my side and began to lick me. You can’t imagine how its little rough tongue tickled.”

“And then, *Mademoiselle?*” de Grandin asked as Greta broke off smilingly and lay back on her pillows.

“Then? Oh, there wasn’t any then, sir. Next thing I knew I was in bed, with you and Doctor Trowbridge bending over me and looking as solemn and learned as a pair of owls. But the funny part of it all was that I wasn’t ill at all; just too tired to answer when you spoke to me.”

“And what became of this small kitten, *Mademoiselle?*” de Grandin asked.

“Mother didn’t see it. I’m afraid the little thing was frightened when I fell, and jumped out of the bathroom window.”

“U’m?” Jules de Grandin teased the needle-points of his mustache between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger; then: “And this so mysterious lady without clothing whom you saw reflected in your mirror, *Mademoiselle?* Could you, by any chance, identify her?”

“Of course,” responded Greta, matter-of-factly as though he’d asked her if she had studied algebra at school, “she was the girl whose portrait’s in the living-room downstairs, Kristina Friebergh.”

“Will you leave me in the village?” asked de Grandin as we left the Friebergh house. “I would supplement the so strange story which we heard last night by searching through the records at the church and court-house, too.”

Dinner was long overdue when he returned that evening,

and, intent upon his dressing, he waved my questioning aside while he shaved and took a hasty shower. Finally, when he had done justice to the salad and meringue glacé, he leant his elbows on the table, lit a cigarette and faced me with a level, serious glance.

“I have found out many things today, my friend,” he told me solemnly. “Some supplement the story which Monsieur Friebergh related; some cast new light upon it; others are, I fear, disquieting.

“By example: There is a story of the little kitten of which Monsieur Friebergh told us, the kitten which refused to grow into a cat. When poor Madame Kristina was first haled before the magistrates for trial, a most careful search was made for it, but nowhere could the searchers find it; yet during the *al fresco* trial several persons saw it now here, now there, keeping just outside the range of stone-throw, but at all times present. Further, when the ban of witchcraft had apparently been lifted by Madame Kristina’s inability to float and her burial within the churchyard close had been permitted, this so little kitten was seen nightly at her grave, curled up like a patch of snow against the greenery of the growing grass. Small boys shied stones at it, and more than once the village men went to the graveyard and took shots at it, but stone and bullet both were ineffective; the small animal would raise its head and look at those who sought to harm it with a sadly thoughtful glance, then go back to its napping on the grave. Only when approached too closely would it rouse itself, and when the hunter had almost succeeded in tiptoeing close enough to strike it with a club or sword it would completely vanish, only to reappear upon the grave when, tired out with waiting, its assailant had withdrawn to a safe distance.

“Eventually the townsfolk became used to it, but no horse would pass the cemetery while it lay upon its mistress’ grave without shying violently, and the most courageous of the village dogs shunned the graveyard as a place accursed. Once, indeed, a citizen took out a pair of savage mastiffs, determined to exterminate the little haunting beast, but the giant dogs, which would attack a maddened bull without a moment’s hesitation, quailed and cowered from the tiny bit of fluffy fur, nor could their master’s kicks and blows and insults force them past the graveyard gateway.”

“Well, what’s disquieting in that?” I asked. “It seems to me that if there were any sort of supernatural intervention in the case, it was more divine than diabolical. Apparently the townsfolk tried to persecute the little harmless cat to death exactly as they had its mistress. The poor thing died eventually, I suppose?”

“One wonders,” he returned as he pursed his lips and blew a geometrically perfect smoke-ring.

“Wonders what?”

“Many things, *parbleu*. Especially concerning its death and its harmlessness. Attend me, if you please: For several years the small cat persisted in its nightly vigils at the grave. Then it disappeared, and people thought no more about it. One evening Sarah Spotswood, a young farmer’s daughter, was passing by the graveyard, when she was accosted by a small white cat. The little creature came out in the road near where it winds within a stone’s-throw of the grave of Kristina Friebergh. It was most friendly, and when she stooped to fondle it, it leaped into her arms.”

He paused and blew another smoke-ring.

“Yes?” I prompted as he watched the cloudy circle sail a lazy course across the table-candles.

“Quite yes,” he answered imperturbably. “Sarah Spotswood went insane within a fortnight. She died without regaining reason. Generally she was a harmless, docile imbecile, but occasionally she broke out raving in delirium. At such times she would shriek and writhe as though in torment, and bleeding wounds appeared upon her sides and breast and throat. The madhouse-keepers thought she had inflicted injury upon herself, and placed her in a straitjacket when they saw the signs of the seizure coming on. It made no difference: the wounds accompanied each spell of madness, as though they were stigmata. Also, I think it worth while mentioning, a small white kitten, unknown to anybody in the madhouse, was always observed somewhere about the place when Sarah’s periods of mania came.

“Her end came tragically, too. She escaped surveillance on a summer afternoon, fled to a little near-by stream and cast herself into it. Though the water was a scant six inches deep, she lay upon her face until she died by drowning.

“Two other similar cases are recorded. Since Sarah Spotswood died in 1750 there have been three young women similarly seized, the history of each case revealing that the maniac had taken a stray white kitten for pet shortly before the onset of incurable madness, and that in every instance the re-appearance of this kitten, or an animal just like it, had coincided with return of manic seizures. Like their predecessor, each of these unfortunate young women succeeded in drowning herself. In view of these things would you call this kitten either dead or harmless?”

“You have a theory?” I countered.

“Yes — and no,” he answered enigmatically. “From such information as we have I am inclined to think the verdict rendered in Madame Kristina’s witch trial was a false one. While not an ill-intentioned one — unknowingly, indeed, perhaps — I think the lady was what we might call a witch; one who had power, whether she chose to exercise it or not, of working good or bad to fellow humans by means of supernatural agencies. It seems this little kitten which never

grew to cathood, which lay in mourning on her grave and which afflicted four unfortunate young women with insanity, was her familiar — a beast-formed demon through whose aid she might accomplish magic.”

“But that’s too utterly absurd!” I scoffed. “Kristina Friebergh died three centuries ago, while this kitten—”

”Did not necessarily die with her,” he interjected. “Indeed, my friend, there are many instances in witch-lore where the familiar has outlived its witch.”

“But why should it seek out other girls—”

“*Précisément*,” he answered soberly. “That, I damn think, is most significant. Witches’ imps, though they may be ambassadors from hell, are clothed in pseudo-natural bodies. Thus they have need of sustenance. This the witch supplies with her blood. It is at the insensitive spot known as the witch-mark or witch’s teat that the familiar is suckled. When Monsieur Friebergh told us of Madame Kristina’s trial, you will recall that he described the spot in which she felt no pain as an area roughly square in shape marked off by four small scars which looked like needle-wounds set about three-quarters of an inch apart? Consider, my friend — think carefully — where have you seen a cicatrix like that within the last few days?” His eyes, round and unwinking as those of a thoughtfully inclined tom-cat, never left mine as he asked the question.

“Why” — I temporized — “oh, it’s too absurd, de Grandin!”

“You do not answer, but I see you recognize the similarity,” he returned. “Those little ‘needle-wounds,’ *mon vieux*, were made by little kitten-teeth which pierced the white and tender skin of Mademoiselle Greta just before she swooned. She exhibited the signs of hemorrhage, that you will agree; yet we found no blood. *Pourquoi?* Because the little fluffy kitten which she took into her arms, the little beast which licked her with its tongue a moment before she lost consciousness, *sucked it from her body*. This cat-thing seems immortal, but it is not truly so. Once in so many years it must have sustenance, the only kind of sustenance which will enable it to mock at time, the blood of a young woman. Sarah Spotswood gave it nourishment, and lost her reason in the process, becoming, apparently, identified with the unfortunate Madame Kristina, even to showing the stigmata of the needle-wounds which that poor creature suffered at her trial. The manner of her death — by drowning — paralleled Kristina’s, also, as did those of the other three who followed her in madness — *after having been accosted by a small white kitten*.”

“Then what d’ye suggest?” I asked him somewhat irritably, but the cachinnation of the telephone cut in upon the question.

“Good Lord!” I told him as I hung up the receiver. “Now

it's young Karl Pettersen! His mother 'phoned to tell me he's been hurt, and—"

"Right away, at once; immediately," he broke in. "Let us hasten to him with all speed. Unless I make a sad mistake, his is no ordinary hurt, but one which casts a challenge in our faces. Yes, assuredly!"

I do not think I ever saw a man more utterly unstrung than young Karl Pettersen. His injury was trivial, amounting to scarcely more than a briar-scratch across his throat, but the agony of grief and horror showing in his face was truly pitiful, and when we asked him how the accident occurred his only answer was a wild-eyed stare and a sob-torn sentence he reiterated endlessly: "Greta, oh, Greta, how could you?"

"I think that there is something devilish here, Friend Trowbridge," whispered Jules de Grandin.

"So do I," I answered grimly. "From that wound I'd say the little fool has tried to kill himself after a puppy-lovers' quarrel. See how the cut starts underneath the condyle of the jaw, and tapers off and loses depth as it nears the median line? I've seen such cuts a hundred times, and—"

"But no," he interrupted sharply. "Unless the young *Monsieur* is left-handed he would have made the cut across the left side of his throat; this wound describes a slant across the right side. It was made by someone else — someone seated on his right, as, by example, in a motorcar.

"*Monsieur!*" he seized the boy by both his shoulders and shook him roughly. "Stop this childish weeping. Your wound is but a skin-scratch. It will heal almost with one night's sleep, but its cause is of importance. How did you get it, if you please?"

"Oh, Greta—" Karl began again, but the smacking impact of de Grandin's hand against his cheek cut short his wail.

"*Nom d'un coq*, you make me to lose patience with you!" cried the Frenchman. "Here, take a dose of this!" From his jacket pocket he produced a flask of cognac, poured a liberal portion out into a cup and thrust it into Karl's unsteady hand. "Ah, so; that is better," he pronounced as the lad gulped down the liquor. "Now, take more, *mon vieux*; we need the truth, and quickly, and never have I seen a better application of the proverb that in alcohol dwells truth."

Within five minutes he had forced the better portion of a pint of brandy down the young man's throat, and as the potent draft began to work, his incoherent babbling gave way to a melancholy but considered gravity which in other circumstances would have appeared comic.

"Now, man to man, *compagnon de débauche*, inform us what took place," the Frenchman ordered solemnly.

"Greta and I were out driving after dinner," answered Karl. "We've been nuts about each other ever since we met,

and today I asked her if she'd marry me. She'd been actin' sort o' queer and distant lately, so I thought that maybe she'd been fallin' for another bird, and I'd better hurry up and get my brand on her. Catch on?"

De Grandin nodded somewhat doubtfully. "I think I apprehend your meaning," he replied, "though the language which you use is slightly strange to me. And when you had completed your proposal—"

"She didn't say a word, but just pointed to the sky, as though she'd seen some object up there that astonished her."

"Quite so. One understands; and then?"

"Naturally, I looked up, and before I realized what was happening she slashed a penknife across my throat and jumped out of the car screaming with laughter. I wasn't very badly hurt, but—" He paused, and we could fairly see his alcoholic aplomb melt and a look of infantile distress spread on his features. "O-o-o!" he wailed disconsolately. "Greta, my dear, why did you—"

"The needle, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," Jules de Grandin whispered. "There is nothing further to be learned, and the opiate will give him merciful oblivion. Half a grain of morphine should be more than ample."

"This is positively the craziest piece of business I ever heard of!" I exclaimed as we left the house. "Only the other night she told us that she loved the lad so much that her heart ached with it; this afternoon she interrupts his declaration by slashing at his throat. I never heard of anything so utterly fantastic—"

"Except, perhaps, the case of Sarah Spotswood and the other three unfortunates who followed her to madness and the grave?" he interrupted in a level voice. "I grant the little *demoiselle* has acted in a most demented manner. *Ha*, but is she crazier than—"

"Oh, for the love of mercy, stop it!" I commanded querulously. "Those cases were most likely mere coincidences. There's not a grain of proof—"

"If a thing exists we must believe it, whether it is susceptible of proof or not," he told me seriously. "As for coincidence — had only one girl graduated into death from madness after encountering a kitten such as that which figures in each of these occurrences, we might apply the term; but when three young women are so similarly stricken, *parbleu*, to fall back on coincidence is but to shut your eyes against the facts, *mon vieux*. One case, yes; two cases, perhaps; three cases — *non*, it is to pull the long arm of coincidence completely out of joint, by blue!"

"Oh, well," I answered wearily, "if you — good Lord!"

Driven at road-burning speed a small, light car with no lamps burning came careening crazily around the elbow of the highway, missed our left fender by a hair and whizzed

past us like a bullet from a rifle.

"Is it any wonder our insurance rates are high with idiots like that out upon the public roads?" I stuttered, inarticulate with fury, but the whining signal of a motorcycle's siren cut my protest short as a state policeman catapulted around the bend in hot pursuit of the wild driver.

"D'ye see 'um?" he inquired as he stopped beside us with a scream of brakes. "Which way did 'e go?"

"Took the turn to the right," I answered. "Running like a streak with no lights going, and—"

"My friend mistakes," de Grandin interrupted as he smiled at the policeman; "the wild one turned abruptly to the left, and should be nearly to the village by this time."

"Why, I'm positive he took the right-hand turn—" I began, when a vicious kick upon my shin served notice that de Grandin wished deliberately to send the trooper on a wild-goose chase. Accordingly: "Perhaps I was mistaken," I amended lamely; then, as the officer set out:

"What was your idea in that?" I asked.

"The speeder whom the gendarme followed was Mademoiselle Greta," he replied. "I recognized her in our headlights' flash as she went by, and I suggest we follow her."

"Perhaps we'd better," I conceded; "driving as she was, she's likely to end up in a ditch before she reaches home."

"Why, Grefa's not been out to-night," said Mrs. Friebergh when we reached the house. "She went out walking in the afternoon and came home shortly after dinner and went directly to her room. I'm sure she's sleeping."

"But may we see her anyway, *Madame*?" de Grandin asked. "If she sleeps we shall not waken her."

"Of course," the mother answered as she led the way upstairs.

It was dark and quiet as a tomb in Greta's bedroom, and when we switched on the night-light we saw her sleeping peacefully, her head turned from us, the bedclothes drawn up close about her chin.

"You see, the poor, dear child's exhausted," Mrs. Friebergh said as she paused upon the threshold.

De Grandin nodded acquiescence as he tiptoed to the bed and bent an ear above the sleeping girl. For a moment he leant forward; then, "I regret that we should so intrude, *Madame*," he apologized, "but in cases such as this—" An eloquently non-committal shrug completed the unfinished sentence.

Outside, he ordered in a sharp-edged whisper: "This way, my friend, here, beneath this arbor!" In the vine-draped pergola which spanned the driveway running past the house, he pointed to a little single-seated roadster. "You recognize him?" he demanded.

"Well, it *looks* like the car that passed us on the road—"

"Feel him!" he commanded, taking my hand in his and pressing it against the radiator top.

I drew away with a suppressed ejaculation. The metal was hot as a teakettle full of boiling water.

"Not only that, *mon vieux*," he added as we turned away; "when I pretended to be counting Mademoiselle Greta's respiration I took occasion to turn back the covers of her bed. She was asleep, but most curiously, she was also fully dressed, even to her shoes. Her window was wide open, and a far less active one than she could climb from it to earth and back again."

"Then you think—"

"*Non, non*, I do not think; I wish I did; I merely speculate, my friend. Her mother told us that she went out walking in the afternoon. That is what she thought. Plainly, that is what she was meant to think. Mademoiselle Greta walked out, met the young Monsieur Pettersen and drove with him, cut him with her ninety-six times cursed knife, then leaped from his car and walked back home. Anon, when all the house was quiet, she clambered from her window, drove away upon some secret errand, then returned in haste, re-entered her room as she had left it, and" — he pursed his lips and raised his shoulders in a shrug — "there we are, my friend, but just where is it that we are, I ask to know."

"On our way to home and bed," I answered with a laugh. "After all this mystery and nonsense, I'm about ready for a drink and several hours' sleep."

"An excellent idea," he nodded, "but I should like to stop a moment at the cemetery, if you will be so kind. I desire to see if what I damn suspect is true."

Fifteen minutes' drive sufficed to bring us to the lich-gate of the ancient burying-ground where generations of the county's founders slept. Unerringly he led the way between the sentinel tombstones till, a little distance from the ivy-mantled wall which bordered on the highway, he pointed to a moss-grown marker.

"There is Madame Kristina's tomb," he told me in a whisper. "It was there — by blue! Behold, my friend!"

Following his indicating finger's line I saw a little spot of white against the mossy grass about the tombstone's base, and even as I looked, the little patch of lightness moved, took shape, and showed itself a small, white, fluffy kitten. The tiny animal uncoiled itself, raised to a sitting posture, and regarded us with round and shining eyes.

"Why, the poor little thing!" I began, advancing toward it with extended hand. "It's lost de Grandin—"

"*Pardieu*, I think that it is quite at home," he interrupted as he stooped and snatched a piece of gravel from the grave beneath his feet. "*Regardez, s'il vous plait!*"

In all the years I'd known him I had never seen him do an

unkind thing to woman, child or animal; so it was with something like a gasp of consternation that I saw him hurl the stone straight at the little, inoffensive kitten. But great as my surprise had been at his unwonted cruelty, it was swallowed up in sheer astonishment as I saw the stone strike through the little body, drive against the granite tombstone at its back, then bounce against the grave-turf with a muffled thud. And all the while the little cat regarded him with a fixed and slightly amused stare, making no movement to evade his missile, showing not the slightest fear at his approach.

“You see?” he asked me simply.

“I—I thought—I could have sworn—” I stammered, and the laugh with which he greeted my discomfiture was far from mirthful.

“You saw, my friend, nor is there any reason for you to forswear the testimony of your sight,” he assured me. “A hundred others have done just as I did. If all the missiles which have been directed at that small white cat-thing were gathered in a pile, I think that they would reach a tall man’s height; yet never one of them has caused it to forsake its vigil on this grave. It has visited this spot at will for the past two hundred years and more, and always it has meant disaster to some girl in the vicinity. Come, let us leave it to its brooding; we have plans to make and things to do. Of course.”

“*Grand Dieu des chats, c’est l’explication terrible!*” de Grandin’s exclamation called me from perusal of the morning’s mail as we completed breakfast the next day.

“What is it?” I demanded.

“*Parbleu*, what is it not?” he answered as he passed a folded copy of the *Journal* to me, indicating the brief item with a well-groomed forefinger.

TREASURE HUNTERS VIOLATE THE DEAD

the headline read, followed by the short account:

Shortly after eleven o’clock last night vandals entered the home of the late Timothy McCaffrey, Argyle Road near Scandia, and stole two of the candles which were burning by his casket while he lay awaiting burial. The body was reposing in the front room of the house, and several members of the family were in the room adjoining.

Miss Monica McCaffrey, 17, daughter of the deceased, was sitting near the doorway leading to the front room where the body lay, and heard somebody softly opening the front door of the house. Thinking it was a neighbor come to pay respects to the dead, she did not rise immediately, not wishing to disturb the visitor at his devotions, but when she noticed an abrupt diminution of the light in the room in which her father’s body lay, as though several

of the candles had been extinguished, she rose to investigate.

As she stepped through the communicating doorway she saw what she took to be a young man in a light tan sports coat running out the front door of the house. She followed the intruder to the porch and was in time to see him jump into a small sports roadster standing by the front gate with its engine running, and drive away at breakneck speed.

Later, questioned by state troopers, she was undetermined whether the trespasser was a man or woman, as the overcoat worn by the intruder reached from neck to knees, and she could not definitely say whether the figure wore a skirt or knickerbockers underneath the coat.

When Miss McCaffrey returned to the house she found that all the vigil lights standing by the coffin had been extinguished and two of the candles had been taken.

Police believe the act of wanton vandalism was committed by some member of the fashionable summer colony at Scandia who were engaged in a “treasure hunt,” since nothing but two candles had been taken by the intruder.

“For goodness’ sake!” I looked at de Grandin in blank amazement.

His eyes, wide, round and challenging, were fixed on mine unwinkingly. “*Non*,” he answered shortly, “not for goodness’ sake, my friend; far from it, I assure you. The thief who stole these candles from the dead passed us on her homeward way last night.”

“Her homeward way? You mean—”

“But certainly. Mademoiselle Greta wore such a coat as that *le journal* mentions. Indubitably it was she returning from her gruesome foray.”

“But what could she be wanting corpse-lights for?”

“Those candles had been exorcised and blessed, my friend; they were, as one might say, spiritually antiseptic, and it was a law of the old witch covens that things stolen from the church be used to celebrate their unclean rites. All evidence points to a single horrid issue, and tonight we put it to the test.”

“Tonight?”

“*Précisément*. This is the twenty-third of June, Midsummer’s Eve. Tonight in half the world the bonfires spring in sudden flame on mountain and in valley, by rushing river and by quiet lake. In France and Norway, Hungary and Spain, Rumania and Sweden, you could see the flares stand out against the blackness of the night while people dance about them and chant charms against the powers of Evil. On Midsummer’s Eve the witches and the wizards wake to power; tonight, if ever, that which menaces our little friend will manifest itself. Let us be on hand to thwart it — if we can.”

“Greta’s dancing at the Country Club,” said Mrs.

Fribergh when we called to see our patient late that evening. "I didn't want her to go, she's seemed so feverish and nervous all day long, but she insisted she was well enough, so—"

"Precisely, *Madame*," Jules de Grandin nodded. "It is entirely probable that she will feel no ill effects, but for precaution's sake we will look in at the dance and see how she sustains the strain of exercise."

"But I thought you said that we were going to the club," I remonstrated as he touched my arm to signal a left turn. "But we are headed toward the cemetery—"

"But naturally, my friend; there is the grave of Madame Kristina; there the small white cat-thing keeps its watch; there we must go to see the final act played to its final curtain."

He shifted the small bundle on his knees and began unfastening the knots which bound it.

"What's that?" I asked.

For answer he tore off the paper and displayed a twelve-gauge shotgun, its double barrels sawed off short against the wood.

"Good Lord!" I murmured; "whatever have you brought that for?"

He smiled a trifle grimly as he answered, "To test the soundness of the advice which I bestowed upon myself this morning."

"Advice you gave yourself — good heavens, man, you're raving!"

"Perhaps so," he grinned. "There are those who would assure you that de Grandin's cleverness is really madness, while others will maintain his madness is but cleverness disguised. We shall know more before we grow much older, I damn think."

The air seemed thick and heavy with a brooding menace as we made our way across the mounded graves. Silence, choking as the dust of ages in a mummy-tomb, seemed to bear down on us, and the chirping of a cricket in the grass seemed as loud and sharp as the scraping of metal against metal as we picked our path between the tombstones. The stars, caught in a web of overhanging cloud, were paling in the luminance which spread from the late-rising moon, and despite myself I felt the ripple of a chill run up my back and neck. The dead had lain here quietly two hundred years and more, they were harmless, powerless, but — reason plays no part when instinct holds the reins, and my heart beat faster and my breathing quickened as we halted by the tombstone which marked Kristina Fribergh's grave.

I cannot compute the time we waited. Perhaps it was an hour, perhaps several, but I felt as though we had crouched centuries among the moon-stained shrubbery and the

half-tones of the purple shadows when de Grandin's fingers on my elbow brought me from my semi-dream to a sort of terrified alertness. Down by the ancient lich-gate through which ten generations of the village dead had come to their last resting-place, a shadow moved among the shadows. Now it lost itself a moment; now it stood in silhouette against the shifting highlights on the corpse-road where the laurel bushes swayed in the light breeze. Terror touched me like a blast of icy wind. I was like a little, frightened boy who finds himself deserted in the darkness.

Now a tiny spot of lightness showed against the blackened background of the night; a second spot of orange light shone out, and I descried the form of Greta Fribergh coming slowly toward us. She was dressed in red, a bright-red evening dress of pleated net with surplice sleeves and fluted hem, fitted tightly, at the waistline, molding her slender, shapely hips, swirling about her toeless silver sandals. In each hand she bore a candle which licked hungrily against the shadows with its little, flickering tongue of orange flame. Just before her, at the outer fringe of candlelight, walked a little chalk-white kitten, stepping soundlessly on dainty paws, leading her unhurriedly toward the grave where Kristina Fribergh lay as a blind man's poodle might escort its master.

I would have spoken, but de Grandin's warning pressure on my arm prevented utterance as he pointed silently across the graveyard to the entrance through which Greta had just come.

Following cautiously, dodging back of tombstones, taking cover behind bushes, but keeping at an even distance from the slowly pacing girl, was another figure. At a second glance I recognized him. It was young Karl Pettersen.

Straight across the churchyard Greta marched behind her strange conductor, halted by the tombstone at the head of Kristina's grave, and set her feebly flaring candles in the earth as though upon an altar.

For a moment she stood statue-still, profiled against the moon, and I saw her fingers interlace and writhe together as if she prayed for mercy from inexorable fate; then she raised her hands, undid snap-fasteners beneath her arms and shook her body with a sort of lazy undulation, like a figure in a slowed-down motion picture, freeing herself from the scarlet evening gown and letting it fall from her.

Straight, white and slim she posed her ivory nakedness in silhouette against the moon, so still that she seemed the image of a woman rather than a thing of flesh and blood, and we saw her clasp her hands behind her, straining wrists and elbows pressed together as though they had been bound with knotted thongs, and on her features came a look of such excruciating pain that I was forcibly reminded of the pictures of the martyrs which the mediæval artists painted with such

dreadful realism.

She turned and writhed as though in deadly torment, her head swayed toward one shoulder, then the other; her eyes were staring, almost starting from their sockets; her lips showed ruddy froth where she gnashed them with her teeth; and on her sides and slim, white flanks, upon her satiny-gleaming shoulders, her torture-corded neck and sweetly rounded breasts, there flowered sudden spots of red, cruel, blood-marked wounds which spouted little streams of ruby fluid as though a merciless, sharp skewer probed and stabbed and pierced the tender, wincing flesh.

A wave of movement at the grave's foot drew our glance away from the tormented girl. Karl Pettersen stood there at the outer zone of candlelight, his face a gleam with perspiration, eyes bright and dilated as though they had been filled with belladonna. His mouth began to twist convulsively and his hands shook in a nervous frenzy.

"Look — look," he slobbered thickly, "she's turning to the witch! She's not my Greta, but the wicked witch they killed so long ago. They're testing her to find the witch-mark; soon they'll drown her in the bay — I know the story; every fifty years the witch-cat claims another victim to go through the needle-torture, then—"

"You have right, *mon vieux*, but I damn think it has found its last one," interrupted Jules de Grandin as he rested his shotgun in the crook of his left elbow and pulled both triggers with a jerk of his right hand.

Through a smoky pompon flashed twin flares of flame, and the shotgun's bellow was drowned out by a strangling scream of agony. Yet it was not so much a cry of pain as of wild anger, maniacal, frenzied with thwarted rage. It spouted up, a marrow-freezing geyser of terrifying sound, and the kitten which had crouched at Greta's feet seemed literally to fly to pieces. Though the double charge of shotgun slugs had hit it squarely, it did not seem to me that it was ripped to shreds, but rather as though its tiny body had been filled with some form of high explosive, or a gas held at tremendous pressure, and that the penetrating slugs had liberated this and caused a detonation which annihilated every vestige of the small, white, furry form.

As the kitten vanished, Greta dropped down to the ground unconscious, and, astoundingly, as though they had been wiped away by magic, every sign of pulsing, bleeding wounds was gone, leaving her pale skin unscarred and without blemish in the faintly gleaming candlelight.

"And now, *Monsieur*, *s'il vous plait!*" With an agile leap de Grandin crossed the grave, drew back his sawed-off shotgun and brought its butt-plate down upon Karl's head.

"Good heavens, man, have you gone crazy?" I demanded as the youngster slumped down like a pole-axed ox.

"Not at all, by no means; otherwise, entirely, I assure you," he answered as he gazed down at his victim speculatively. "Look to *Mademoiselle*, if you will be so kind; then help me carry this one to the motorcar."

Clumsily, I drew the scarlet ballgown over Greta's shoulders, then grasped her underneath the arms, stood her on unconscious feet a moment and let the garment fall about her. She was scarcely heavier than a child, and I bore her to the car with little effort, then returned to help de Grandin with Karl Pettersen.

"What ever made you do it?" I demanded as we set out for my office.

Pleased immensely with himself, he hummed a snatch of tune before he answered: "It was expedient that he should be unconscious at this time, my friend. Undoubtedly he followed *Mademoiselle* Greta from the dance, saw her light the candles and disrobe herself, then show the bleeding stigma of the witch. You heard what he cried out?"

"Yes."

"*Très bon*. They love each other, these two, but the memory of the things which he has seen tonight would come between them and their happiness like a loathsome specter. We must eliminate every vestige of that memory, and of the wound she dealt him, too. But certainly. When they recover consciousness I shall be ready for them. I shall wipe their memories clean of those unpleasant things. Assuredly; of course."

"How can you do that?"

"By hypnotism. You know I am an adept at it, and these two, exhausted, all weakened with the slowly leaving burden of unconsciousness, will offer little opposition to my will. To implant suggestions which shall ripen and bear fruit within their minds will be but child's play for me."

We drove along in silence a few minutes; then, chuckling, he announced: "*Tiens*, she is the lucky girl that Jules de Grandin is so clever. Those other ones were not so fortunate. There was no Jules de Grandin to rescue Sarah Spotswood from her fate, nor the others, either. No. The same process was beginning in this case. First came a feeling of aversion for her lover, a reluctance to embrace him. That was the will of wickedness displacing her volition. Then, all unconsciously, she struck him with a knife, but the subjugation of her will was not complete. The will of evilness forced her hand to strike the blow, but her love for him withheld it, so that he suffered but a little so small scratch."

"Do you mean to tell me Kristina Friebergh was responsible for all these goings-on?" I asked.

"No-o, I would not say it," he responded thoughtfully. "I think she was a most unfortunate young woman, more sinned against than sinning. That *sacré petit chat* — that wicked little cat-thing — was her evil genius, and that of Sarah

Spotswood and the other girls, as well as Mademoiselle Greta. You remember Monsieur Frierbergh's story, how his several times great-uncle found the little Kristina trying to force her way into the flames which burnt her parents, with a little kitten clutched tight in her arms? That is the explanation. Her parents were undoubtedly convicted justly for the crime of witchcraft, and the little cat-thing was the imp by which they worked their evil spells. When they were burnt, the cat-familiar lingered on and attached itself to their poor daughter. It had no evil work to do, for there is no record that Kristina indulged in witchery. But it was a devil's imp, instinct with wickedness, and her very piety and goodness angered it; accordingly it brought her to a tragic death. Then it must find fresh source of nourishment, since witches' imps, like vampires, perpetuate themselves by sucking human blood. Accordingly it seized on Sarah Spotswood as a victim, and took her blood and sanity, finally her life. For half a century it lived on the vitality it took from that unfortunate young woman, then — *pouf!* — another victim suffers, goes insane and dies. Each fifty years the process is repeated till at last it comes to Mademoiselle Greta — and to me. Now all is finished."

"But I saw you toss a stone at it last night without effect," I argued, "yet tonight—"

"*Précisément.* That gave me to think. 'It can make a joke of ordinary missiles,' I inform me when I saw it let the stone I threw pass through its body. 'This being so, what are we to do with it, Jules de Grandin?'"

"Phantoms and werewolves which are proof against the ordinary bullet can be killed by shots of silver,' I reply.

"Very well, then, Jules de Grandin,' I say to me; 'let us use a silver bullet.'

"Ha, but this small cat-thing are an artful dodger, you might miss it,' I remind me; so I make sure there shall be no missing. From the silversmith I get some silver filings, and with these I stuff some shotgun shells. 'Now, *Monsieur le Chat,*' I say, 'if you succeed in dodging these, you will astonish me.'

"*Eh bien,* it was not I who was astonished, I damn think."

We took the children to my surgery, and while I went to seek some wine and biscuit at de Grandin's urgent request, he placed them side by side upon the couch and took his stance before them.

When I tiptoed back some fifteen minutes later, Greta lay sleeping peacefully upon the sofa, while Karl was gazing fascinated into Jules de Grandin's eyes.

"... and you will remember nothing but that you love her and she loves you, *Monsieur,*" I heard de Grandin say, and heard the boy sigh sleepily in acquiescence.

"Why, we're in Doctor Trowbridge's surgery!" exclaimed Greta as she opened her eyes.

"But yes, of course," de Grandin answered. "You and Monsieur Karl had a little, trifling accident upon the road, and we brought you here."

"Karl dear" — for the first time she seemed to notice the scratch upon his neck — "you've been hurt!"

"*Ah bah,* it is of no importance, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin told her with a laugh. "Those injuries are of the past, and tonight the past is dead. See, we are ready to convey you home, but first" — he filled the glasses with champagne and handed them each one — "first we shall drink to your happiness and forgetfulness of all the things which happened in the bad old days."

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Weird Tales

JANUARY

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CHILDREN OF THE BAT

an eery story of unusual
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Children of the Bat

JULES DE GRANDIN beat his hands together softly in perfunctory applause as the slim young bubble-dancer, birth-nude save for a liberal application of pearl powder, poised on slender, painted toes an instant with the shimmering thirty-inch rubber balloon forming a pellucid barrier between her nakedness and the audience, then ran lightly as a wind-blown thistle-fluff from the semi-lighted dance quadrangle framed by the rows of tables.

“*Parbleu,*” he murmured with a grin, “facilities for studying anatomy have been enlarged since you and I were at *l'école de médecine, n'est-ce-pas,* my friend?”

With the deftness of much practise he maneuvered the cherry at the bottom of his old-fashioned cocktail onto the flange of his muddler and raised it to his lips as a Chinaman might raise rice upon his chopsticks. He ruminated on the candied fruit a moment, washed it down with the cocktail's final draft and turned his eyes again toward the dancing-floor, where an amber spotlight's shaft stabbed through the violet darkness as the orchestra began to play a waltz tune softly.

Memories of moonlit straw-rides, of college proms and midwinter cotillions came to me as I recognized the gliding melody of *Sobre las Olas*, but no partners at a college hop or ballroom German of my dancing-days ever matched the couple who flowed out upon the floor. The man was tall and slim, virtually hipless in his molded evening clothes, with a tiny wisp of black mustache and gleaming hair pomaded and stretched back so tightly from his brow that it almost seemed to make his eyeballs pop. The girl was gold and cinnabar and ivory. Her hair, cut in a rippling shoulder-bob, was a mixture of pale gold and red, and the spotlight which played on her made it glimmer like a cataract of coruscating molten metal. Her gown of uncut velvet was brilliant yellow-red, throat-high in front, backless to the waist behind, and slit to the knee at either side to show the gleam of slender, sleekly depilated legs. Mandarin rouge was on her cheeks and lips, the filbert-shaped nails of her hands and feet were lacquered bright vermilion, her spool-heeled sandals were of gilded leather. The oval face, long-lashed blue eyes and provocative red mouth were perfect, yet her vibrant youthfulness was overlaid with a veneer of hardness. The girl had lived and looked at life, not always in its most alluring aspects.

Their dance was neatly executed but purely routine. Turn followed pirouette and lift succeeded turn in an acrobatic version of the waltz, and applause was merely courteous in volume when the couple paused at length and made their

salutations to the audience.

The music muted to a slow, soft, sobbing undertone, and a purl of babbling conversation had begun to buzz as the dancers turned to leave the floor. I looked about the darkened cabaret, searching for our waiter. A final drink of Dubonnet, the check, then home seemed the best immediate program, for I had an appendectomy at seven the next morning. The servitor had lost himself among the tables, according to the habit of his kind, and I half rose from my chair to get a better vision, when my glance strayed upward to the entrance stairway. Framed against the silken hangings of vermilion, multi-folded by reflections of opposing gilt-framed mirrors, stood a woman.

So startling was the silhouette she made that she seemed to be a figure out of allegory, Perhaps Lachesis grown weary of her task of measuring the thread of human destiny. Tall she was, and slender, an aureole of old-world glamor hovering round her; black hair shining smoothly back from a forehead of magnolia-white, wide-set black eyes beneath black-penciled brows, lips full and red and richly curved, a little mocking, more than a little scornful. Her gown was midnight velvet, its somberness lightened only by a diamond buckle at her belt, and, molding shapely hips, fell swirling down about the brocade sandals on her long and narrow feet. As she threw her velvet evening wrap back from her shoulders it seemed to spread and billow between her outstretched arms, and I had the momentarily unpleasant impression that her graceful shoulders were adorned with sable bat-wings.

“*Mon Dieu!*” de Grandin's exclamation called my wandering attention to the dance floor; “she is distrait, she is unwell, she swoons, my friend!”

The little danseuse's glance had caught the woman at the stairhead as she rose from her deep curtsy, and the set, professional smile faded from her features as though wiped away. A sudden deathly pallor spread across her face, making the vermilion rouge stand out in shocking contrast, like an undertaker's pigments on the features of a corpse. She paused abruptly, seemed to shiver as though chilled, then sank down to the floor, not in a toppling faint, but with a kind of slow deliberation which reminded me of the collapse of something formed of wax when heat is applied to it. Yet it was not an ordinary fainting fit which bore her down; rather, it seemed to me, she groveled on the polished floor in utter self-abasement, like a dog which, caught in fault, pleads with its master to withhold the whip.

As her dancing-partner raised her in his arms and bore her to the dressing-rooms the orchestra burst out into a fox trot, trumpets and saxophones bellowing the melody, piano, bass viol and drums beating the rhythm, and in a moment the sharp whisper of the dancers' sliding feet mingled with the jungloid music and the cachinnation of high, half-drunken laughter to drown out the memory of the girl's indisposition.

"Doctor," Mike Caldes, proprietor of *La Pantoufle Dorée*, tiptoed to our table, "will you step back to th' dressin'-rooms? Rita's pretty sick an' we'd like to keep th' customers from knowin' it, so—"

"Of course, immediately; at once," de Grandin whispered. "We observed her difficulty, my friend, and were about to offer our assistance when you came."

The dancer Rita lay upon the couch in her narrow, cell-like dressing-room, and one look at her convinced us that she suffered from a case of paralyzing shock. Her face was absolutely colorless, her skin was utterly devoid of warmth, and tiny nodules of horripilation showed upon her forearms. When she sought to speak, an ululating groan was all that issued from between her writhing lips, for the muscles of her throat were contracted nearly to the choking-point by the *globus hystericus*; in a moment she was trembling in a spasm of uncontrollable successive shudders, while her eyeballs rolled back underneath the lids till the pupils disappeared, leaving but a line of oyster-white framed by her lashes.

"Has she got an epileptic fit, Doc?" Caldes asked. "Th' dirty little double-crosser told me she was strong an' healthy; now she goes an'—"

"Be silent," ordered Jules de Grandin, "it is not epilepsy, but hysteria. She has been badly frightened, this one. Hasten, if you please, *Monsieur*, and bring us brandy and a pan of boiling water and some towels. Be quick; we wait on you, but not with patience."

Quickly he wrung the steaming towels out, enveloped them in dry cloths and placed them on the trembling girl's neck, wrists and feet. This done, he wrapped her in a blanket and proceeded to administer the brandy by the spoonful till the tremors passed and her eyelids slowly lowered.

A little moan escaped her as her tautened nerves relaxed and the anesthesia of sleep came on. "What is it, *Made-moiselle*?" he asked, bending till his ear lay nearly level with her lips.

"*La — La Murciélagá,*" she responded sleepily. "*La — Mur—*" her whisper trailed to silence and her bosom fluttered with a tired sigh as she sank into unconsciousness.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"I don't know," he responded with a shrug. "Perhaps a line of chorus from some song. They say absurd things at such times, my friend.

"She should be recovered in an hour, at most," he told Caldes as he rose and slipped his dinner jacket on. "Let someone sit with her until she has regained her strength; then see that she goes home. She must not dance again tonight."

"O.K., Doc; much obliged," responded Caldes. "I'll see she's taken care of." But the greedy gleam between his heavy lids served notice that the girl would carry out her schedule on the dance floor if her partner had to bear her in his arms.

I might have been asleep an hour when the fretful rattle of the bedside telephone awakened me. "Hullo, Doctor Trowbridge, sor," a richly brogued Hibernian voice announced, "this is Detective Sergeant Costello. Will ye an' Doctor de Grandin be afther comin' to th' Pantuflay Dory on th' run, sor? I'll take it kindly if ye will."

"Come where?" I answered sleepily.

"Th' Pantuflay Dory, sor. Mike Caldes' joint. There's all hell to pay here an' no pitch hot."

"What's happened?"

"'Tis a pore young gur-rl's been murdered, sor; kilt dead entirely by a gang o' sacrilegious haythens, an' — can ye come at onct, sot? Ye'll be interested; leastwise, Doctor de Grandin will."

De Grandin joined me as I drove the car from the garage. He had not waited to don shirt and collar, but had wound a mauve silk scarf around his neck and tied it ascot fashion, then slipped his jacket over his pajamas. As he climbed into the motor he was busy teasing needle-points upon the tips of his small blond mustache.

"Who is it who is done to death?" he asked. "In what manner was the killing done?"

"You know as much as I," I answered as we slid into the street, and, headlights blazing, rushed across town to the *Pantoufle Dorée*.

Costello had not made an overstatement when he told me that the murder was the work of "sacrilegious haythens."

The door communicating from the outer lobby to the club's wide entrance stairs was built of heavy mortised timbers — a relic of the Prohibition days when ax-armed raiders might swoop down upon the place unheralded — and these were overlaid with a smooth coat of bright vermilion lacquer on which were painted golden dragons in the Chinese manner. Bone-white against this brilliant background, crucified with railway spikes, hung the naked body of a girl. From nail-pierced hands and feet small rivulets of bright-red blood writhed down like ruby-colored worms. In haste, perhaps, the slayers had neglected to strip off both her sandals, so that one foot showed gilt cross-straps on each side of the cruel spike which held it to the painted door,

while the other was unclothed except for the stigmata of bright blood which ran down from the pierced instep.

In the orange glow of a great Chinese lantern she hung against the red and golden panels in a hush of horror; yet she made a picture of appealing, tragic beauty. Her long, slim limbs, the slender waist, the hips which swelled in gracious curves, were beautiful as anything shaped by a master sculptor. Her breasts, drawn upward by the outstretched arms, were lovely as twin hemispheres of alabaster jeweled with coral. Her head had fallen forward in the utter flaccidness of death, and the fine, bright hair cascaded downward from her brow, veiling the horror of half-closed, glazing eyes and limp lips fallen open.

Upon the Peking-blue of the rich Chinese rug spread on the floor before her the sandal she had lost gleamed emptily upon its side, its buckle broken, its golden heel and instep straps ripped almost clear away from the gilt sole. Somehow, death seemed incongruous here. In this resort of opulent magnificence, this temple dedicated to enjoyment of the vanities of life, death was as out of place as a murder scene injected in a Johann Strauss operetta. An odd place, surely, for a woman to be crucified!

De Grandin stood before the lovely, piteous crucifix, arms akimbo, blond mustache a-twitch. "When did you find her?" he demanded of Costello.

"We didn't, sor," the Irishman replied. "Th' watchman o' th' place ran onto 'er whilst he wuz makin' his rounds a little afther three o'clock. He came a-runnin' like the divil's self wuz afther him, an' bawled his sthory to the desk sergeant down at Number Three; so they sends a harness bull around here to invistigate, an' rings th' homicide squad at headquarters. Gilligan an' I gits detailed to th' job, an' th' first thing I does when I sees how things is, is to ring fer you an' Doctor Trowbridge, sor."

"One comprehends. And where is this *gardien de nuit* — this how do you call him? — watchman? — if you please?"

"Come here, youse!" Costello bawled, and at the hail a heavy-set, bow-legged man of thirty-five or -six came from the checkroom where evidently he had been in durance. Despite the neat gray uniform he wore, the man reminded me of something simian. His shoulders were enormous, his chest so much developed that it seemed to dwarf his abdomen; his legs were strong and heavy, but bowed almost to the point of deformity; his arms hung down quite to his knees, and his forehead was so low it made his hairline seem to rest upon his brows. As he turned his head to keep his gaze averted from the pale corpse on the door, I saw the telltale cauliflower ear which proclaimed his past experience in the prize ring.

"I wuz goin' on me rounds, y'understan'," he said, "just after three o'clock this mornin' — th' three-ten box is by th'

checkroom door — an' I had to come through there." He jerked a thumb across his shoulder toward the panels where the dead girl hung, but kept his eyes averted. "Th' door's always kind o' hard to open, y'understan,' but tonight seems like it wuz stuck, or sumpin, an' I has to lean me shoulder to it. Th' office is out here, an' th' first thing that I thinks about is that some yegg is monkeyin' wid th' safe an' one o' his pals is holdin' th' door on me; so I pulls out me rod an' jams me shoulder agin th' door wid all me might an' busts in here. But if they's anybody here, they're awful quiet, thinks I; so I flashes me light aroun', an' then I sees her hangin' there—" He paused in his recital and a tremor shook his heavy frame.

"*Précisément*, you saw her; and then?" de Grandin prompted.

"Then I goes all haywire, I gits so deadly sick I busts out to th' street an' pukes; then I beats it for th' station house. Th' coppers brung me back, but I don't know nothin' about it. Honest to Gawd, I don't!"

"Did you hear no sounds before you found the body?"

"No, sir. I don't come on till two o'clock when th' kitchen gang signs off, an' dis wuz me first trip roun' tonight. I starts off down by th' kitchen an' storerooms, an' these doors is pretty thick, an' wid th' hangin's an' rugs an' things they has here, you wouldn't be apt to hear nothin' much goin' on in one end o' th' place when you wuz at th' other."

"*Très bien*," de Grandin answered. "You may wait outside, my friend." To Costello:

"Have you called the others?"

"Yis, sor. There's a squad car wid Mike Caldes on its way here, now."

The Frenchman nodded toward the pendent body on the door. "How long has she been dead, Friend Trowbridge?"

"H'm, not very long," I returned. "There's no sign of *rigor mortis*, and scarcely any perceptible clotting of blood around the wounds. No hypostasis apparent. My guess is that she could not have been dead much more than half an hour when the watchman found her."

He studied the pale body thoughtfully. "Does it not seem to you that there should be more hemorrhage?" he demanded. "Those spikes are blunt and more than half an inch in thickness, and the tissues round the wounds are badly torn; yet I doubt that she has bled as much as fifteen cubic centimeters."

"Why — er—" I temporized, but he was paying no attention.

Like a tom-cat pouncing on a mouse, he dropped upon his knees and snatched at something lying at the margin of the rug, half hidden by the shadow of the dead girl's feet. "*Tiens*, what have we here?" he asked, holding his find up to the light.

"A bat's wing," I replied as I looked at it, "but what in

heaven's name could it be doing here?"

"God and the devil know, not I," he answered with a shrug as he wrapped the leathery pinion in a sheet of note-paper and stowed it in an inner pocket of his jacket.

Stepping softly, almost reverently, he crossed the room and surveyed the body pendent on the door through half-closed eyes, then mounting a chair brushed back the rippling wave of bright, fair hair and put a hand beneath her chin.

"*Que diable?*" he exclaimed as the back-brushed tresses unveiled the pale, dead face. "What do you make of this, *mon vieux?*" With a well-groomed forefinger he pointed to the tip of her tongue, which, prolapsed in death, lay across her teeth and hung a quarter-inch or so beyond her lower lip. Against the pale pink of the membrane showed a ruby globule, a little gout of blood.

"Probably the poor child gnashed her tongue in torment when they nailed her to the door," I hazarded, but:

"No, I do not think so," he denied. "See, here is the trail of blood" — he pointed to a narrow track of red which marked the center of the tongue — "and besides, her lips have not been injured. She would have bitten them to ribbons in her agony if — *ah?* Observe him, if you please!"

Lowering the girl's head he bent it downward on her chest and brushed the hair up from her neck. About three inches from the skull-base showed a tiny cross-shaped wound, its arms a scant half-inch in length. Apparently it had been made by some sharp, square instrument, and from the faintly bluish cast about the edges of the puncture I reasoned that the weapon had been forced deep into the tissues.

"Ritual, *pardieu!*" he murmured. "It is obvious. Of course, but—"

"What's obvious?"

"That they hanged her on the door as part of some vile ceremony. She was dead before they touched a hammer to a spike. That drop of blood upon her tongue explains the manner of her death. They drove the lethal instrument clear through her spine, so deeply that it penetrated to her throat. She died instantly and silently; probably painlessly, as well. That accounts for the watchman's having heard no outcry, and also for the small amount of blood she shed when they pierced her hands and feet with nails."

"But why?" I asked. "If they'd already killed her, why should they hang her body up like this?"

"That is a question we must answer, but I fear we shall not answer it tonight," he replied as he stepped down from the chair. "Now, if—"

A blustering bellow drowned his observation as Mike Caldes, flanked by two policemen, bustled through the vestibule.

"What's this? — what's all this?" he shouted. "Someone's

broken in my place? Where's that dam' lazy watchman? I'll fire 'um! Sleepin' on th' job an' lettin' —" Striding forward wrathfully and glowering about him, he was almost face to face with the girl's body before he saw it.

The change that swept across his fat and swarthy countenance would have been comic if it had not been so terrible. Perspiration spouted on his forehead, trickling down until it formed in little pools above his bushy brows. His jowls hung heavily, like the dewlaps of a hound, and his black eyes widened suddenly and shone with an unnatural brightness, as though they were reacting to a drug. His lips began to twist convulsively and his hands twitched in a perfect paroxysm of abysmal terror. For half a minute he stared mutely at the body; then a dreadful, choking cry, retched from him.

"*Santissima Maria!*" he sobbed, bending an arm across his eyes to shut the vision out. "Not that — not here — they can't do this in my place! No — no — *no!*"

De Grandin bent a fixed, unwinking stare on him. "Be good enough to tell us more, *Monsieur,*" he ordered. "Who is it that did this thing which could not be accomplished in your place? You were forewarned of this?"

"No!" Caldes gasped. "Not me! I didn't know — I didn't think—"

The Frenchman nodded to Costello. "Take him to the office, *sergent,*" he commanded. "We can talk with more convenience there."

Turning to an officer he bade: "Have them take her down with gentleness, my friend. Do not let them tear her hands and feet unnecessarily when they withdraw the nails.

"And now, *Monsieur,* we shall be grateful for such information as you have," he said to Caldes as we joined Costello in the office. "You may speak with freedom, but you must be truthful, too, for we are most unpleasant fellows to attempt the monkey business with."

Caldes' hands shook so that he had to make a number of attempts before he managed to set fire to his cigar. Finally, when he had drawn a deep whiff of pungent smoke into his lungs: "Read this," he ordered, drawing a sheet of paper from his pocket and thrusting it into de Grandin's hand.

"*Hace abierto la ventana de su oficina mañana por la noche* — leave your office window open tomorrow night," the missive ordered. It was without signature, but the silhouette of a flying bat was appended to the legend.

"*Ha!*" exclaimed de Grandin. "*La Murciélagu* — the she-bat! It was that the poor one babbled in her delirium of fear. What does the message mean?"

Caldes squirmed uncomfortably, looked about the room as though he sought an inspiration from the frankly displayed charms of the photographed young women hanging on the

walls, finally:

"I was born in Tupulo," he answered, and we noticed that his usual boastful manner had departed. "They have societies down there, something like th' Black Hand they used to have in Italy, only worse. When they say to do a thing you do it, no matter what it is. Down in Yucatan th' orders of these people always have th' picture of a bat — a female bat, *la Murciélagu* — on them. Everyone, from th' *alcalde* down, knows what happens when you get a note with th' picture of a bat signed to it. I've been up here twenty years, but when I got that letter yesterday I didn't ask no questions — I left th' window open like they said. That's why I scrambled home early tonight an' had th' watchman come on duty late. They didn't ask for money, or tell me to stay an' meet 'em, so—"

"An' I don't suppose ye had th' faintest idea what they wuz up to, eh?" Costello interrupted cynically.

"*Dios mio, no!*" exclaimed the Mexican. "How should I know they wuz goin' to murder someone, least of all Rita, who's an American gal, an' never did a thing to cross 'em, far's I know?"

"A woman came into the club just as Mademoiselle Rita was finishing her dance; it was then that she was taken ill," mused Jules de Grandin. "Did you recognize her?"

"Who, me? No, sir. I wuz in th' bar when Rita pulled her faintin'-fit. I didn't know about it till they'd took her to her dressin'-room."

"And did you later recognize anyone whom you knew to be connected with these people of the bat?"

A grimace which might have been intended for a smile, but which bore small family resemblance to it, swept over Caldes' face, making the knife-scar on his cheek do a macabre dance. "Outsiders don't know th' members of th' bat society," he responded. "You don't live long if you ever find out who's a member, either. But — say, was this dame you're speakin' of a tall, dark woman — looked like a princess, or sumpin? If she wuz, I know her — she just blew into town, an' lives at—"

"*Jesusito!*" the shrill scream broke his words as he leapt from his chair, his face a writhen mask of pain and fright. Frantically he clawed at his throat, as if he slapped at some stinging insect which had lighted there. But it was no insect which he held between his fingers as he waved a trembling hand at us. It was a bit of brownish wood, no longer and no thicker than a match-stick, pointed at the tip and slightly rounded at the base.

I looked at it in mute inquiry, but de Grandin seemed to recognize it, for with a bound he dashed around the desk and seized the stricken man by the shoulders, easing him to the floor. With his thumb and forefinger he seized a fold of the smooth-shaven skin encasing Caldes' neck and, pinching the

tiny wound up, put his lips to it.

"Look out for 'em, Clancy!" Costello roared, dashing to the open window of the office and leaning out to bawl his order down the alley. "Oh, ye would, would ye?"

Snatching the revolver from his shoulder holster he leant across the window-sill and fired two shots in quick succession, and the detonation of his weapon was repeated by a third shot from the alley-mouth. Nimble as a cat despite his bulk, he clambered through the window and went racing down the brick-paved passage.

"Send someone for potassium permanganate," de Grandin ordered as he raised his head from Caldes' wounded throat and expelled a mouthful of blood. "Quickly, if you please; we must make haste!"

I hurried to the lobby and dispatched an officer post-haste for the permanganate, then rejoined him in the office.

Caldes lay upon the floor, lips quivering, emitting little whimpering noises. Even as I joined de Grandin he drew his legs up with a sharp, convulsive jerk, then straightened them with a sharp kick, and his heels began to beat the floor with a constantly increasing rhythm. He drew his arms across his breast, clenching his fists together, then threw them out to right and left, bowling de Grandin over and upsetting a bronze smoking-stand which stood beside the desk.

"*Ar-wa-ar-war-war!*" thickly the choked syllables came from his throat as he fought for breath. The man was dying of asphyxia before our eyes.

We turned him on his face and begin administering artificial respiration, but before we had more than started the man gasped once or twice, shook with a hideous spasm, then went limp beneath our hands.

"Good heavens, what was it?" I asked as de Grandin rose and began matter-of-factly to brush the dust from his knees.

"Kurare poisoning. It was a dart from a *soplete*, or blow-gun, which struck him in the throat. The thing was poisoned with a strychnos extract which acts like cobra venom, causing death within an hour by paralysis of the respiratory muscles. Had it struck him on a limb we could have used a tourniquet to stop the flow of poison to the blood stream. But no! The dart struck into his external jugular, and the venom spread like wildfire through his system. I think that fright increased its action, too, for he had doubtless seen men die in such a way before, and gave himself no hope when he discovered he was wounded. Usually the poison does not act so quickly—"

"I got 'im, sor," announced Costello jubilantly from the doorway. "Bad cess to 'im, he tried to shoot me wid his bean-blower, so I give 'im a dose o' lead poisonin' an' Clancy let 'im have another pill jist for — howly Mither, what's this?"

“This, my friend, is murder,” answered Jules de Grandin evenly. “It seems he spoke more truly than he realized when he said that those who recognized the members of this gang are seldom troubled by infirmities of age. Come, let us see the other.”

Costello’s victim was an undersized dark man, thin to emaciation, swarthy-skinned, smooth-shaven save for a small black mustache, and dressed impeccably in dinner clothes. A quick search failed to show a single clue to his identity. Nothing but a pack of *Violetta* cigarettes, ten dollars in bills and change and a book of paper matches occupied his pockets. The maker’s labels had been taken from his clothes, his linen had apparently been worn that evening for the first time; there were no laundry marks upon it. Ten feet or so from where the man had fallen we found a tube of smoothly polished hollow reed some eighteen inches long, and beside it, like a clip of cartridges, a folded sheet of cardboard through which were thrust three four-inch splints of wood like that with which the night-club owner had been wounded. Near the window where it had fallen harmlessly to the pavement lay the dart he had blown at Costello.

“Be careful how you handle them,” de Grandin warned as Officer Clancy picked up the paper clip of darts; “a scratch from them is death!”

“Humph,” Costello murmured as he viewed the body of the murderer, “they wuzn’t takin’ any chances, wuz they, Doctor de Grandin, sor? This felly’s as bare o’ clues as Billy-be-damned. Th’ woman Mike wuz tellin’ us about is our best bet. A dame as sthrikin’ as ye tell me this one wuz ought not to be so hard to locate. If she just blew into town, like Caldes said, an’ if she’s been around enough for him to notice her, she’s likely livin’ at some swank hotel. We’ll put th’ dragnet out for her immejiately, an’ when we find her I’m after thinkin’ she’ll have some mighty fancy answerin’ to do.”

We were enjoying coffee and Chartreuse in the study after dinner the next evening when Nora McGinnis announced: “Sergeant Costello an’ a lady’s here to see yez, sors. Shall I have ’em wait?”

“Not at all; by no means; show them in,” de Grandin bade, and, as the burly Irishman loomed in the doorway, “Welcome, *mon sergent*; is it news of the strange woman that you bring?”

“Well, sor, yis an’ no, as th’ felly sez,” Costello answered with a rather sheepish grin as he beckoned to someone behind him. “This here young lady’s got a sthory which may shed some light on last night’s monkey-business.”

The girl who entered at his gesture seemed absurdly small and fragile in comparison to his great bulk, though in fact she was something over middle height. It was not until she

took a seat upon the sofa at de Grandin’s invitation that I recognized her as the bubble-dancer at the Caldes cabaret. How a young female who dances naked dresses when she is not working at her trade had never been a subject of my thought, but certainly I was not prepared for any costume such as that our visitor wore. She was almost nun-like in her sheer black dinner dress of marquissette trimmed with tiny ruffles of white organdy, her corsage of gardenias, her small black hat, and her white-kid gloves. She might have been a clergyman’s daughter, or a member of the Junior League, judging from appearances.

“I’m Nancy Meigs,” she told us as she folded white-gloved hands demurely in her lap and looked at us with wide, grave, troubled eyes. “Rita Smith, the girl they killed last night, and I were pals.”

“Smith! *Mon Dieu*, her name was Smith, and she so beautiful!” de Grandin murmured sadly. “This English, what a language!”

“It was *Los Niños de la Murciélaga* — the ‘Children of the Bat’ — who killed her,” Nancy added. “I was sure—”

“Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*, and so are we,” de Grandin interrupted, “but who are these sixty-times-accursèd ones, where may they be found, and why, especially, should they kill and crucify a young girl in New Jersey?”

Her gray eyes were clear and soft and steady as they looked at him, but they were frightened, too. “Was — did you find a bat wing by her body?” she responded.

“By blue, I did!” he answered. “Wait, I have it in my room.”

He hurried out, returning in a moment with the sheet of paper wrapped around the wing he had retrieved the night before.

She took the folded wing between her thumbs and forefingers, extending it against the light cast by the study lamp. “Can you read it?” she demanded, moving the membranes across the field of light.

Scratched upon the leathery skin was a five-word legend:

Así siempre á los traidores.

“Howly St. Patrick!” swore Costello.

“*Précisément*,” de Grandin nodded.

“What’s it mean?” I asked.

“‘Thus always to traitors,’ sor,” Costello answered. “I picked up enough o’ th’ lingo whilst I wuz servin’ in th’ Fillypines to read that much.”

De Grandin poured two glasses of Chartreuse and handed them to our visitors; then, as he refilled his own:

“Just what connection did this poor young woman have with these so naughty murderers, *Mademoiselle*?”

“Rita and I were members of the order — once,” replied

the girl. "It was back in '29, just before the bottom fell out of the show business; we were touring South America with a troupe of entertainers. Fan and bubble dancing hadn't been invented then, but we did a rumba routine that was popular, and went over almost as big as the performing seals. We'd gotten up the coast as far as Tupulo when the crash came. Tupulo's an oil town, you know, and all orders from the wells had been canceled; so the place was like a western mining-camp when the ore ran out. We didn't draw a corporal's guard at shows, and then one night our manager, Samuelson, got into a fight in a gambling-hall and they put him in jail and seized the animals and properties of the show. Rita and I were stranded with only about ten *pesos* between us. That didn't last us long and presently they threatened to jail us, too, for non-payment of rent. We were desperate."

"One understands," de Grandin nodded. "And then?"

"We got an engagement dancing in one of the saloons. It was pretty dreadful, for the patrons of the place were the off-scum of the oil fields, and we had to do the *danza de las dos tetas* — dancing in unbuttoned blouses and shaking our shoulders till our breasts protruded through the opening, you know — but stranded actresses can't very well afford to quarrel with their bread and butter.

"One night it was especially terrible. The drunken loafers in the place called insults at us and even pelted us with bits of bread and vegetables as we danced; we were both about to collapse when the evening's work was done. Rita cried all the way to our lodgings. 'I can't stand this another night,' she wept. 'I'd sooner go lose myself in the jungle and die than do another shimmy in that dreadful place!'

"One may go into the jungle, yet not die, *Señorita*,' someone told us from the darkness, and a man stepped out from the shadow of a building, raising his sombrero.

"We thought at first it was one of the barroom loafers who'd followed us, and I drew my hands back to write the Ten Commandments on his cheeks with my nails, but the street lamp showed us he was a stranger and a *caballero*.

"I have watched you for some time,' he told us. 'You were made for better things than twinkling your little, perfect feet before such swine as those you entertain. If you will let me, I can help you.'

"We sized him up. He was little, very neat and extremely ugly, but he didn't look particularly dangerous. 'All right,' said Rita, 'what's your proposition?'

"One I serve has need of women with discretion — and beauty,' he answered. 'She can offer you a life of luxury, everything which you deserve — fine clothes, fine food, luxurious surroundings. But it will not be a life of ease or safety. There will be much work and more danger. Also, no one in this service ever makes a second mistake. However' — he shrugged his shoulders as only a Mexican can — 'it

will be better than the life you're leading now.'

"Our contract was concluded then and there. We didn't even go back to our lodgings to collect and pack what clothes we had.

"He had a motor waiting at the outskirts of the town, and in this we rode till daylight, stopping at a little *hacienda* at the jungle edge to sleep all day. When darkness came he wakened us, and we rode on mule-back through the bush till it was nearly dawn again.

"Our destination was an old abandoned Mayan temple, one of those ruins that dot the jungle all through Yucatan, and it seemed deserted as a graveyard when we rode up to it, but we found the jungle had been cleared away and the debris of fallen stones removed till the place was made quite habitable.

"We rested all next day and were wakened in the evening by the sound of tom-toms. An Indian woman came and led us to a stone tank like a swimming pool, and when we finished bathing we found she'd taken our soiled clothes and left us gowns of beautifully woven cotton and *huaraches*, or native sandals. When we'd dressed in these she took us to another room, where she gave us stewed meat and beans and cool, tart wine, after which she signaled us to follow her.

"We walked out to the square before the pyramid, which was all ablaze with lighted torches, and I nearly fainted at the sight that met our eyes. All around the square was a solid rank of men and women, all in native costume — a simple, straight gown like a nightdress for the women, a shirt and pair of cotton trousers for the men — and all masked by having huge artificial bats' heads drawn over their faces like hoods. Everywhere we looked they were, as much alike as grains of rice from the same bag, all with their eyes flashing in the torchlight at us through the peep-holes in their masks.

"Four of the bat-men took our arms and turned us toward the steps of the great pyramid. Then we saw *La Murciélagas!*"

"*La Murciélagas?*" echoed Jules de Grandin. "Was it then a bat that these strange people worshipped?"

"No, sir. It was a woman. She was tall and slender and beautifully made, as we could see at a glance; for every inch of her was encased in a skin-tight suit of sheer black webbing, like the finest of silk stockings, and her face was hidden by a bat-mask like the rest, only hers seemed made of shimmering black feathers while theirs were made of coarse black fur. Joining her arms to her body were folds of sheer black silk so that when she raised her hands it spread and stretched like a bat spreading its wings to fly.

"Some kind of trial seemed to be in progress, for two bat-men held another one between them, and the woman in the bat costume seemed questioning the prisoner, though we

couldn't hear what she said or he replied from where we stood.

"After a little while she seemed to have arrived at a decision, for she raised her hands, spreading out her bat-wings, and curved her fingers at him as though she were about to claw his face. The poor thing dropped upon his knees and held his hands extended, asking mercy, but *La Murciélagá* never changed her pose, just stood there with her claws stretched out and her eyes gleaming horribly through her mask.

"Before we realized what was happening some men had brought a blood-stained wooden cross and laid it down upon the pavement. Then they stripped the prisoner's clothing off and nailed him to the cross while the tom-toms beat so loudly that we could not hear his shrieks, and all the masked bat-people screamed '*Así siempre á los traidores!*' over and over again.

"That's what comes to those who disobey or fail *La Murciélagá!*' someone whispered in my ear, and I recognized the voice of the man who had brought us out from Tupulo.

"But we don't want to join any such terrible society as this!' I cried. 'We won't—'

"There are other crosses waiting,' he warned me. 'Will you hang beside that traitor or will you take the oath of fealty to the Bat Mother and become her true and faithful servants?'

"The poor wretch on the cross kept shrieking, and though we couldn't hear him for the tom-toms' noise, we could see his mouth gape open and the blood run down his chin where he gnashed his lips and tongue. He beat his head against the cross and arched his body forward till the spikes tore greater wounds in his pierced hands and feet, and all the time *La Murciélagá* stood there statue-still with her bat-wings spread out and her fingers curved like talons.

"Finally, when the crucified man's screams had muted to a low, exhausted moan, they led us up to the 'Bat Mother,' and there in the shadow cast by the cross with its writhing, groaning burden, we knelt down on the stones and swore to do whatever we were bidden, promising to give ourselves up for crucifixion if we ever disobeyed an order or attempted to leave the bat society or divulge its secrets. They made us put our hands out straight before us on the ground, and *La Murciélagá* came and stood on them while we kissed her feet and vowed we were her slaves for ever. Then we were given bat-masks and told to take our places in the ranks which stood about the square before the pyramid."

"And how did you escape that place of torment, *Mademoiselle?*"

"We didn't have to, sir. In the morning we were wakened and taken to the coast, where they put us on a boat and sent

us up to Vera Cruz.

"May I have a cigarette?" she asked; and, as de Grandin passed the box to her, then held his lighter while she set it glowing, "Do you remember how the Spanish freighter *Gato* apparently sailed off the earth?"

De Grandin and Costello nodded.

"We did that, Rita and I. They told us to make love to the master and chief engineer, and with the memory of that horrid scene out in the jungle to spur us on, we did just as they told us. We teased the engineer to let us go and see his engines, and Rita took a little box they'd given her aboard, and hid it in the bunkers. What was in it we don't know, but when they threw the coal where it had rested in the furnace the whole side of the ship was ripped away, and everyone on board was lost."

"But this is purest idiocy, *Mademoiselle!*" protested Jules de Grandin. "Why should anyone in wanton cruelty desire to destroy a ship?"

"The *Gato* carried half a million dollars' worth of jewels," the girl replied. "She sank in less than fifteen fathoms, and the hole blown in her side made it easy for the divers to go in and loot her strongroom."

She took a final long draw at her cigarette, then crushed its fire out in the ash-tray. "You remember when MacPherson Briarly, the insurance magnate's son, was held for ransom in Chihuahua?" she asked. "Rita was the lure — posed as an American girl stranded in El Centro and traded on his chivalry. He went out riding with her one afternoon and — it cost his father fifty thousand dollars to get him back alive."

"But why didn't you attempt escape?" I asked. "Surely, if you went as far north as Chihuahua you were out of reach of the jungle headquarters in Yucatan?"

A queer look passed across her face, wiping away her youth and leaving her features old and utterly exhausted-looking. "You don't escape *Los Niños de la Murciélagá*, sir," she answered simply. "They are everywhere. The loafer in the doorway, the policeman in the street, the conductor of the tram-car or the train, is as likely as not a member of the band, and if he fails to prevent your breaking your oath of obedience — there's a cross waiting for him in the jungle. You may be dining in a fashionable hotel, sitting in a box at the opera in Mexico City or walking in the plaza when someone — a beggar, a stylish woman or an elegantly dressed man — will open his hand and display a bat wing. That is the signal, the summons not to be ignored on pain of crucifixion."

"But you finally escaped," I insisted somewhat fatuously.

Again that queer, senescent-seeming look spread on her face. "We ran away," she corrected. "They sent us up to Tia Juana and when we found ourselves so near the American

border we decided to make a dash for it. We were well supplied with funds — we always were — so we had no trouble getting up to San Diego, but we knew we'd not be safe in California, or anywhere within a thousand miles of Mexico, for that matter, so we hurried back East.

"The movies had killed vaudeville, and no new musical shows were outfitting that season, but we managed to get jobs in burlesque. Finally I heard about an opening at Mike Caldes' place and sold him the idea of letting me go on as a bubble-dancer. I hadn't been there long when the girl who did the waltz routine left the show to marry, and I got Rita her place. We thought we'd be safe out here in New Jersey," she finished bitterly.

"And this so unpleasant female, this *Murciélaga*, you can tell us what she looks like?" asked de Grandin.

"You're asking me?" she answered. "You saw her when she came into the club before they took revenge on Rita."

"That lovely woman?" I exclaimed incredulously.

"That lovely woman," she repeated in a flat and toneless voice. "Did you see the way she held her cloak before she took it off? That's her sign. The others carry bat wings for identification. Only *La Murciélaga* is allowed to wear them."

"Well, I'll be damned," declared Costello.

"Assuredly, unless you mend your ways," agreed de Grandin with a grin. Then, sobering abruptly:

"Tell me, *ma petite*," he asked, "have you any idea the unfortunate Mike Caldes knew of your connection with these people of the bat?"

"No, sir," she answered positively. "Mike had never been a member of the order, but he'd lived in Tupulo and knew its power. He'd no more have dared shelter us if he'd suspected we were wanted by *La Murciélaga* than he'd have given us jobs if he'd thought we had the smallpox. As far as any Mexican from Yucatan is concerned, any fugitive from the vengeance of the Bat is hotter than counterfeit money or stolen Government bonds."

"And what of you, my friend?" de Grandin asked Costello. "Have you been able to locate this strange woman whose advent heralded these murders?"

"No, sor, we haven't," answered the detective. "We spread th' dragnet for 'er, like I told ye at th' joint last night, but we can't find hide nor hair o' her. P'raps she's stayin' in New York — there's lots o' furriners — axin' yer pardon, sor — always hangin' out there, an' we've asked th' police to be on th' lookout fer her, but you know how it is. Pretty much like lookin' fer a needle in a haystack, as th' felly says. So when Nancy — beg pardon, I mane Miss Meigs — come an' told me she might be able for to shed some light on all this monkey-business, I thought I'd better bring her over."

"Precisely," nodded Jules de Grandin. "And in the meantime, while we seek the so elusive Lady of the Bat, how

shall we make things safe for Mademoiselle Nancy?"

"H'm, I might lock 'er up as a material witness," Costello offered with a grin, "but—"

"Oh, would you — *please*?" broke in the girl. "I never wanted to be anywhere in all my life as much as I want to be behind jail bars right now!"

"Sold," Costello agreed. "We'll go over to your place an' get your clothes; then you can trot along to jail wid me."

"One moment, *Mademoiselle*, before you go to the *bastille*," de Grandin interrupted. "It is entirely unlikely that the search for this Bat Woman will produce results. They are clever, these ones. I do not doubt that they have covered up their trail so well that long before the gendarmes realize the search is useless she will have fled the country. Tell me, would you know your way — could you retrace your steps to that so odious temple where the Children of the Bat have made their lair?"

A little frown of concentration wrinkled her smooth forehead. "I think I could," she answered finally.

"And will you lead us there? Remember, it is in the cause of justice, to avenge the ruthless murder of your friend and to save *le bon Dieu* knows how many others from a similar fate."

She looked at him with widened eyes, eyes in which the pupils seemed to swell and spread till they almost hid the irises. Her eyes were blank, but not expressionless. Rather, they seemed to me like openings to hell, as though they mirrored all the nightmares she had seen within their depths.

"I suppose I might as well," she answered with a little shudder. "If I go there they will nail me to a cross. If I stay here they'll do it sooner or later, anyway."

She was like a lovely, lifeless robot as she rose to go with Costello. The certain knowledge of foreshadowed death, cold and ominous as some great snake, had seized her in its paralyzing grip.

Captain Hilario César Ramirez de Quesada y Revilla, Commandant of Tupulo, courteously replenished our glasses from the straw-sheathed flask of *habañero*, then poured himself a drink out of all proportion to his own diminutive stature. "*Señores, Señorita*," he bowed to us and Nancy Meigs in turn, "your visit is more welcome than I can express. *Valgame Dios!* For a year I have stormed and sweated here in impotence; now you come with explanations and in offer of assistance. Crime is rampant in this neighborhood, and the police are powerless. A man is murdered, a business house is robbed at night, no one knows who did it; there are no clues, there are no complainants. The very persons who are injured place their fingers on their lips and shrug their shoulders. '*La Murciélaga*,' they say, as though they said it was inexorable fate. They tell us nothing;

we are helpless. Nor is that all. People, women as well as men, disappear; they vanish as though swallowed by an earthquake. 'Where is so and so?' we ask, and 'S-s-sh — *La Murciélaga!*' is the only answer. I came here with a full company a year ago. Today I have but two platoons; the others are all dead, deserted or vanished — *La Murciélaga!*

"*Por Dios*, until you came here with this explanation I had thought she was a legend, like Tezcatlipoca or the Thunder-Bird!"

"Then we may count upon your help, *Monsieur le Capitaine?*" de Grandin asked.

"With all my heart. *Carajo*, I would give this head of mine to lay my eyes upon *La Murciélaga*—"

An orderly tapped at the door, and he looked up with a frown. "*Que cosa?*" he demanded.

"A young *caballero* waits to see the captain," the man explained apologetically. "His *hacienda* was burglarized last night. Much livestock was driven off; the family plate was stolen. He is sure it was *La Murciélaga*, and has come to make complaint."

"*Un milagro* — a miracle!" the Commandant cried exultantly. "Two in one day, *amigos*. First come you with information of this cursed bat society, then comes a man with courage to denounce them for their thievery.

"Bring him in, *muy pronto!*" he commanded.

The man the orderly showed in was scarcely more than a lad, dark, slender, almost womanish in build, his sole claim to masculinity seeming to be based upon a tiny black mustache and a little tuft of beard immediately below his mouth, so small and black that it reminded me of a beetle perched between his chin and lip. He wore the old-time Mexican costume, short jacket and loose-bottomed trousers of black velveteen, a scarlet cummerbund about his waist, exceedingly high-heeled boots, a bright silk handkerchief about his head. In one hand he bore a felt *sombrero*, the brim of which seemed only the necessary groundwork to support row on row of glittering silver braid.

At sight of us he paused abashed, but when the Commandant presented us, his teeth shone in a glittering smile. "We are well met, *Señores y Señorita*," he declared; "you are come to seek these Children of the Bat, I am come to ask the *commandante's* aid. Last night they picked my house as clean as ever vultures plucked a carcass, and my craven peons refused to lift a hand to stop them. They said that it was death to offer opposition to *La Murciélaga*, but me, I am brave. I will not be intimidated. No, I have come to the police for aid."

"What makes you think it was *La Murciélaga*, sir?" the Commandant inquired. "These people of the bat are criminals, yes; but there are other robbers, too. Might not it be that—"

"*Señor Commandante*," broke in the other in a low, half-frightened voice, "would other robbers dare to leave *this* at my house?" Opening his small gloved hand he dropped a folded bat-wing on the desk.

"Bring a file of soldiers quickly," he besought. "We can reach my house by sundown, and begin pursuit tomorrow morning. *Señorita Meigs* can lead us to the secret stronghold in the jungle, and we can take them by surprise."

Preparations were completed quickly. Two squads of cavalry with two machine-guns were quickly mustered at the barracks, and with young *Señor Epilar* to guide us, we set out for the scene of *La Murciélaga's* latest depredation. The sun dropped down behind the jungle wall as we arrived at the old *hacienda*.

The soldiers were bivouacked in the *patio*, and escorted by our host, we made our way to a wide, long drawing-room lighted by wax candles in tall wrought-iron standards and sparsely furnished with chairs and tables of massive oak.

"I bid you welcome to my humble home, my friends," said *Señor Epilar* with charming Spanish courtesy. "If you will indulge me a few moments I will have refreshment—"

"What's that?" the Commandant broke in as a sharp, shrill cry, followed by the detonation of a carbine shot, came from the *patio*.

"Perhaps one of my people plucked up courage to fire at a coyote," answered *Epilar*. "They showed little enough desire to shoot last night—"

"No, that was an army rifle," the Commandant insisted. "If you will excuse me—"

"And if I do not choose to do so?" calmly asked our host. "*Très mil diablos* — if you do not choose—"

"*Precisamente, Señor Commandante*," answered *Epilar*. "I should like to claim my forfeit."

De Grandin's small blue eyes were sparkling in the candlelight. "*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" he murmured. "I was certain; I was sure; I could not be mistaken!"

The Commandant regarded *Señor Epilar* in round-eyed wonder. "Your forfeit?" he demanded. "In the devil's name—"

"Not quite the devil, though something like it," cut in *Epilar* with a soft laugh. "*La Murciélaga, Commandante mio*. As I came into your office you declared that you would give your head if you could but lay your eyes upon the Bat-Woman. Look, my friend, your wish is granted."

With one hand he tore off the tiny black mustache and goatee which adorned his face; with the other he unwound the gaudy handkerchief which bound his head, and a wealth of raven hair came tumbling down about his face and rippled round his shoulders. Stripped of its masculine adornments I recognized that lovely, cold, impassive face as belonging to

the woman who had stood upon the stairs the night that Caldes and the dancer met their deaths.

"*Dios!*" the Commandant exclaimed, reaching for the pistol at his belt; but:

"I would not try to do it," warned the woman. "Look about you."

At every window of the room masked men were stationed, each with a deadly blow-gun poised and ready at his lips.

"Your soldiers are far happier, I know," the woman announced softly. "All of them, I'm sure, had been to mass this morning. Now they are conversing with the holy saints. "As for you" — she threw us the dry flick of a Mona Lisa smile — "if you will be kind enough to come, I shall take pleasure in entertaining you at my jungle headquarters." For a moment her sardonic gaze fixed on Nancy Meigs; then: "Your fair companion will be glad to furnish some amusement, I am sure," she added softly.

We rode all night. Strapped tightly to the saddles of our mules, hands bound behind us and with *tapojos*, or mule-blinds, drawn across our faces, we plodded through the jungle, claws of acacia and mesquite slapping and scratching against us, the chafing of our rawhide bonds becoming more intolerable each mile.

It was full daylight when they took our hoodwinks off. We had reached an open space several hundred feet in breadth, tiled with squared stones and facing on the ruins of a topless Mayan pyramid which towered ninety or a hundred feet against the thick-set wall of jungle. On each side of us ranked a file of bat-masked men, each with a blow-gun in his hand. Of *La Murciélaga* we could see nothing.

"*Holá, mes enfants*, we have come through nobly thus far, *n'est-ce-pas?*" de Grandin called as he twisted in his saddle to throw a cheerful grin in our direction. "If — *par Dieu et le Diable!*" he broke off as his small blue eyes went wide with horror and commiseration. Turning, I followed the direction of his glance and felt a sickening sensation at my stomach.

Behind us, bound upon a mule, sat Nancy Meigs. They had stripped her shirt and bandeau off, leaving her stark naked to the belt, and obviously they had failed to tie a *tapajo* across her face, for from brow to waist she was a mass of crisscrossed slashes where the cruelly-clawed thorn branches of the jungle had gashed and sheared her tender skin as she rode bound and helpless through the bush. Little streaks of blood-stain, some fresh, some dry and clotted, marked a pattern on her body and her khaki jodhpurs were bespattered with the dark discolorations. She slumped forward in her saddle, half unconscious, but sufficiently awake to feel the pain of her raw wounds, and we saw her bite her lips as she strove to keep from screaming with the

torment which the buzzing jungle flies, her lacerations and the cruelly knotted rawhide bonds inflicted.

"Be all th' saints, 'tis meself as would like nothin' better than to git me hands on that she-devil!" swore Costello as he saw the claw-marks on the girl's white torso. "Bedad, I'd—

"*Andela* — forward!" came a sharp command beside us, and masked men seized the bridles of our mules and led them toward the pyramid.

Our prison was a large square room lighted by small slits pierced in the solid masonry and furnished with a wooden grating at its doorway. Here we stretched our limbs and strove to rub the circulation back into our hands and feet.

"*Soy un bobo* — what a fool I am!" the Commandant groaned as he rubbed his swollen wrists. "I should have known that no one in the neighborhood would have the courage to come to me with complaints against these Bat-Men. I should have taken warning—"

"Softly, *mon ami*," de Grandin comforted. "You acted in the only way you could. It was your duty to embrace the chance to wipe this gang of bandits out. Me, I should probably have done the same, if—"

A rattling at the wooden grating interrupted him. "*La Murciélaga* deigns to see you. Come!" a masked man told us.

For a moment I had hopes that we might overpower our guard, but the hope was short-lived; for a file of blowgun bearers waited in the corridor outside our cell, and with this watchful company we made our way along the passage till we came to a low doorway leading to a large apartment lighted by a score of silver lamps swinging from the painted ceiling.

The ancient walls were lined with frescoes, figures of strange dancing women posed in every posture of abandon, some wearing red, some clad in green, a few in somber black, but most entirely nude, flaunting their nakedness in a riot of contorted limbs and swaying bodies. There was a vigor to the art of the old Mayan painters who had limned these frescoes on the walls. Despite their crudity of execution there was an air of realness in the murals which made it seem that they might suddenly be waked to life and circle round the room in the frenzy of an orgiastic dance.

At the far end of the room a table of dark wood was laid with cotton napery and a wonderful old silver service which must at one time have graced the banquet hall of some old grandee in the days of Spanish dominance. Four chairs were drawn up to the board facing the end where a couch of carven wood heaped high with silken cushions stood beneath the fitful luminance cast by a hanging silver lamp.

"This must have been the priestess' hall," the Commandant informed us in a whisper. "This temple is supposed to have contained a college of priests and priestesses,

something like a convent and monastery.”

“*Parbleu*, if that is so, I think those old ones did not mortify the flesh to any great extent,” the Frenchman answered with a grin. “But while we wait in this old mausoleum of the ancient ones, where is our charming hostess?”

As though his words had been a cue, a staff of bells chimed musically outside the door, and the guard of bat-men ranged about the walls sank to their knees.

The chime grew higher, shriller, sweeter, and a double file of women dressed in filmy cotton robes, each with a bat-mask on her face, came through the low-arched entrance, paused a moment, then, as though obeying an inaudible command, dropped prostrate to the floor, head to head, hand clasping hand, so that they made a living carpet on the pavement.

Framed in the arching entrance, *La Murciélaga* stood like some lovely life-sized portrait. A robe of finely woven cotton, dyed brilliant red with cochineal and almost sheer as veiling, flowed from a jeweled belt clasped below her bosoms to the insteps of her narrow, high-arched feet. On throat and arms, on her thumbs and little-fingers, flashed great emeralds, any one of which was worth a princely ransom. Long golden pendants throbbing with the flash of blood-bright rubies reached from the tiny lobes of little ears almost to naked, cream-white shoulders. Each move she made was musical, for bands of pure gold were clasped in tiers about her wrists and on her slender ankles, and clashed tunefully together with each step she took. Upon the great and little-toe of each slim foot there gleamed a giant emerald so that as her feet advanced beneath the swirling hem of her red robe it seemed that green-eyed serpents darted forth their heads.

“*Madre de Dios!*” I heard the Commandant exclaim, and his voice seemed choked with sobs. “*Que hermosa* — how beautiful!”

“So is the tiger or the cobra,” murmured Jules de Grandin as *La Murciélaga* trod upon the prostrate women as unconcernedly as though they had been figures woven in a carpet.

She greeted us with a bright smile. “Good morning, gentlemen. I hope you did not suffer too much inconvenience from your ride last night?”

None of us made reply, but she seemed in nowise fazed. “Breakfast is prepared,” she announced, sinking down upon the heaped-up cushions of the couch and motioning us to the chairs which stood about the table. “I regret I cannot offer you such food as you are used to, but I do my poor best.”

Oranges and cherimoya, grapes, sweet limes, guavas and plates of flat, crisp native bread composed the meal, with coffee, chocolate and lemonade for beverages. Finally came

long, thick cigars of rich lowland-grown tobacco and a sweet, strong wine which tasted like angelica.

The woman leant back on her cushioned divan and regarded us through half-closed eyes as she let a little streamlet of gray smoke flow from her lips. “The question, gentlemen, is, ‘What are we to do with you?’” she stated in a voice which held that throaty, velvety quality of the southern races. “I cannot very well afford to let you go; I have no wish to keep you here against your will. Would you care to join our ranks? I can find work for you.”

“And if we should refuse, *Madame?*” de Grandin asked.

Her shrug lifted the creamy shoulders till they touched the jeweled ear-pendants and set their gems to flashing in the lamplight. “There is always *el crucifijo*,” she replied, turning black-fringed, curious eyes upon him. “It would be interesting to see four bodies hanging up at once. You, my friend, would doubtless scream in charming tenor, *el Comandante* would shriek baritone, I think, while I do not doubt that the old bearded one and the big Irishman would be the basses of the concert. It should make an interesting quartet. I have more than half a mind to hear it.”

A frigid grimace, the mere parody of a smile, congealed upon the Commandant’s pale lips. “You make a gruesome jest, *Señora*,” he asserted feebly.

“*Cabrón!*” she shot the deadly insult at him as a snake might spew its poison. “*La Murciélaga* never jests!” Her face had gone skull-white, with narrowed, venomous eyes, the chin and mouth thrust forward and the lips pressed taut against the teeth.

“Down,” she ordered, “down on your faces, all of you! Lick my feet like the dogs you are, and pray for mercy! Down, I say, for as surely as I reign supreme here I’ll crucify the one who hesitates!”

De Grandin looked at Costello, and his Gallic blue eyes met prompt answer in the black-fringed eyes of Irish blue of the detective. With one accord they turned to me, and instinctively I nodded.

The little Frenchman rose, heels clicked together, and faced the termagant she-fiend with a glance as cold and polished as a leveled bayonet. “*Madame*,” he announced in a metallic voice, “we are men, we four. To men there are things worse than death.”

“*Bueno*, my little one,” she answered; “then I shall hear your quartet after all. I had hoped that you would choose to play the hero.” Turning to her guards she ordered sharply: “Take them away.”

“No, no; not me, *Señora!*” the Commandant implored, falling on his knees before her. “Do not crucify me, I beseech you!”

Across his shoulder he cried frenziedly: “Save yourselves,

amigos. Beg mercy. What good is honor to a corpse? I saw a man whom they had crucified — they flung his body in the city square at night. It was terrible. His wounds gaped horribly and the middle fingers had been torn away where his hands had ripped loose from the spikes!”

“You would have mercy, little puppy?” asked the woman softly, regarding him with a slow, mocking smile.

“Yes, yes, *Señora!* Of your pity spare me—”

“Then, since you are a cringing dog, deport yourself becomingly.” With the condescension of a queen who graciously extends her hand for salutation, she stretched out a slim, ring-jeweled foot.

It was shocking to behold him stultify his manhood. “*Misericordia muy Señora graciosa* — have mercy, gracious lady!” he whimpered, and I turned away my head with a shudder of repulsion as he put his hand beneath her instep, raised the gemmed foot to his mouth, and, thrusting forth his tongue, began to lick it as a famished dog might lap at food.

“*Cordieu,*” de Grandin murmured as the guards closed round us and began to crowd us from the room, “she may murder us to death, but I damn think she can do no worse to us than she has done to him!”

“Thru fer ye, Doctor de Grandin, sor,” Costello rumbled. “You an’ me wuz soldiers an’ Doctor Trowbridge is a gentleman. Thank God we ain’t more scared o’ dyin’ than o’ dishonorin’ ourselves!”

The square before the pyramid blazed bright with torchlight. On three sides, ranked elbow to elbow, stood the “Children of the Bat” looking through the peep-holes of their masks with frenzied, hot-eyed gloating. Before the temple steps there crouched a line of drummers who beat out a steady, mind-destroying rhythm. We stood, legs hobbled, between our guards, looking toward the temple stairs, and I noticed with a shudder that at intervals of some eight feet four paving-blocks had been removed, and beside each gaping opening was a little pile of earth. The crosspits had been dug.

“Courage, *mes enfants,*” de Grandin whispered. “If all goes well—”

Costello’s lips were moving almost soundlessly. His eyes were fixed in fascinated awe upon the cross-holes in the pavement; the expression on his face showed more of wonder than of fear. “To hang upon a cross,” I heard him whisper, “I am not worthy, Lord!”

“*Morbleu,* she comes, my friends!” the little Frenchman warned.

Tiny tom-toms, scarcely larger than a tea-cup, beat out a low, continuous roar beneath the thumbs and knuckles of the double line of bat-masked women filing from a doorway in the temple. Behind them came an awe-inspiring figure. Skin-

tight, a sheath of finely-woven jet-black silk, sheer and gleaming as the finest stocking, cased her supple form from throat to ankles, its close-looped meshes serving rather to accentuate than hide the gracious curves of her long, slim limbs. Moccasins of cloth of gold were on her feet, her head was covered with a hood which bore the pointed snout and tufted ears of a great vampire bat. In the eyeholes we could see the red reflection of the torchlight. Joined to her body from arm-pits to hips were folds of black-silk tissue, and these, in turn, were fastened to her tightly fitting sleeves, so that when she spread her arms it seemed that great black wings stretched from her. Her hands were bare, and we could see the blood-red lacquer gleaming on her nails as she curved her fingers forward like predatory talons.

“*La Murciélaga! La Murciélaga!*” rose a mighty shout of homage from the crowd of bat-masked men and women. It was not so much a cry of greeting as of stark insanity — of strange disease and maniacal excitement. It spouted up, cleaving the heavy, torchlit air like a terrible geyser of sound.

The drums redoubled their wild rataplan, and the shouting grew more frenzied as *La Murciélaga* mounted a low block of stone and stood outlined in torchlight, great sable wings a-flutter, as though she were in very truth the dread Death Angel come to grace the sacrifice of poor lives with her presence.

“Look, sors, for th’ love o’ hivin!” bade Costello.

Across the torchlit square there walked, or rather danced, a man. In his hand he held a tether, and I felt a wave of sick revulsion as I recognized the thing he led. It was the Commandant of Tupulo. He was chained and muzzled like a dog, and he went upon all fours, like a brute beast. As his keeper led him to the altar-stone on which the Bat-Woman was poised, he sank back on his heels, threw back his head and held his hands, drooped at the wrists, before him in simulation of a begging dog. At a kick from his keeper he sank down at the altar’s base, drew up his knees and folded arms around them. His depth of degradation reached, he crouched in canine imitation at his mistress’ feet.

“*Corbleu,* I think that we three chose the better part, *n’est-ce-pas,* my friends?” de Grandin asked.

The hot breath rising in my throat choked off my answer. Four men were staggering from the shadows with a cross, a monstrous thing of mortised timbers, and despite myself I felt my knees grow weak as I saw the red stains which disfigured it. “Mine will be there soon,” a voice seemed dinning in my ears. “They’ll stretch my limbs and drive the great spikes through my hands and feet; they’ll hang me there—”

“*La Traidora — la Traidora —* the Traitor!” came a great shout from the crowd, as three masked women

struggled forward with a fourth. All were garbed identically, but we knew before they stripped her mask and gown and sandals off that the captive was poor Nancy Meigs.

There was no pretense of a trial. “*Á la muerte — á la muerte!*” screamed the congregation, and the executioners leapt forward to their task.

Birth-nude, they stretched her on the blood-stained cross and I saw a hulking ruffian poise a great nail over her left palm while in his free hand he drew back a heavy hammer.

Costello started it. Hands joined, he dropped upon his knees and in a firm, strong voice began:

“*Hail, Mary, full of grace, blessèd art Thou among women...*”

De Grandin and I followed suit, and in chorus we repeated that petition of the motherless to Heaven’s Queen. “... *Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of death.*”

“Amen,” concluded Jules de Grandin. and, in the next breath: “*Sang de Dieu*, my friends, they come! Observe them!”

Their motor roars drowned by the screaming of the crowd, three planes zoomed down above the square, and a sudden squall of bullets spewed its deadly rain upon the close-packed ranks which lined the quadrangle.

I saw the executioner fall forward on his victim’s body, a spate of life-blood gushing from his mouth; saw the Commandant leap up, then clutch his breast and topple drunkenly against the altar-stone; saw *La Murciélagá’s* outspread wings in tatters as the steel-sheathed slugs ripped through them and cut a bloody kerf across her bosom; then de Grandin and Costello pulled me down, and we lay upon the stones while gusts of bullets spattered round us or ricocheted with high, thin, irritable whines.

The carnage was complete. Close-packed, illuminated by their own torch flares, and taken wholly by surprise, the bat-men fell before the planes’ machine-gun fire like grain before the reaper.

That the three of us escaped annihilation was at least a minor miracle, but when the squadron leader gave the signal for the fire to cease, and, sub-machine guns held alertly, the aviators clambered from their planes, we rose unharmed, though far from steady on our feet.

“*Muchas gracias, Señor Capitán,*” de Grandin greeted as he halted fifteen paces from the flight commander and executed a meticulous salute. “I assure you that you did not come one little minute in advance of urgent need.

“Come, let us see to Mademoiselle Nancy,” he urged Costello and me. “Perchance she still survives.”

She did. Shielded by the bodies of her executioners and the upright of the cross beside which she had rolled when the gunfire struck the bat-man down, she lay unconscious in a

welter of warm blood, and it was not till we had sponged her off that we found her only hurts were those inflicted by the jungle vines the night before.

Carefully they placed the Commandant’s shot-riddled body in a plane for transportation back to Tupulo, and a military funeral.

“He died a hero’s death, *no?*” the flight commander asked.

“Was he not an officer and gentleman?” de Grandin answered disingenuously.

“But no, my friends,” he told us as we lay sprawled out in deck chairs on the steamship *Golondrina* as she plowed her way toward New York “it was no magic, I assure you. That commandant at Tupulo, I mistrusted his good sense. There was a weakness in his face, and lack of judgment, too. ‘This one loves himself too much, he is a strutting jackdaw, he has what Friend Costello would call the silly pan,’ I say to me while we were talking with him. Besides—

“We knew the countryside was terrified of *La Murciélagá*; the bare mention of her name drove men indoors and women into swoons. That anyone would have the courage to complain of her — to come to the police and ask that they send out an expeditionary force — *pardieu*, it had the smell of fish upon it!

“Furthermore, I am no fool. Not at all, by no means, and it is seldom that I do forget a face. When I saw this Señor Epilar, there was a reminiscence in his features. He reminded me too much of one whom I had seen the night poor Mademoiselle Rita met her tragic death. Also, there was a savage gleam within his eye when it rested on our Nancy — the sort of gleam a cat may show when he finds that he has run the little helpless mouse to earth.

“Jules de Grandin, my friend, are you going into the jungle with this so idiotic Commandant and this young man who looks uncomfortably like the Lady of the Bat?” I ask me.

“Jules de Grandin, my esteemed self, I am going,’ I reply to me, ‘but I shall take precautions, too!’

“Accordingly, while *Monsieur le Capitaine* was fitting out his force and you were packing for the trip, I hied me to a telephone and put a call through to the military airport at Merida. ‘*Monsieur le Commandant,*’ I tell the officer in charge, ‘we are going in the jungle. We go to seek that almost legendary lady, *La Murciélagá*. I fear it is a foolish thing we do, for it is more than possible that we shall be ambushed. Therefore I would that you make use of us for bait. Have flyers fly above the jungle, and if we do not return by tomorrow noon, have them investigate anything suspicious which they may see. And, *Monsieur le Commandant,*’ I tell him in conclusion, ‘it might be well to order them to make investigation with machine-gun fire.’

“*Eh bien*, I think they carried out their orders very well, those ones.”

Nancy laid slim fingers on his arm. “We owe our lives to you — all of us — you little darling!” Impulsively, she leant forward and kissed him on the mouth.

Tiny wrinkles crinkled round de Grandin’s eyes and in

their blue depths flashed an impish gleam.

“Behold, *ma chère*,” he told her solemnly, “I save our lives again.

“*Mozo*,” he hailed a passing deck steward, “bring us four gin slings, *muy pronto!*”

W/HS

WEIRD TALES

SEPTEMBER

Satan's Palimpsest

an eery tale of sinister doom

By SEABURY QUINN

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

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H. P. LOVECRAFT

The
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of
STRANGE
and
UNUSUAL
Stories



Satan's Palimpsest

IT WAS a merry though oddly assorted party Philip Classon entertained at Saint's Rest, his big house beside the Shrewsbury: a motion-picture star, a playwright quietly and industriously drinking himself to death, one or two bankers, a lawyer, several unattached ladies living comfortably on their dower or their alimony, Jules de Grandin and me. Dinner had been perfect, with turtle soup, filet of lemon sole in sauce bercy, Canada grouse and an assortment of wines which caused my little friend's blue eyes to sparkle with appreciation. Now, as he sat with Karen Kirsten on the big divan before the roaring fire of apple logs and sipped his Jérôme Napoléon from a lotus-bud shaped brandy snifter, he was obviously at peace with all the world.

"*Mais certainement, ma belle,*" I heard him tell the actress in an interval between the efforts of the duet at the piano to retail the nostalgic longings of the old cowhand from the Rio Grande, "it is indubitably a fact. Thoughts are things. We may not see or handle them, nor can we weigh them in a balance, but they have a certain substance of their own. They can penetrate, they can permeate the hardest matter, and like the rose-scent in Monsieur Moore's poem, they will cling to it when it is all but worn away by time or smashed by violence."

"Sure of that, are you, de Grandin?" our host asked quizzically as he leant across the sofa back and rested one hand on the little Frenchman's black-clad shoulder, the other on the actress' gleaming arm.

"As sure as one can be of anything — only fools are positive," de Grandin answered with a smile.

"You're certain?"

"Positive, *parbleu!*"

As the laughter died away Classon nodded toward the curtained doorway. "We've a chance to test Doctor de Grandin's theory," he announced. "There's something in the gunroom I'd like to show you and see what effect it has."

Amid murmurs of mystified conjecture he led the way across the wide hall lit by a pair of swinging boat-shaped lamps which gave that odd, pale light that comes only from burning olive oil, swept aside the heavy Turkish hangings at the door and motioned us to enter.

The "gunroom" was a relic of the days when New Jersey had no need of conservation laws for game, and the fowling-piece and rifle were as much a source of daily meat as were the meadow, the pig-sty and the poultry yard. An ancestor of Classon's who built ships when Yankee mariners dropped anchor in every port from Bombay to Southampton had built

Saint's Rest as sturdily as he built his craft, and though slaves' quarters and summer kitchens had long been turned to modern usages, like the gunrooms they still retained their ancient designations.

It was a lovely place. There was a walnut table of Italian make surely not a year younger than the Fifteenth Century, French rosewood chairs upholstered in brocade which must have been worth its measurement in gold, a lacquered Chinese cabinet dating from the days when the Son of Heaven bore the surname Han; across one wall was hung a lovely verdure tapestry from Sixteenth Century Flanders depicting decidedly naughty *al fresco* goings-on with the same lack of restraint as that displayed by that amazing little mannikin in Brussels which every year decants champagne with utter unconventionality.

With a taper Classon lit two oil-dish lamps — the house was wired for electricity, but I'd seen nothing thus far but the light of lamps and candles — and directed our attention to a white-wood table like an altar which stood just within their zone of radiance. "This is it," he told us, and it seemed to me there was a sharp intake of breath, almost like a sigh of pain, as he made the brusque announcement.

Something like the tabernacle of a Catholic altar showed aureately in the lamplight. Two feet in height by eighteen inches wide, pointed like a Gothic arch, plain and unadorned with ornament as a siege gun's shell, its dull mat gold shone dimly in the mounting luminance cast by the gently swaying lamps.

"What is it? Is it a—" the querying babble started, but Classon raised his hand.

"This is just the frame," he answered. "Look."

He pressed a hidden spring and twin doors sprang apart, revealing three pictures integrated into one, all worked in deft mosaic. On the inside of the left-hand door there ranged a group of dancing youths and maidens clad in the chiton of the classic Greeks as modified for use in Constantine's Byzantium. The other panel bore a group of creeping children, nude and chubby with the chubbiness so dearly loved by early artists, while in the center, deep-set between the back-flung doors, there stood a slender, pale ascetic figure with a clout of camel's hair about his loins, rough sandals on his feet and a cross-topped staff in his right hand. The ancient artist had worked cunningly, so cunningly that the tiny lines between the variegated-colored marble were finer than the minute crevices in Chinese crackle-wear, and no detail of the groups or portrait had been lost. The saint's

blue eyes, wide, deep and extraordinarily sad, seemed to look into our own with a searching, deep intensity, as though to chide us for the worldliness that lay within our hearts and say: "Behold these dancing youths, these creeping, puling babes; the babes grow into youth and maidenhood and have their hour of silly pleasure, then comes old age and death and dissolution. Vanity, vanity; all is vanity!"

"Well?" Classon asked when we had gazed upon the ikon for a long moment in silence. "What d'ye see?"

"A sacred picture." — "Beautiful!" — "Exquisite!" — "Sweet!" — "Divine!" — "Superb!" — "Swell!"

The fatuous comments fluttered thick as snowflakes, phrased according to the speaker's wealth or paucity of diction.

"Yes, of course, but what d'ye *see*? What's the picture of?"

"A saint?" I hazarded when no one else seemed willing to express conjecture.

"That's what you all see?" asked Classon, and it seemed to me there was an eagerness about his question and an air of quick relief entirely unwarranted by the triviality of the entire business.

I was turning to examine the Chinese cabinet when de Grandin's hand upon my elbow brought me round.

"Observe her, if you will, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded, motioning toward Karen Kirsten with his eyes.

She had not replied to Classon's questions nor expressed opinion of the ikon's artistry, I realized, but I was unprepared for what I saw. She was standing looking at the triple picture, head thrown back, hands hanging limply open at her sides. The lamplight played across her, accentuating her unusual beauty in a way no cameraman had ever managed. Tall she was, almost six feet, and every line of her was long, but definitely feminine. Her hair, like silver-silken filaments, was smoothed and plaited in long braids about her head; her dazzling fairness was set off by a slim gown of apple-green baghera draped in Grecian fashion; there were bracelets of carved gold upon her arms and a strand of pearls about her throat, and I caught my breath in sudden wonder, for lustrous pearls and lucent skin almost exactly matched each other. Her ice-blue Nordic eyes habitually held the commanding look which is the heritage of Northern races, but now there was another, different look in them. The pupils seemed to spread until they stained the blue irises black; I could see fear stealing into them, stark, abysmal fear which radiated from a sickened heart and was mirrored in her eyes.

"All right, folks," Classon's brusque announcement broke the spell; "that's all there is. Let's go back and have another drink."

"But why did you insist we tell you what we saw, Phil?"

asked Mrs. Durstin as we reassembled in the drawing-room. "It's just an ordinary lovely piece of mosaic, isn't it?"

Classon laughed shamefacedly. "Just a gag, Clara," he assured her. "Didn't you ever notice how the average person can be bullied out of sticking to the evidence of his own senses? Why, I've had people here who declared they saw all sorts of things — even swore they saw the figures move — when I kept asking 'em what they saw in those pictures. Seems as if this is a pretty level-headed crowd, though; I didn't have a bit of luck with you."

The evening passed with a surprising variety of liquid refreshment, some passable singing, much ultra-modernistic dancing and a number of stories, some of which were funny and risqué, some merely ribald. By midnight I had managed to convince myself that the vision of Miss Kirsten's terror in the gunroom had been due to some illness which had stricken her — any doctor knows what changes indigestion-pangs can work in patients' faces — and dismissed the recollection from my mind.

But as we paused to say good-night beside the stairs, Miss Kirsten laid her hand upon my arm.

"You and Doctor de Grandin drove down from Harrisonville, didn't you, Doctor Trowbridge?" she asked, and again I saw that flicker of stark terror in her eyes.

"Yes," I answered.

"How long are you staying?"

"Only to breakfast, unfortunately. I should have liked the opportunity of talking more with you, but—"

"Won't you take me with you, please?" she broke in on my clumsy gallantry. "There isn't any train till noon tomorrow, and I've been going utterly mad in this house all day. I must get away as quickly as I can. I must — *I must!*"

"Why, certainly," I soothed. "Doctor de Grandin and I shall be pleased to have you with us on the homeward drive."

"Oh" — her long, slim, delicately articulated fingers closed upon my arm with a grip of surprising strength — "thank you, Doctor!"

She made me the offer of a grateful, half-frightened smile, lit her candle from the lamp of hammered bronze which burned upon the table by the newel post, and turned to mount the stairs.

Arrayed in violet-silk pajamas and mauve dressing-gown, de Grandin stood before the window of our bedroom, looking out upon the snow-flecked darkness of the winter night as if he sought to light it with something burning in his mind.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" I asked, smothering a yawn as I made for the bathroom, tooth-brush in hand.

"I wonder," he returned without taking his meditative gaze

from the black square of the window, "I ponder, I cogitate; there is a black dog running through my brain."

"Eh?" I shot back. "A black—"

"*Précisément*. An exceedingly troublesome and active small black poodle, my friend. Why?"

"I don't think that I follow—"

"*Ah bah*, you are literal as a platter of boiled codfish! When I ask why, I mean why. Why, by example, does our friend Classon want to have the testimony of his guests that that ikon in his gunroom is but the pretty picture of some dancing children and some creeping babes who act as foils for an ascetic saint? Why is he relieved when they tell him what they see. Why—"

"Didn't you hear what he told Mrs. Durstin?" I broke in. "It's some silly sort of game he played; he wanted to see if he could bully us into thinking that we saw—"

"What he has seen, maybe?"

"What *he* saw? Why, what could he see that we couldn't?"

"That which Mademoiselle Kirsten saw, perhaps."

"See here," I dropped into the armchair by the fire and felt for my cigar-case, "all this mystery has me slowly going crazy. Classon didn't seem in any jocose mood when he asked us what we saw while looking at that picture. Indeed, it seemed to me that he was definitely frightened, and when we told him that we saw the picture of a saint he seemed relieved, yet a little disappointed, too.

"Then take Karen Kirsten. I can't understand her. She's more like Brunhilde than Griselda; I'd say she never was afraid of anything. Twelve hundred years ago women like her swung double-bladed axes and tugged twenty-foot oars beside their men, and spat back curses and defiance in the face of god and devil; yet if that woman wasn't absolutely mad with horror of some sort — if she isn't hag-ridden and almost wild to leave this house this very minute — I never saw terror in a human face. Have you any idea what it's all about?"

He turned from the window and tore the blue wrapping from a packet of "Marylands," selected one of the evil-smelling things with infinite care and set it alight. "Not an idea, my friend, merely a thought; one of those vague, elusive thoughts that fade like dewdrops in the sun when you seek to put them into words. But—" He shook his head impatiently, as though to clear his brain, then recommenced:

"You saw the composition of those pictures, how they are constructed of cleverly matched bits of colored stone. Very good. Between the little colored fragments are tiny, so small lines, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Of course, it's a mosaic—"

"*Bien*. It was only for a moment, for the fraction of the twinkling of an eye, but as I looked upon those pictures I

thought the colored marbles ran together, separated, turned about one another like the bright glass of a kaleidoscope and formed a different pattern. It was over quickly, *parbleu*, so quickly that it could hardly have been said to have occurred, but—" He paused and puffed reflectively at his cigarette, letting twin rivulets of smoke trickle slowly from his nostrils.

"What was it that you saw?"

"*Mordieu*, that is what taunts me. I cannot say. So quickly it came, so fast it disappeared that I had not time to realize it. But I am certain that it was an evil, an obscene and wicked thing I saw, like a monkey dancing on a consecrated altar."

"But that's absurd."

"The line of demarkation that divides absurdity from horror is often very finely drawn, my friend." For a moment he stared straight before him, and his little round blue eyes seemed misted, as though, still open, they shut out vision while he racked his inner consciousness for an answer to the riddle. Abruptly: "Come, let us go and look at it," he bade. "It may be in the quiet of the empty room we shall be able to congeal and hold that fleeting metamorphosis which mocked me when we stood there with the others."

We tiptoed toward the stairs, but hardly had we gone ten feet when his hand upon my arm brought me to a halt. In the dim light cast by a single swinging oil lamp someone was coming from the floor below, someone who walked in silence and whose presence we should not have realized had it not been for the shadow cast across the stairhead.

"Back into this doorway if you please, my friend," de Grandin whispered, and as we shrank into the recess of the deepset door Karen Kirsten glided up the stairs, paused a moment with one hand upon the baluster and threw back her head with up-turned eyes as though imploring mercy from kind Providence. She was tense as a drawn harp-string, and her face was set in lines of suffering, but the faint light seeping up the stair-well from behind her rippled through her golden hair and cast shadows on her brows which seemed to deepen the cerulean of her eyes. In her sleeveless, neckless nightrobe of white crepe, with a slender hand laid humbly on her heaving bosom, it seemed to me she bore a likeness to the pictures of Saint Barbara.

"Ah, God!" she breathed in a high, quivering sigh. "God have pity!"

Filled with compassion I took a half-step toward her, but the sudden pressure of de Grandin's small hand on my elbow halted me.

"Observe," he breathed — "*le sang!*"

I felt a retching wave of sickness as he spoke. Across the bodice of her nightdress where her slender hand had rested, was a dark, rubescent stain.

For an endless moment we three, watched and watchers,

stood in statue-like stillness; then with another sobbing sigh the woman turned and glided down the hall, her white, bare feet as soundless as a zephyr on the polished boards.

“Wh—what can have happened?” I faltered, but his only answer was to urge me toward the stairs.

The pale glow of a single lamp burning like a vigil light above the altar-table where the ikon stood shone through the gunroom as we entered. At a glance I saw the little doors were open and the triple picture on display, but before de Grandin’s quickly indrawn breath had sounded I had also seen the thing that lay before the table on the floor.

It was — it had been — Wyndham Farraday, the dissolute young playwright, and a single glance assured us he was dead. His head lay back, and in the staring, sunken eyes, pinched nose, drooping jaw and idiotically half-protruding tongue we read the signs that to the practised eye are unmistakable. He lay upon his back with arms thrown out to right and left as though he had been crucified upon the hardwood floor, and from the left breast of his pajama jacket thrust the gilded cross-shaped handle of a slender dagger, a mediæval misericord, thin as a darning-needle, pointed as a bee-sting, designed to slip between the links of fine chain-mail and deal the death blow where a larger weapon would have failed. A little sluggish stream of blood had stained his jacket round the knife-wound. He was not handsome or majestic as he lay there with the chill of *rigor mortis* even then beginning to congeal his loose-hung lower jaw. Poets and romantic writers to the contrary, there is little dignity or beauty in raw death, as every soldier, doctor and embalmer knows. The majesty of death is largely artificial.

“Do you think she—” I began, but de Grandin’s sudden exclamation broke my words.

“*L’idole* — the picture, my friend — observe her, if you please!” he breathed.

I looked, then blinked my eyes in wondering disbelief. The little bits of colored marble which composed the triple picture seemed sliding past, around and *through* one another with a bewildering kaleidoscopic motion, losing their old pattern, making vague, unformed designs upon their golden background, then rearranging themselves in new and terrifying groupings. It was hard — impossible — to say what scenes they formed, but I felt a wave of nausea sweeping over me, a physical sickness such as that I felt when as a young interne I had been assigned to duty at the city morgue and for the first time smelled the fulsome odor of decaying human flesh.

Then sanity returned. The lamp! It was swaying pendulum-like above the ikon. That was it; the changing light and shadow as the light swung back and forth had caused an optical illusion. I took the boat-shaped bowl of burnished copper in my hands and steadied it. When I looked

again the pictures had resumed their lovely wont. The youths and maidens once again danced joyously upon the tender, blue-green grass against a background of fresh-budding willows; the chubby cooing infants rolled and sported on a flowering sward; the pale, ascetic saint looked out with admonition and reproach upon a world which wooed the pomps and pleasures of the carnal life.

“Oh thou empty-headed zany, thou species of an elephant, thou — oh, *le bon Dieu* give me patience with this witless one!” de Grandin fairly chattered, his round blue eyes ablaze with indignation, his small hands twitching to close round my throat.

“Why, what’s the matter now?” I asked. “That swaying lamp obscured our vision; we’ll need a steady light to see—”

“If kindly Providence will defend me from my well-intentioned friends, I think that I can guard against my enemies!” he broke in sharply, looking at me with a heaven-grant-me-fortitude expression. “In your attempt at helpfulness you have blocked the path of justice, human and divine. That swinging lamp was not set in motion by itself, *par consequent* it must have started swaying by some outside force. I would make bold to venture that some human hand had touched it in the recent past, for it was still in motion when we came here. Accordingly, there were unquestionably finger-prints upon it. Whose? *Hélas*, that we shall never know. You must needs stop the light from swinging because it made you see things which were not there to see — and left your great and ugly paw-prints on it in the process. Twenty expert tracers cannot now find the prints which were left there by the person who had touched that lamp a little while before. And that person, I damn think, was none other than the murderer of this poor one.

“Also, the distortion of this picture, as you call it, which you have attributed to the swaying of that lamp, may be the very crux of all this cursèd mystery. Why was Monsieur Classon anxious to have the testimony of his guests that this pretty picture was nothing but a pretty picture? Because, I think, he had seen it show another scene, *pardieu!* Why did *la Kirsten* show such signs of fear when she looked upon this seventy-times-damned ikon? Because she saw a something which was not good to see while the others saw but pretty figures! Why did Jules de Grandin have impressions of some sacrilegious scene when first he looked upon this piece of what seems innocent mosaic? Because I am attuned to superphysical appearances; I see deeper into such things than the ordinary man. Finally, why did you look sick, as if your dinner had most vilely disagreed with you, when you looked at this cursèd picture but a moment since? Because you, too, saw something dreadful taking shape. A moment more and we had captured it — but you must be helpful and dispel the atmosphere of evil which was gathering thick as fog.

“And now you ask me what’s the matter! You should abase yourself. You should repent in sackcloth; you should walk barefoot through the snow; you should abstain from liquor for a week, *parbleu!*”

“No matter,” he put aside annoyance with true French practicality and turned toward the door. “This is now a matter for police investigation. Let us telephone the state constabulary.”

“This is positively the most uncanny business I’ve ever seen,” Captain Chenevert of the State Police informed us.

De Grandin eyed him saturninely. “You are informing me, *mon capitaine?*”

“I certainly am. Look here: We’ve checked and double-checked that room for finger-prints, and what do we find? Nothing. Not a thing!”

“Nothing?”

“Well, practically. Or, rather, something worse. There are plain and unmistakable prints on the dagger handle, but they’re Wyndham Farraday’s. Now, that just doesn’t make sense. Farraday might have stabbed himself through the heart, though this job’s so neatly done it almost seems as if a surgeon did it; but if he did it himself one of two things would have followed the infliction of the wound. Either he’d have staggered forward and fallen in a heap, probably on his side, or he’d have collapsed at once; in which case he would either have fallen face-forward or dropped upon his back with his legs partly doubled under him. Possibly — though this usually happens in cases of shooting through the brain — he’d have been seized with a cadaveric spasm, all his muscles would have tightened into knots, and his fingers would have closed round the dagger-hilt in an almost unbreakable grip.”

He paused and looked at Jules de Grandin questioningly. “Do you agree?”

“Perfectly, *mon capitaine*; you have exhausted the possibilities of the situation from a scientific standpoint.”

“Then why in blazing hell was he lying so neatly spread out on the floor with his heels together like a soldier at attention and his arms flung out at right angles to his body?”

“Mightn’t someone wearing gloves have stabbed him after he’d had the dagger in his hand?” I hazarded; but:

“Not a chance!” Chenevert smiled bleakly. “We’ve considered that, but if it had been done that way Farraday’s finger-prints would have been practically obliterated, or at least smudged to some extent. They’re not; they’re clean and clear as any I’ve ever seen. This thing’s got me going nutty. The finger-prints say ‘suicide’ with a capital S; all collateral evidence points to murder. If such a thing weren’t palpably absurd here, I’d say it looked like *hari-kari* — ritual suicide with the assistance of a second party, you know. I saw a case

of it in Kobe some years ago. A man had disemboweled himself in the approved Japanese manner, but the friend who acted as his second had waited to compose his limbs so that he lay as peacefully as Wyndham Farraday, though he must have threshed around terribly during the death agony. “

Suddenly I saw it all. Karen Kirsten’s frenzy to get away, her terror when she entered the gunroom last night, the blood on her nightgown when we saw her in the upper hall! It had been a suicide pact, and the woman lost her courage at the last. “By, George,” I exclaimed, “Miss—”

The kick de Grandin gave me underneath the table nearly broke my tibia, but it had the desired effect. “Mistakes like that are easy to make in such cases,” I ended lamely as Chenevert cast a questioning look at me.

“Friend Trowbridge has the right of it,” de Grandin nodded. “There are many angles to this case, my captain; the trail is long and winding, and involved. Perhaps it would be well to lay the household under interdict.”

“Eh? Inter—”

“Perfectly. Until the guilty party is arrested or the case marked permanently unsolved, every person in the building is suspect. People have a way of disappearing, my captain, once they leave the jurisdiction. While all of us are here you can put the finger on us at convenience. Once we are scattered—”

“I gotcha,” Chenevert laughed. “You bet I’ll put the clamp on, Doctor. Can’t hold ’em here indefinitely, but I’ll post a couple of the boys here with orders not to let anybody leave for thirty-six hours. We should know where we stand by that time. Meantime,” he wound his muffler round his neck and buttoned up his short coat, “there’s the body to dispose of and reports to be prepared. Call me at the barracks if anything comes up. I’ll be over again sometime this afternoon.”

“Oh, this is terrible!” Karen Kirsten wailed when we told her the police had forbidden us to leave. “I have shopping to do in New York, and my lawyers to consult about a new contract. I have to take a plane for the Coast immediately!” Her blue eyes blazed and her long hands folded and unfolded as she strode across the floor with her characteristic long-limbed, effortless walk. “I can’t — I won’t be cooped up in this dreadful place another minute, I tell you!”

True to the traditions of her trade, she was working herself into a temperamental tantrum, but beneath de Grandin’s level stare she calmed amazingly.

“It would be better if we told ourselves the truth without reservation of any sort, *Mademoiselle*,” he spoke in a level, almost toneless voice. “We are your friends; moreover, our experience has taught us to give credence to many things which the ordinary man would brush aside as nonsense.

Nevertheless, we cannot help you if you are not frank.”

“Why shouldn’t I be frank?” she blazed. “I’ve nothing to hide. I know nothing of this dreadful business.”

“You did not know that Monsieur Farraday was dead until they told you?”

“Of course not!”

“Not even when you left your room at dead of night and crept mouse-quiet to the gunroom where he lay like one crucified before that so queer ikon?”

“What do you mean? I never left my room last night—”

“*Mademoiselle*,” he interrupted harshly, “you are lying. It was Doctor Trowbridge and I who notified the police of Monsieur Farraday’s death when we stumbled on his body in the gunroom. As we were about to leave our room we saw you coming up the stairs, we saw the agitation under which you labored, we saw the blood upon your *robe de nuit*. We have not spoken of this, *Mademoiselle*, for there are some things best left unsaid, for the present, at any rate; but if you persist in this pretense of ignorance — if you will not help us to help you” — he spread his hands and raised his shoulders, brows and elbows in a shrug — “*eh bien*, it is a crime to withhold information from the officers, *Mademoiselle*. You would not have us become criminals, surely?”

She went absolutely rigid. There had never been much natural color in her cheeks; now they were positively corpse-gray. And her eyes were terrible in their fixed stare.

“You mean you saw me come upstairs last night?” she whispered. Her words were so low that we could scarcely hear them, her voice flat, expressionless, almost mechanical.

“Perfectly, *Mademoiselle*.” The ghost of a hard smile curved the lips beneath the trimly waxed wheat-blond mustache.

Surrender showed in the sudden drooping of her shoulders, in the lines of weariness that suddenly etched themselves in her carefully-tended face.

“Very well,” she answered in a voice dull with fatigue, “I was there; I saw him — found him huddled up before the altar where that dreadful picture stands. He seemed so young, so helpless, lying there like that. I composed his limbs” — her blue eyes filled with tears and her firm chin quivered with unbidden sobs — “I stretched his arms out, too. It was a dreadful thing he’d done; it’s terrible to kill yourself, and I thought that if I stretched his arms out like a cross it might help him plead for pardon—”

“That was the *only* reason you arranged him so, *Mademoiselle*?” Again the flicker of a disbelieving smile showed upon his mobile lips.

“Oh” — the woman turned on him, her eyes gone flat with fright — “you’re dreadful, uncanny, devilish! No, if you must have the truth! I stretched his arms out like a cross because I was afraid. There’s an old belief in Sweden that

the dead ride hard, that suicides are lonely on their way through hell, and come back to the world to look for company; but if you lay a cross across their path, their way back to this world is barred. They can’t come at you, then. We forget these things in practical America, but Death’s not practical; it’s as old and terrible as Odin’s raven or the Storm Sisters; it brings back thoughts of olden days, so—”

“Precisely, *Mademoiselle*, one understands. Now tell us, if you please, what made you seek the gunroom in the first place?”

“Give me a cigarette,” she begged, and he held his open case before her, then held his lighter forward. As she touched her cigarette tip to the fire she looked at him across the tiny flame that gleamed its echo fascinatingly in her brilliant eyes.

“I’ve had devils ever since I came here,” she told us. Her voice was slurred and languorous, almost somnolent, yet strangely mechanical, as though an unseen hand played a gramophone on which her words had been recorded. “I don’t know what it was; ordinarily I’m not subject to nerves, even when I’m tired, but something in the very atmosphere of this house seemed to frighten me. Perhaps it was the eery half-light the place has even in the day, maybe the lamplight, so different from the bright glow of electricity to which I’m used. At any rate, I had the creeps from the moment I crossed the threshold; everywhere I went I seemed to feel eyes, dozens of pairs of eyes — evil, wicked, calculating eyes — boring right into my brain from behind. I’d turn around a dozen times in the process of crossing the room to see if someone really were staring at me, but it was no use, the eyes were quicker. No matter how fast I’d turn they’d get around behind me, and keep staring — *leering* — at me from the back.”

She ground the fire of her cigarette out against the bottom of an ashtray. “Last year I visited a psycho-analyst in Hollywood, and he hypnotized me. I can remember how I fought against it just as I was going off to sleep. I kept shrieking to myself inside my brain: ‘No, no; I won’t give up my consciousness; I won’t let this man inside my secret soul!’ but by that time it had gone too far, and I fell asleep despite myself. That’s how it was here. Someone — some *thing* — seemed trying to creep inside my brain; to steal my mind — no, not quite that, rather, to crowd it out. I could feel the force of impact of an alien presence trying steadily to get inside me, and just as I fought against the hypnotist, so I fought against this threat here at Saint’s Rest. Only this time I was prepared; I was warned against the attack in time; I felt the subtle influence that probed and clawed and dug at my integrity. And I fought it — *Gud*, how I fought it!

“It was through Wyndham Farraday that I met Mr.

Classon. I'd known Wyndham out on the Coast when he was doing some writing for Cosmic Films, and looked him up when I came East. He told me of a friend of his who had this wonderful old house filled with the most astonishing old relics, and said the pride of the collection was a reliquary brought from Constantinople when the Crusaders under Baldwin sacked it in 1204.

"I love old things. I've spent a fortune on them for my house in Beverly, and the thought of something like this fascinated me. Wyndham wanted Mr. Classon to take me to the gunroom right away, but he put us off with first one excuse and then another. We didn't go in till he took the others to see it after dinner last night, and by that time I was almost frantic. I felt that if only I could get away from this awful place I'd have nothing more to ask.

"The moment Mr. Classon took us in to see the ikon I *knew*. There, I realized, was the spider that sat in the center of the dreadful web which was entangling me. A spider — ugh! Spiders suck their victims' blood, I'm told, and just so this — this *thing* — had been sucking at my soul and sanity. I looked at the horrible, lovely thing with the same feeling of repulsion I'd have felt while looking at some beautiful venomous reptile in its cage. Only this thing wasn't caged. It was loose, and nothing stood between it and me. Then, as I looked, the colored stones in the mosaics all seemed to melt and run together, and form a sort of toneless gray. It seemed as though there were dull, lead-colored mirrors in the golden frames, and as I looked in them other pictures seemed to form. The dancing youths and maidens seemed to age before my eyes till they were dreadful dotards and hags, the little babies seemed to swell and puff to monstrous parodies of human children. The saint — "her voice trailed off and her eyes became lack-luster, dead as painted eyes in a wooden statue's painted face.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted softly.

"I — don't — remember," she said softly. "It was something terrible, some dreadful transformation that shook me like a chill, but I can't describe it."

"One appreciates your difficulty," the little Frenchman murmured. "And then?"

"Like a voice in a dream I heard Mr. Classon telling us to go back to the drawing-room, and it seemed to awaken me from a sort of trance I'd fallen into. I drank more than I should last night, but if I could get drunk, I thought, I might be able to escape the memory of those frightful figures in the pictures. Finally, when we said good-night, I asked Doctor Trowbridge if I might ride up with you this morning.

"I couldn't sleep. The recollection of the things I'd seen — all the more terrifying because I couldn't recall them clearly — kept torturing me, and I made up my mind to go down to the gunroom and have another look at the

reliquary."

A faint smile raised the drooping comers of her mouth, and she looked at us diffidently, as though she begged for understanding.

"When I was a little girl we had a picture-book that scared me dreadfully. It was the story of Strongheart and the Dragon, and I'd feel my breath all hot and sulfurous in my throat when I looked at some of the illustrations. But I kept going back to it. I'd creep into the library, take it down from its shelf and, beginning at the first page, slowly turn the pages back, leaf by leaf, till I came at last to the picture showing Strongheart grappling with the Monster. 'It won't frighten you so much this time, you're getting used to it,' I'd tell myself as I came nearer and nearer to the terrifying picture. But it always did. When at last I'd turned the final leaf and saw the awful, scaly thing with protruding, fiery eyes and forked red tongue and clutching claws staring at me, I'd seem to suffocate again, and run shrieking from the library to hide my face in Mother's apron.

"It was like that last night. I knew I'd be frightened almost past endurance if I looked at the ikon again, but I couldn't resist the morbid urge to go downstairs. Finally I gave up the struggle and crept down, fighting with myself at every step, and losing the contest at each stride. I was fairly running when I reached the lower hall.

"A light was burning in the gunroom, and it must have been set going recently, for the lamp was still swaying like a pendulum when I entered. I started for the picture, but before I reached it my foot struck something, and when I looked down there was poor Wyndham lying dead before me. I tried to scream, but the breath seemed to stick in my throat. I just stood there trembling, and in my brain a thought kept pounding: 'The picture made him do it — the picture made him do it!'"

"You say you knew he did it. One does not doubt your intuition, but how were you certain it was suicide, *Mademoiselle?*"

"Because there was a smear of blood on the heel of his hand, as if it had spurted out when he drove the dagger through his heart. If someone else had stabbed him he'd have thrown his hand up to his heart or tried to pluck the dagger out; the blood would have been on his palm or on his fingers."

"*Bravo*, an excellent deduction. And then—"

"I wiped the blood off his poor hand and wiped my own hands on my nightdress, then composed his limbs and laid him like a cross to bar his wandering spirit if it came back seeking company. Then I crept back upstairs without stopping even to extinguish the lamp."

An agony of entreaty was in her face, and she clasped her hands imploringly, not theatrically, but instinctively, as she

begged: "Please, please believe me. I've told you nothing but the truth. You don't think that I murdered Wyndham, do you?"

"We believe you utterly, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin answered. "But what the police would think is something else again. It would be better if we kept our counsel, we three, and said nothing till we have had time to think."

"Now what?" I asked as we closed our interview with Karen Kirsten.

"I think that I should like a word or several with Monsieur Classon," he replied. "His anxiety to test his guests' reactions to that *sacré* picture was founded on no idle whim, my friend; there is something much decidedly more than meets the naked eye in all this business of the monkey, or I am vastly more mistaken than I think. Yes, of course."

But Philip Classon was nowhere to be found. We sought him in the drawing-room, the library, the little combination office and retreat which he had made above the ancient carriage house. Finally, all other places failing, we ventured to the gunroom. The night before we had observed that only a heavy Turkish tapestry closed off the gunroom from the wide central hall. Now, as we put the drapery back, we found our passage barred by a heavy sliding door which had been drawn and locked.

"*Sang du diable!*" de Grandin muttered when neither repeated knockings nor calls could elicit a response; "this is more than merely strange! He cannot have gone out, the police will not permit that any leave the premises without a pass from Captain Chenevert; he is not in any of the other rooms; *alors*, he is in there. But who would go into that devil-haunted place, and why does he persist in keeping silent? *Parbleu*, but I should like to tweak him by the nose."

"Perhaps he doesn't want to be disturbed," I ventured. "Events of the last twelve hours have been enough to make him worry. If—"

"If he does not answer our next summons I shall force the door," the little Frenchman interrupted. "I do not trust that gunroom, me. No, it is an evil place, the very temple of the evil genius which has haunted *Mademoiselle* Kirsten since she came here. *Holà*, Monsieur Classon, are you within? We have important matters to discuss!"

Utter silence answered him and with a sigh of vexation he went to seek the trooper who stood guard at the front door.

The young state constable was diffident. His orders were to watch the house and see that no one left. Regulations forbade the injury of private property unless a crime had been committed.

"*Morbleu*, a crime will be committed, that of assault and battery, if you refuse us aid," the little Frenchman blazed. "Am I not in charge here in Captain Chenevert's absence?"

But certainly. Are not *Monsieur le Capitaine* and I close friends, boon companions? Indubitably. Have we not been drunk together? It is entirely so. Break in the door, *mon vieux*; I will shoulder full responsibility."

Whoever built that door had understood his business, for it was not until de Grandin had added his weight to the stalwart young trooper's that the lock gave way and the heavy oaken panels slid aside.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed as the gunroom stood revealed.

"Well, I'll be damned!" the trooper swore.

"*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" said Jules de Grandin.

No lamp was burning in the room, and the heavy, rebound curtains had been drawn across the windows to shut out the howling storm, but enough light filtered through to make large objects visible. Almost in the selfsame spot where Wyndham Farraday had stretched out cruciform in death something half leant, half knelt in the gloom, its outlines proclaiming it a man, but its attitude terrifyingly inhuman.

It was — or rather had been — Philip Classon, and he leant obliquely forward with half-bent knees and dangling hands that almost touched the floor, and head bent oddly sidewise, mouth partly opened to permit a quarter-inch of livid, blood-empurpled tongue to find escape between the teeth displayed by curled-back upper lip and limply hanging, flaccid lower jaw. A strand of knotted rope was round his neck, its upper end made fast to the bronze ringbolt which secured the hanging lamp. The rope had been too long and Classon too tall to permit conventional suicide. It had been necessary for him to lean, almost kneel, in order to secure sufficient downward drag to strangle himself. Any time within the first few seconds after dropping forward he could have saved himself by merely standing upright, but unconsciousness follows swiftly on compression of the great blood-vessels of the neck.... He was grotesque but placid. There had been no death agony.

De Grandin and I were regaling ourselves with black coffee liberally flavored with araq when Captain Chenevert stormed in after battling fifteen miles of snow-blocked roads.

"Another one?" he shouted angrily. "In the same room — within twelve hours? God A'mighty, this things gettin' to be a habit!"

Functionaries filled the house with utter chaos the remainder of the day. Photographers and finger-print experts from the police barracks; a sheriff's deputy, not quite clear as to either functions, rights or duties, but officiously anxious to impress us and the cynically polite state troopers with his own importance; the coroner, who being also the neighborhood mortician was wrung between the necessity of

appearing appropriately grave and the difficultly suppressed delight at acquiring two cases from the same house in a single day. Finally the coroner's physician, a superannuated quack whose knowledge of postmortem phenomena of suicide was plainly inferior to the state policemen's expert training. But at last the grisly business finished, and Classon left his house feet-first upon a stretcher, his mortality concealed but not disguised beneath a not-too-fresh white sheet.

Dinner was a dismal rite, its only spot of color Karen Kirsten's golden hair and vivid, scarlet lips. No one strove for conversation, no one had much appetite for food, but when we went into the drawing-room for coffee and liqueurs the appetite for alcohol was something more than obvious. By nine o'clock the women were thick-tongued and maudlin, the men sunk in the utter taciturnity of saturnine intoxication.

Karen Kirsten left us early, pleading headache, and de Grandin and I followed her as quickly as we could. There was too much of the solemnity and none of the jollity of a wake about that dim-lit drawing-room.

"You've some theory," I accused as we shut our bedroom door against the dismal crowd downstairs, "What is it?"

"This afternoon I have been reading in the library of our late host," de Grandin answered as he fit a cigarette, "and what I read may throw some light upon these self-destructions. Mademoiselle Kirsten furnished us the clue when she told us that accursed picture came from Constantinople. You are familiar with the culture of Byzantium?"

"Only vaguely."

"One assumed as much. Very well: The Greeks of that old city were an evil lot. For the most part they conformed to Christianity only outwardly, and conformity with them was largely but an overlaying of the ancient cults with a thin veneer of outward faith. At heart they never lost their paganism, and paganism, my friend, is far from being the sweet, pretty thing our pastoral poets would depict it.

"Diana of the Ephesians, the All Mother, sometimes known as *Magna Mater*, was no prototype of the Blessed Virgin; quite otherwise, I do assure you. There were dark mysteries in the groves of Aricia beside the lake men called the Mirror of Diana. Dionysos, who has been so celebrated by our neopagan poets that we commonly regard him as a hearty boon companion, was far from being so. True, he was the god of women, wine and song, but his women were harlots, his wine was drunkenness, his songs the ditties of the brothel. At his midnight festivals men and women cast their garments off and ran with staring eyes and unbound hair between the swaying trees, frenzied with the worship of their god, and his worship was unbridled lust. Little children were caught up by grown men and women, oftentimes their own

parents, and forcibly initiated in the rites of drunkenness and carnal love. Aphrodite's priestesses were mere strumpets, working openly in competition with the common women of the town. Adonis, that pale lovely boy so famed in poetry and picture, was worshiped with the sacrifice of boars. *Ha*, but there were places where his female votaries, anxious to assimilate their god through the intervention of his sacred animals, assumed the name and rôle of sows!

"Such were the deities of paganism. They were not gods, but devils. Yet for hundreds of years they had been worshipped with revolting ceremonies. Would people long accustomed to a religion of drunkenness and lechery willingly forgo it for the gentle, simple rites of Christianity? Not willingly, but Constantine the Great gave them their choice of Cross or sword, and they chose the Cross. Yet ever the old and wicked faith persisted, always there were found some worshippers of the old ones in the secret places.

"*Bien*. It was not safe to flaunt their heathen practises. The lictors of the Emperor were ever on the watch for those who frequented suspicious gatherings; so, like the gambling-houses in your puritanical communities where gaming is prohibited, they must perforce resort to subterfuge. They had chapels to all outward seeming dedicated to the holy saints, and in those chapels they had furniture which seemed devoted to the Christian worship. But as the witty Monsieur Gilbert says in his opera *Pinafore*, 'Things are seldom what they seem.' A quick change here, the drawing of a curtain or pressing of a hidden spring there, and the sacred Christian ikons become horrid instruments of evil, base scenes which pander to the passions like those which graced the obscene sanctuary of the goddess Aphrodite.

"But in some instances these Christians-who-were-no-Christians did not depend on anything so crude as mere mechanical appliances. They had skilled workmen make the holy images, sacred pictures, sacerdotal vessels which by means of cunning spells and conjurations were endowed with power to change their aspect of their own accord when the concentrated thought of evil persons focused on them. Happily, we do not know just what these wicked old ones' magic was; we do know that it comprehended human sacrifice and defilement of the sacred things of Christianity. We know also that periodically it was necessary that a victim be immolated, else the evil power of these Jekyll-Hyde things made of gold and stone and silver would be lost.

"Now, Friend Trowbridge, thoughts are things. Who is it that is not unpleasantly impressed when standing in a dungeon of the bad old Middle Ages? Who can look upon the blade of that blood-thirsty guillotine with which so many brave and lovely necks were severed while the Terror raged in *la belle France* and forbear to shiver? Who can hold a hangman's rope within his hands and not have feelings of a

vague uneasiness? No one but the veriest clod, *pardieu!* For why? Because, I tell you, thoughts are things. The evil passions, the emotions of hatred, anger or despair which flowed so freely round these solid objects soaked into them as water penetrates a porous stone. And ever and anon those very thoughts are loosed — exhaled, if you prefer the term — upon the world again.

“*Bien. Très bien. Tout va bien.* In Monsieur Classon’s books I read something of the history of this so hateful picture which he showed us. The Crusaders under Baldwin stole it from a place they thought to be a Christian chapel when they sacked Constantinople. *Ha*, but the one who brought it back to Venice soon discovered his mistake! He set it up upon the altar of a church, and straightway evil things began to happen. Good women praying at that altar turned to strumpets; mild, godly men were roused to deeds of lust and violence. At last the good priests exorcised the lovely, evil thing; then to make assurance doubly sure, got rid of it.

“But Italians were Italians then as now. Instead of throwing it away, destroying it, they sold it to a Frenchman!

“Piously, my guileless countryman took the vile thing home with him and made an offering of it to a house of Benedictines. *Nom d’un rat*, within a month all hell had broken loose in that community! The monks forgot their vows, and I regret to state the nuns did likewise. They mortified the flesh with mutton pie on Fridays, they drank sweet wines and sang some tunes which had a most unchurchly air, and other things they did which more befitted soldiers and women of the camp than sober-lived conventuals. It was a gay and naughty time they had until the bishop heard of it.

“Came the Revolution. Tired of being trodden underfoot the people rose, and like a rabid, sightless beast struck right and left in frenzy, cutting down the just and unjust in their anger. The convents and religious houses were suppressed and sacred vessels melted down and turned to money to assist the Government in waging war against the foreign despots who would seat a king again upon the throne of France and place the tyrant’s heel once more upon the people’s neck. But not this one, *hélas!*

“An English milord bought it and took it to his *triste* and foggy little island. *Eh bien*, he was quite a fellow, that one! The things he did were shocking, even to a generation which was noted for its tolerance. If he coveted a neighbor’s wife that neighbor would have been advised to say his paternosters, for our gallant lord was skilled in sword-play and could crack a wine-glass stem at twenty paces with his pistol bullet. Also it appeared that Satan was a loving guardian of his own; for when the injured gentleman sent friends to wait on the seducer of his wife or fiancée or daughter, he might have saved his heirs much trouble if he

had sent messengers to interview the clerk, the parson and the sexton, for he soon had need of all their offices.

“*Tiens*, the devil is a mocker, always. After many years of startlingly successful sin our noble lord was caught red-handed as a card cheat. His fortune had been wasted by extravagance, the Jews of Lombard Street refused to lend him further money on his lands, he became a bankrupt and perished miserably in debtor’s prison.

“Among the items seized by creditors was this same accursed picture. For years it gathered dust in storage, then was put on sale at auction. Monsieur Classon’s uncle purchased it, but luckily for him he kept it in a safe deposit box, and not until a year ago was it brought out and placed among the treasures of the gunroom. Again his luck held good, for he was much away from home, and though there were some stories of some naughty intrigues in the servants’ quarters, who knows if these were influenced by the presence of the picture in this house or simply the result of poor, weak human nature?

“At any rate *Monsieur* the Senior Classon died and his nephew took possession of this house and all things in it. When did he first perceive this picture of the saint was not as other pictures? One wonders. Surely, he must have noticed it, for it had him greatly worried. A Frenchman, an Italian, an Irishman or Highland Scot, even a Spaniard, perhaps, would at once have recognized that there was something *outré*, other-worldly, in the way that picture seemed to change its scenes and in the feeling of repulsion yet attraction it engendered in him. But certainly. These people have imagination. But Americans and Englishmen? *Non!* ‘This thing is not in keeping with the general rule of things,’ they would tell themselves. ‘Me, I have seen things, things which most certainly are not there to be seen. Therefore it is my eyes which are at fault. I shall consult an oculist. I have felt things I never felt before; I have felt the power of utter, concentrated wickedness. I am not like that, me. No, I go to church five Sundays in the year, and pay my taxes and obey such laws as it is convenient to obey. I am a thoroughly good citizen, an Anglo-Saxon; I do not believe in fairies, Santa Claus or witchcraft, even if I do put credence in the literature that stock-promoters send me. This feeling of malaise I have whenever I am near that picture is due to indigestion. *Voilà*, I shall buy some pills next time I pass a pharmacy.’ Yes, my friend, that is the way of it.

“But Monsieur Classon was not easy in his mind. He had seen things, he had felt things that neither spectacles nor patent medicines could cure. And so instead of seeking someone competent to give advice, he tried experiments upon his friends, asked them to the gunroom, bade them look upon this old Greek ikon and tell him what it was they saw. If they saw nothing strange he took their testimony as

evidence that his feelings of discomfort and his visions of unpleasant things had come from his disordered faculties, not from some outside source. *Tiens*, that way madness lay.”

“But granting all you say, and it seems incredible, what induced Farraday to stab himself?” I asked.

He teased the needle-points of his mustache between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. At length:

“Ecstasy is hard to reason with,” he answered slowly. “We see it manifest itself in various phases. The nun who kneels in breathless adoration at the altar feels no discomfort though the cold stones bite her knees till the flesh is almost separated from the bone. The Indian fakir and the Moslem dervish inflict unutterable tortures on themselves, yet feel no pain. Devotees of olden gods, Aphrodite, Moloch, Dionysos, Adonis, cut and hacked and cruelly mutilated their bodies while ecstatic fervor gripped them. Monsieur Farraday was a highly nervous, highly imaginative, highly organized man. Influences which would not affect the average person took tremendous hold on him. He had lived not long, but much. It is probable there was no sensation which he had not tasted sometime. The lure to self-destruction grows more potent as we deplete the possibility of fresh experience. That the evil influence of this picture swayed him we can hardly doubt. He had hidden it, but he induced Mademoiselle Kirsten to come and see it. Why? Merely because it was an ancient thing of lovely workmanship? I cannot think so. Deliberately, having felt the lure and terror and excitement which inevitably followed a period of gazing at that evil picture, he desired to initiate her into them. It was like the drug addict who seeks to corrupt others to his evil practises. Yes, that is so.”

“And Classon?”

“We cannot surely know. He has sealed his lips; but I think if he could talk he would tell a tale of slowly mounting terror, yet a fascination which would not let him leave off looking at the dreadful scenes he saw when the picture changed its aspect. Like Mademoiselle Kirsten and the book which terrified her so, he must needs go back and back to look and look again upon that which no human eye should see. It was like a siren-song luring him to sure destruction. When his friend Farraday had broken with the strain and sacrificed himself a votive offering to sin, the strain on Monsieur Classon was past beating. Perhaps his reason snapped, perhaps he felt an impulse to emulate his friend — any police officer knows that suicidal impulses are contagious. *En tout cas*, there it is. Farraday is dead, self-murdered, Classon is dead by his own hand—”

“And Miss Kirsten?” I broke in.

“*Précisément*, Mademoiselle Kirsten. I think we shall do well to watch that lovely one, both for her sake and ours.”

“Ours?”

“Perfectly. If we keep close watch on her we shall prevent her emulation of those other poor ones; also we may find that she will guide us to an explanation of this Christian-heathen ikon.”

“But good heavens, man! We’ve been chatting here for hours; she may have gone and—”

“No fear,” he interrupted with a smile. “Me, I took the care. The gunroom door I nailed tight shut, for I was certain if she meant to harm herself it would be on the same spot where the others offered up their lives, and — *mordieu* — *nom de nom de nom de nom!* Why had I not thought of it before?”

“What in the world—”

“*S-s-sh*, my friend, keep still; be silent as the *chauve-souris* when she goes flutter-flitting in the twilight. Me, I have the inspiration, the idea, the — what you call him? — hunch. Yes.”

He tiptoed down the corridor till he stood outside Miss Kirsten’s door, then, almost in a shout, announced, “Yes, my friend, it is amazing. I cannot think how I forgot it. The gunroom door is nailed tight shut, but the windows are unfastened. I must have them nailed the first thing in the morning.”

Making more noise than the occasion seemed to warrant, he tramped back to our door and slammed it, shoved me unceremoniously aside and seized his woolen muffler from the dresser.

“Come,” he commanded as he wound the reefer round his neck, “I do not think we shall have long to wait.”

“What the dickens are you up to?” I demanded as he led me down the stairs, taking care to step on the innermost edges of the treads so that no telltale squeak should give warning of our descent.

“Cannot you see? I have given her the hint, shown her how the way is open. If she feels the mastering-urge to seek the gunroom, perhaps intent on suicide, she will surely do it now, and through the open window. We must be there first.”

It was cold and quiet as a mausoleum in the empty gunroom as we clambered through the window. In accordance with custom a fire had been laid on the andirons, but no logs had burned there since the night before, and the eery chill which permeates all empty places filled the darkened chamber to its farthest corner. Stabbing through the darkness with his flashlight, de Grandin finally decided on the space behind a yellow-taffeta upholstered sofa as the spot to lay our ambush and we sank down to begin our vigil.

I had no way of telling time, for de Grandin had insisted that we leave our watches off lest their ticking warn our quarry of our presence. My feet grew cold, then stiff, then “full of pins and needles” as I crouched behind the couch.

We dared not talk, we hardly dared to change position lest the creaking of a board betray us. At last, when I was willing to affirm on oath our vigil had endured a month, I felt the pressure of de Grandin's fingers on my elbow. Slowly, soundlessly, but steadily, the window opposite to where we crouched was being raised. In the half-light shining from the snow outside we descried a figure almost shapeless in the gloom, but plainly feminine.

The rasping of a match, the little flare of orange flame against Egyptian darkness, the pale, clear glow of burning olive oil as the hanging lamps were lighted, showed us Karen Kirsten.

She had thrust her bare feet into fur-lined carriage boots, and with one hand she held her coat of priceless sable tight across her breast. Her eyes shone phosphorescent in the lamplight's glow, like the eyes of an animal. Her lips' moist crimson and the pearl-hard sheen of little teeth between them fascinated me. Unbidden came the thought of Clarimonde, of Margarita Hauffe and her victims.

She faced the ikon and we saw her bosom heave beneath its sheath of gleaming fur. Her breath came rasping, grindingly, almost like the labored breathing of a patient *in extremis* with nephritis. A little skirl of laughter stung her scarlet mouth, not loud, but terribly intense. I thought that never had I heard a cry more blasphemous than that light cachinnation.

Her eyes were straining toward the ikon which she had thrown open so its triple picture caught the full force of the ever-shifting beams which slanted downward from the swinging lamps. They were fixed, intense, half closed, as though the violence of her gaze was too annihilating to be loosed direct; it seemed as though the very substance of her soul and body would pour out of those set, staring eyes.

"Master," came her thin-edged whisper, mordant as a storm-blast in December, "lord, possessor, ever-living conqueror of flesh and soul and spirit — I am here!"

She kicked the fur-topped boots from off her feet and put her hands up to the collar of her coat, throwing back the garment and permitting it to fall in coruscating brown-black coils upon the floor behind her. Then with a wrench she tore her marigold-hued negligée from throat to hem.

Whiter than a figure carved from Parian marble, whiter than an image fresh-cut from new ivory she stood before the altar-table with its golden-gleaming ikon in her pallid slenderness.

It was no wonder that two hundred million movie-fans were mad about her, for she was beautiful almost past describing. Her graciously turned arms, her slender, gently swelling hips, her tapering legs, her full, high, pointed breasts were utterly breath-taking in their loveliness. The Greeks had a word for her, *chryselephantinos* — formed of

gold and ivory!

Strangely mystic she stood there; more mysterious, the odd thought came to me, in the starkness of her nudity, than when hidden in the swathe of clinging garments.

Statue-still she stood, only her left hand moving a little as it fluttered upward toward her breast, then forward, like a tower toppling when its cornerstone is wrenched away, like a silver-birch tree crashing when the axman's final stroke cuts through its roots, she fell face-downward on the floor and lay there motionless.

The lamplight glimmered on the whiteness of her body and the bright gold of her hair, flecking, flowing shadows interchanging quickly with bright spots of light as she clasped her hands behind her neck and beat her forehead softly on the floor before the ikon.

"The pictures — *mort d'un rat!* — see the pictures, good Friend Trowbridge; do you see them now?" de Grandin whispered in my ear.

I saw, and a wave of retching nausea swept across me as I looked.

How it happened I know not, but the little bits of colored stone which formed the pictures in the ikon had rearranged themselves, leaving the compositions of the scenes unchanged, but the subject matter utterly transformed. Where the group of laughing youths and maidens had been dancing there was now a ring of naked, scrawny parodies of men and women holding hands and dancing back to back in the dreadful rigadon which marked the witches' sabbat. Where the pretty babes had crept in infantile delight was now a crowd of edematous, hideously bloated monsters, obscenely tumefied, their faces formless as the features of a creature molded out of dough, yet with enough resemblance to the human countenance to show the nightmare grins which stretched their livid mouths and creased their puffy cheeks. They crept and crawled and sprawled upon each other like sightless slugs which come to light when rotting logs are lifted, nor could I say if they were filled with loathing or obscene affection for each other as they intermingled all but formless bodies in a sort of fictive struggle.

But the center panel showed the greatest metamorphosis of all. The saint had shed his penitential garment of rough camel's hair and in its place his loins were girded with a leopardskin. The cross-topped staff was now a spear with gleaming lance-head; rawhide clogs had turned to golden buskins laced up the leg with straps of scarlet leather; a wreath of wild wood-roses bound his hair. It was a figure of sheer beauty, slender, straight, white-limbed and white-bodied as a girl, with a face too delicate to be a man's, not soft enough to be a woman's. The stern, forbidding glance had vanished, yet the eyes had lost no whit of their compulsion. They seemed to catch and hold all other eyes,

they burned and smoldered with an intolerable sadness, yet their brightness was so great that it was fairly dazzling.

"*Mon Dieu*, it is the Lord of Evil!" Jules de Grandin whispered. "Satanas, Lucifer, Adonis!"

A chill we had not felt before came through the room. It was not the hard bitterness of the storm wind thrusting through the partly opened window, nor the close, still cold of a place long empty and unheated; there was an other-worldliness to it, the utter gelidness of the freezing eternities of interstellar space, a cold which seemed to paralyze the soul and spirit even as it numbed the body. Perhaps it was a trick of shifting lights caused by the swaying of the swinging lamps, but I could swear that on the wall behind the altar where the ikon stood there formed a patch of gloom, a shadow-shape which etched a figure in dull silhouette. And it was a figure of fear. Bat-winged it was, and horribly malformed, with slanting brow, protruding chin and great tusks jutting upward toward a nose which had the outline of a predatory vulture-beak. Great claw-armed hands attached to scaly arms seemed reaching outward through the semi-dark to fasten on the woman prostrate on the floor.

"*Attendez-moi*, my friend," de Grandin whispered; "do exactly as I say, or we shall lose our lives, perhaps our souls as well. When I step forward, do you take up anything that comes to hand and with it strike that cursed ikon from its place. When you have struck, strike on, and keep on striking till you have demolished it completely. Oh, do not stop to bandy silly questions, friend; three lives depend upon your doing as I say, believe it!"

Mystified, but willing to obey his orders, I nodded mute assent, and reached up for a double-bladed Tartar ax which hung clamped to the wall above us.

"*Monsieur*" — de Grandin stepped from his concealment and bent his body stiffly from the hips as though addressing someone formally — "*Monsieur le Démon*, we will fight you for her. We are but mortal men, but by the faith we hold and by the strength that faith imparts, we fling our gage into your face, and offer you wager of battle for this woman's soul and body. More, if that is not enough, we will pledge our own, as well!"

It was not quite a laugh that answered him, indeed, it was not any sound which human ears can record; rather, it was as if a feeling, a subjective impression, of boundless and colossal scorn swept through the room, and like a dried leaf borne before the wind the little Frenchman was hurled back against the wall with an impact so terrific that I heard his bones crack as he struck the plaster-covered brick.

"Remember my instructions, good Friend Trowbridge — strike!" he gasped while he strove to wrench himself from the position into which he had been forced by that unseen

malevolence.

He was suffering, I could see. The force with which he struck the wall had knocked the breath out of him, and something which I could not see was pressing on his throat, his diaphragm, his limbs, and held him with his arms outstretched and head thrown back as though he had been crucified. He gasped and fought for breath, but the struggle was uneven. In a moment he would fall unconscious from asphyxia, for no air could reach his lungs, and his lips were even then beginning to show blue while his eyeballs started from their sockets.

Across the room I leapt, swinging my double-bladed ax: about my head and bringing it down with all my might upon the golden ikon on the altar.

It seemed for an instant that I had cut into an electric cable, for a shock of numbing pain ran up my forearms, and I all but dropped my weapon as I staggered back.

"*Bravo, bravissimo*, my friend; that was nobly done!" De Grandin's voice was stronger, now; he had managed to inhale a breath of air, but even as he cheered me came a rattling in his throat. He was being throttled by his unseen adversary.

I struck again, and this time swept the ikon to the floor. It fell face-downward, its pictures hidden from my sight.

A surge of sudden wild, insensate anger swept through me. How or why I did not know, but this picture somehow was responsible for Jules de Grandin's plight. When I assaulted it he gained a temporary respite, in the momentary pause between my blows he suffered strangulation. I went stark, raving mad. For a wild, exhilarated moment I knew the fury and the joy our Saxon forebears felt when they went berserker and, armor cast aside, leapt bare-breasted into battle.

I felt my ax-blade cleave the ikon's golden plates, wrenched it free and struck again; chopping, hewing, battering. The heavy golden plates were bent and broken, now, and little bits of colored stone were strewn about the floor where my furious assault had smashed the priceless mosaics. I drove my axhead through the center panel, cleft the figure of the beautiful young man in twain, cut the dancing horrors into bits, smashed the crawling infantile monstrosities to utter formlessness; finally, insane with murderous rage, drove the battered golden casque into the fireplace as a hockey-player might shoot the puck into the goal-net, then reached up frenziedly, dragged down a hanging lamp and dashed it on the logs which lay in order ready for the match.

The dry wood kindled like a torch, and as the leaping ocherous flame licked hungrily at the shapeless mass which had a moment earlier been a priceless relic of the tessellater's art, de Grandin staggered forward, gasping thirstily for air like a diver coming to the surface after long immersion.

“Oh, excellent Friend Trowbridge, *brave camarade; camarade brave comme l'épée qu'il porte, parbleu*, but I do love you!” he exclaimed, and before I could defend myself had flung his arms around me, drawn me to him and planted a resounding kiss upon each cheek.

“I'm sorry that I lost my head and wrecked that lovely thing,” I muttered, gazing ruefully at the melting gold and flame-discolored fragments of bright marble in the fireplace.

“Sorry? *Mort de ma vie*, it is your sober reason that speaks now — and when has truth been found in staid sobriety? Your instinct was truer when it urged that you consign this loathsome thing to cleansing fire. *Tiens*, had someone had the wit to do it seven hundred years ago, how much misery would have been averted! *Pah*” — he seized the poker and probed viciously at the remnants of the reliquary — “burn, curse you! Your makers and your votaries have stewed and fried in hell for centuries; go thou to join them, naughty thing!” Abruptly:

“Come, we have work to do, Friend Trowbridge; let us be about it.”

We draped the sable coat round Karen Kirsten, drew the fur-trimmed boots upon her feet, bundled up her tattered negligée, then, quietly as a pair of burglars, took her through the window, through the service-pantry door, and upstairs to her bedroom.

“It is well *Monsieur le Capitaine* had but two men set to watch the house,” de Grandin chuckled as we got the girl's pajamas on and drew the bedclothes over her. “The young man who snores so watchfully before the kitchen door would be surprised if he could know with what impunity his charges come and go at will, I think.”

I suppose you're going to tell me thoughts are things, and that explains the goings-on we've witnessed?” I accused as we got into bed.

“By damn, I am,” he answered with a sleepy laugh. “If it were not so I should have had a merry chase to find a reason for these evil doings. Attend me, if you please: That ikon might be called a devil's palimpsest. First the olden, wicked tessellaters contrived the scenes we saw tonight, the wicked worshipers of evil gods who danced together back to back, as in the days when dancing widdershins paid honor to the pig-faced Moloch, the terrible, amorphous things which typified primeval wickedness, finally the Lord Adonis. Then by a trick of cunning workmanship they overlaid their true design with those sweet, innocuous scenes of innocence, and in the center set the picture of a saint. ‘Beauty is in the beholder's eye,’ the ancient proverb says. It might have added that wickedness and goodness are to a great extent the same. Only when summoned by deliberate thought of evil did the underlying pictures dedicated to the unclean worship

of the evil old ones come to light; at other times the ikon showed an air of innocence. *Ha*, but that was in the very long ago, my friend. Like a jar of porous earthenware filled constantly with aromatic liquids, this ikon was the center of a very evil worship, the receptacle of concentrated thoughts of wickedness and hate. Thoughts are things; they filled the very substance of the ikon as the aromatic liquors will in time so permeate the fiber of the earthen jug that it will always afterward give off their scent. Yes, certainly.

“In time the evil principle became so strongly concentrated in this ikon that it changed unbidden from its good to wicked aspect, and this was so especially when the person who beheld it harbored secret thoughts of sin. More, it added to, it strengthened these desires for evil. Did the person in its presence have suppressed longings to forsake the ways of soberness and take to drink? His resolution to remain a sober citizen was straightway weakened to the breaking-point, his thirst for drink increased tenfold. And so right through the Decalogue. Whatever secret evil one had struggled with and conquered became so magnified when he came in this ikon's presence that he was unable to resist the sinful urge. He was vanquished, beaten, routed, lost in sin.

“And as person after person yielded to its wicked influence this devil's tool waxed ever greater in its strength. Eventually it was not necessary for the one corrupted to have harbored evil thought; he need only be impressionable, psychic, to behold the changing of the pictures and, unless he had unusual strength of character, to succumb to their foul lure. Karen Kirsten realized this when first she stepped into the gunroom; Wyndham Farraday had suffered from the same experience; often Philippe Classon must have seen those pictures change; it was that which preyed upon his mind and made him seek to lull his fears by having others look at them and hear the testimony which they gave. You see? It is quite simple, Yes. Thoughts most assuredly are things.”

“But why should they select Adonis as typifying Evil?” I demanded. “As I recall it, he was a shy young man whom Venus wooed—”

“In Monsieur Shakespeare's poems, yes,” he interrupted, “but not in the belief of those who worshiped Evil for its evil self. No, not at all; by no means.

“When those wicked ones were gathered to make mock of holy things and bend the knee to sinfulness, they invoked some god or goddess of the ancient days, or, in later times, the devil. At gatherings of devil-worshipers it was not always as a hairy man or goat that the devil was adored. He had other aspects, too. Sometimes he came as a most beautiful young man, Lucifer the Lightbearer; as Baron Satanus, cold, haughty, proud, but most distinguished in appearance; sometimes as Adonis, the young man beautiful

and cold as ice, impervious alike to little children's lispings or woman's charming beauty — it was not bashfulness, but utter, cold indifference that made Adonis proof against the blandishments of the Queen of Love and Beauty. He it was — still is, *parbleu!* — who gave nothing in return for worship but lies and bitter disappointments.

“Besides, the men who made those pictures and the worshippers who bent the knee before it were Greeks; degenerate Greeks, of course, but still inheritors of the culture that was Athens. A Greek could not do homage to a god, even to a god of evil, who was anything but beautiful.”

“That dreadful shadow that we saw, the shadow that seemed to detach itself from the wall and reach toward Karen Kirsten just before you challenged it?” I asked. “That was—”

“Thought made manifest, my friend. The evil thought which for generation upon generation had been poured upon

that cursèd ikon, that devil's palimpsest. It was the same thought that induced rebellion in the heavens against the power of good, the thought which prompted Cain to slay his brother, which brought the sacrificial babes to Moloch; *parbleu*, it was everything that is detestable and vile condescended into that little reservoir which was that never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized palimpsest of Satan!”

“It's positively the damnedest thing I ever saw, swore Captain Chenevert next day. “Two killings in that room with no more clues to 'em than if they'd been in China. Then someone sneaks in there last night and smashes up a piece of *bric-à-brac* so valuable that no one can appraise it. Hanged if it doesn't almost seem as if the place were haunted!”

“I damn think you have right, *Monsieur le Capitaine*,” de Grandin answered, his face expressionless as a death mask.

He reached out for the bell-pull: “Will you have Scots or Irish with your soda water, gentlemen?”

Pledged to the Dead

THE AUTUMN dusk had stained the sky with shadows and orange oblongs traced the windows in my neighbors' homes as Jules de Grandin and I sat sipping *kaiserschmarrn* and coffee in the study after dinner. "Mon Dieu," the little Frenchman sighed, "I have the *mal du pays*, my friend. The little children run and play along the roadways at Saint Cloud, and on the Île de France the pastry cooks set up their booths. *Corbleu*, it takes the strength of character not to stop and buy those cakes of so much taste and fancy! The Napoléons, they are crisp and fragile as a coquette's promise, the éclairs filled with cool, sweet cream, the cream-puffs all aglow with cherries. Just to see them is to love life better. They—"

The shrilling of the door-bell startled me. The pressure on the button must have been that of one who leant against it. "Doctor Trowbridge; I must see him right away!" a woman's voice demanded as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, grudgingly responded to the hail.

"Th' docthor's offiss hours is over, ma'am," Nora answered frigidly. "Ha'f past nine ter eleven in th' marnin', an' two ter four in th' afternoon is when he sees his patients. If it's an urgent case ye have there's lots o' good young docthors in th' neighborhood, but Docthor Trowbridge—"

"Is he here?" the visitor demanded sharply.

"He is, an' he's afther digestin' his dinner — an' an' illigant dinner it wuz, though I do say so as shouldn't — an' he can't be disturbed—"

"He'll see me, all right. Tell him it's Nella Bentley, and I've got to talk to him!"

De Grandin raised an eyebrow eloquently. "The fish at the aquarium have greater privacy than we, my friend," he murmured, but broke off as the visitor came clacking down the hall on high French heels and rushed into the study half a dozen paces in advance of my thoroughly disapproving and more than semi-scandalized Nora.

"Doctor Trowbridge, won't you help me?" cried the girl as she fairly leaped across the study and flung her arms about my shoulders. "I can't tell Dad or Mother, they wouldn't understand; so you're the only one — oh, excuse me, I thought you were alone!" Her face went crimson as she saw de Grandin standing by the fire.

"It's quite all right, my dear," I soothed, freeing myself from her almost hysterical clutch. "This is Doctor de Grandin, with whom I've been associated many times; I'd be glad to have the benefit of his advice, if you don't mind."

She gave him her hand and a wan smile as I performed the introduction, but her eyes warmed quickly as he raised her fingers to his lips with a soft "*Enchanté, Mademoiselle.*" Women, animals and children took instinctively to Jules de Grandin.

Nella dropped her coat of silky shaven lamb and sank down on the study couch, her slim young figure molded in her knitted dress of coral rayon as revealingly as though she had been cased in plastic cellulose. She has long, violet eyes and a long mouth; smooth, dark hair parted in the middle; a small straight nose, and a small pointed chin. Every line of her is long, but definitely feminine; breasts and hips and throat and legs all delicately curved, without a hint of angularity.

"I've come to see you about Ned," she volunteered as de Grandin lit her cigarette and she sent a nervous smoke stream gushing from between red, trembling lips. "He — he's trying to run out on me!"

"You mean Ned Minton?" I asked, wondering what a middle-aged physician could prescribe for wandering Romeos.

"I certainly do mean Ned Minton," she replied, "and I mean business, too. The darn, romantic fool!"

De Grandin's slender brows arched upward till they nearly met the beige-blond hair that slanted sleekly backward from his forehead. "*Pardonnez-moi,*" he murmured. "Did I understand correctly, *Mademoiselle*? Your *amoureux* — how do you say him? — sweetheart? — has shown a disposition toward unfaithfulness, yet you accuse him of romanticism?"

"He's not unfaithful, that's the worst of it. He's faithful as Tristan and the chevalier Bayard lumped together, *sans peur et sans reproche*, you know. Says we can't get married, 'cause—"

"Just a moment, dear," I interrupted as I felt my indignation mounting. "D'ye mean the miserable young puppy cheated, and now wants to welch—"

Her blue eyes widened, then the little laughter-wrinkles formed around them. "You dear old mid-Victorian!" she broke in. "No, he ain't done wrong by our Nell, and I'm not asking you to take your shotgun down and force him to make me an honest woman. Suppose we start at the beginning: then we'll get things straight.

"You assisted at both our débuts, I've been told; you've known Ned and me since we were a second old piece,

haven't you?"

I nodded.

"Know we've always been crazy about each other, too; in grammar school, high school and college, don't you?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"All right. We've been engaged ever since our freshman year at Beaver. Ned just had his frat pin long enough to pin it on my shoulder-strap at the first freshman dance. Everything was set for us to stand up in the chancel and say 'I do' this June; then Ned's company sent him to New Orleans last December." She paused, drew deeply at her cigarette, crushed its fire out in an ash-tray, and set a fresh one glowing.

"That started it. While he was down there it seemed that he got playful. Mixed up with some glamorous Creole gal." Once more she lapsed into silence and I could see the heartbreak showing through the armor of her flippant manner.

"You mean he fell in love—"

"I certainly do *not!* If he had, I'd have handed back his ring and said 'Bless you, me children', even if I had to bite my heart in two to do it; but this is no case of a new love crowding out the old. Ned still loves me; never stopped loving me. That's what makes it all seem crazy as a hashish-eater's dream. He was on the loose in New Orleans, doing the town with a crowd of local boys, and prob'ly had too many Ramos fizzes. Then he barged into this Creole dame's place, and—" she broke off with a gallant effort at a smile. "I guess young fellows aren't so different nowadays than they were when you were growing up, sir. Only today we don't believe in sprinkling perfume in the family cesspool. Ned cheated, that's the bald truth of it; he didn't stop loving me, and he hasn't stopped now, but I wasn't there and that other girl was, and there were no conventions to be recognized. Now he's fairly melting with remorse, says he's not worthy of me — wants to break off our engagement, while he spends a lifetime doing penance for a moment's folly."

"But good heavens," I expostulated, "if you're willing to forgive—"

"You're telling me!" she answered bitterly. "We've been over it a hundred times. This isn't 1892; even nice girls know the facts of life today, and while I'm no more anxious than the next one to put through a deal in shopworn goods, I still love Ned, and I don't intend to let a single indiscretion rob us of our happiness. I—" the hard exterior veneer of modernism melted from her like an autumn ice-glaze melting in the warm October sun, and the tears coursed down her cheeks, cutting little valleys in her carefully-applied make-up. "He's my man, Doctor," she sobbed bitterly. "I've loved him since we made mud-pies together; I'm hungry, thirsty

for him. He's everything to me, and if he follows out this fool renunciation he seems set on, it'll kill me!"

De Grandin tweaked a waxed mustache-end thoughtfully. "You exemplify the practicality of woman, *Mademoiselle*; I applaud your sound, hard common sense," he told her. "Bring this silly young romantic foolish one to me. I will tell him—"

"But he won't come," I interrupted. "I know these hard-minded young asses. When a lad is set on being stubborn—"

"Will you go to work on him if I can get him here?" interjected Nella.

"Of a certitude, *Mademoiselle*."

"You won't think me forward or unmaidenly?"

"This is a medical consultation, *Mademoiselle*."

"All right; be in the office this time tomorrow night. I'll have my wandering boy friend here if I have to bring him in an ambulance."

Her performance matched her promise almost too closely for our comfort. We had just finished dinner next night when the frenzied shriek of tortured brakes, followed by a crash and the tinkling spatter of smashed glass, sounded in the street before the house, and in a moment feet dragged heavily across the porch. We were at the door before the bell could buzz, and in the disk of brightness sent down by the porch light saw Nella bent half double, stumbling forward with a man's arm draped across her shoulders. His feet scuffed blindly on the boards, as though they had forgot the trick of walking, or as if all strength had left his knees. His head hung forward, lolling drunkenly; a spate of blood ran down his face and smeared his collar.

"Good Lord!" I gasped. "What—"

"Get him in the surgery — quick!" the girl commanded in a whisper. "I'm afraid I rather overdid it."

Examination showed the cut across Ned's forehead was more bloody than extensive, while the scalp-wound which plowed backward from his hairline needed but a few quick stitches.

Nella whispered to us as we worked. "I got him to go riding with me in my runabout. Just as we got here I let out a scream and swung the wheel hard over to the right. I was braced for it, but Ned was unprepared, and went right through the windshield when I ran the car into the curb. Lord, I thought I'd killed him when I saw the blood — you do think he'll come through all right, don't you, Doctor?"

"No thanks to you if he does, you little ninny!" I retorted angrily. "You might have cut his jugular with your confounded foolishness. If—"

"*S-s-sh*, he's coming out of it!" she warned. "Start talking to him like a Dutch uncle; I'll be waiting in the study if you want me," and with a tattoo of high heels she left us with our

patient.

“Nella! Is she all right?” Ned cried as he half roused from the surgery table. “We had an accident—”

“But certainly, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin soothed. “You were driving past our house when a child ran out before your car and *Mademoiselle* was forced to swerve aside to keep from hitting it. You were cut about the face, but she escaped all injury. Here” — he raised a glass of brandy to the patient’s lips — “drink this. Ah, so. That is better, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

For a moment he regarded Ned in silence, then, abruptly: “You are *distrain*, *Monsieur*. When we brought you in we were forced to give you a small whiff of ether while we patched your cuts, and in your delirium you said—”

The color which had come into Ned’s cheeks as the fiery cognac warmed his veins drained out again, leaving him as ghastly as a corpse. “Did Nella hear me?” he asked hoarsely. “Did I blab—”

“Compose yourself, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin bade. “She heard nothing, but it would be well if we heard more. I think I understand your difficulty. I am a physician and a Frenchman and no prude. This renunciation which you make is but the noble gesture. You have been unfortunate, and now you fear. Have courage; no infection is so bad there is no remedy—”

Ned’s laugh was hard and brittle as the tinkle of a breaking glass. “I only wish it were the thing you think,” he interrupted. “I’d have you give me salvarsan and see what happened; but there isn’t any treatment I can take for this. I’m not delirious, and I’m not crazy, gentlemen; I know just what I’m saying. Insane as it may sound, I’m pledged to the dead, and there isn’t any way to bail me out.”

“*Eh*, what is it you say?” de Grandin’s small blue eyes were gleaming with the light of battle as he caught the occult implication in Ned’s declaration. “Pledged to the dead? *Comment cela?*”

Ned raised himself unsteadily and balanced on the table edge.

“It happened in New Orleans last winter,” he answered. “I’d finished up my business and was on the loose, and thought I’d walk alone through the *Vieux Carré* — the old French Quarter. I’d had dinner at Antoine’s and stopped around at the Old Absinthe House for a few drinks, then strolled down to the French Market for a cup of chicory coffee and some doughnuts. Finally I walked down Royal Street to look at Madame Lalaurie’s old mansion; that’s the famous haunted house, you know. I wanted to see if I could find a ghost. Good Lord, I *wanted* to!

“The moon was full that night, but the house was still as old Saint Denis Cemetery, so after Peering through the iron

grilles that shut the courtyard from the street for half an hour or so, I started back toward Canal Street.

“I’d almost reached Bienville Street when just as I passed one of those funny two-storied iron-grilled balconies so many of the old houses have I heard something drop on the sidewalk at my feet. It was a japonica, one of those rose-like flowers they grow in the courtyard gardens down there. When I looked up, a girl was laughing at me from the second story of the balcony. ‘*Mon fleuron, monsieur, s’il vous plaît,*’ she called, stretching down a white arm for the bloom.

“The moonlight hung about her like a veil of silver tissue, and I could see her plainly as though it had been noon. Most New Orleans girls are dark. She was fair, her hair was very fine and silky and about the color of a frosted chestnut-burr. She wore it in a long bob with curls around her face and neck, and I knew without being told that those ringlets weren’t put in with a hot iron. Her face was pale, colorless and fine-textured as a magnolia petal, but her lips were brilliant crimson. There was something reminiscent of those ladies you see pictured in Directoire prints about her; small, regular features, straight, white, high-waisted gown tied with a wide girdle underneath her bosom, low, round-cut neck and tiny, ball-puff sleeves that left her lovely arms uncovered to the shoulder. She was like Rose Beauharnais or Madame de Fontenay, except for her fair hair, and her eyes. Her eyes were like an Eastern slave’s, languishing and passionate, even when she laughed. And she was laughing then, with a throaty, almost caressing laugh as I tossed the flower up to her and she leant across the iron railing, snatching at it futilely as it fell just short of reach.

“‘*C’est sans profit,*’ she laughed at last. ‘Your skill is too small or my arm too short, *m’sieur*. Bring it up to me.’

“You mean for me to come up there?” I asked.

“But certainly. I have teeth, but will not bite you — maybe.’

“The street door to the house was open; I pushed it back, groped my way along a narrow hall and climbed a flight of winding stairs. She was waiting for me on the balcony, lovelier, close up, if that were possible, than when I’d seen her from the sidewalk. Her gown was China silk, so sheer and clinging that the shadow of her charming figure showed against its rippling folds like a lovely silhouette; the sash which bound it was a six-foot length of rainbow ribbon tied coquettishly beneath her shoulders and trailing in fringed ends almost to her dress-hem at the back; her feet were stockingless and shod with sandals fastened with cross-straps of purple grosgrain laced about the ankles. Save for the small gold rings that scintillated in her ears, she wore no ornaments of any kind.

“‘*Mon fleur, m’sieur,*’ she ordered haughtily, stretching out her hand; then her eyes lighted with sudden laughter and

she turned her back to me, bending her head forward. ‘But no, it fell into your hands; it is that you must put it in its place again,’ she ordered, pointing to a curl where she wished the flower set. ‘Come, *m’sieur*, I wait upon you.’

“On the settee by the wall a guitar lay. She picked it up and ran her slim, pale fingers twice across the strings, sounding a soft, melancholy chord. When she began to sing, her words were slurred and languorous, and I had trouble understanding them; for the song was ancient when Bienville turned the first spadeful of earth that marked the ramparts of New Orleans:

O knights of gay Toulouse
And sweet Beaucaire,
Greet me my own true love
And speak him fair ...

“Her voice had the throaty, velvety quality one hears in people of the Southern countries, and the words of the song seemed fairly to yearn with the sadness and passionate longing of the love-bereft. But she smiled as she put by her instrument, a curious smile, which heightened the mystery of her face, and her wide eyes seemed suddenly half questing, half drowsy, as she asked, ‘Would you ride off upon your grim, pale horse and leave poor little Julie d’Ayen famishing for love, *m’sieur*?’

“‘Ride off from you?’ I answered gallantly. ‘How can you ask?’ A verse from Burns came to me:

Then fare thee well, my bonny lass,
And fare thee well awhile,
And I will come to thee again
An it were ten thousand mile.

“There was something avid in the look she gave me. Something more than mere gratified vanity shone in her eyes as she turned her face up to me in the moonlight. ‘You mean it?’ she demanded in a quivering, breathless voice.

“‘Of course,’ I bantered. ‘How could you doubt it?’

“‘Then swear it — seal the oath with blood!’

“Her eyes were almost closed, and her lips were lightly parted as she leant toward me. I could see the thin, white line of tiny, gleaming teeth behind the lush red of her lips; the tip of a pink tongue swept across her mouth, leaving it warmer, moister, redder than before; in her throat a small pulse throbbled palpitatingly. Her lips were smooth and soft as the flower-petals in her hair, but as they crushed on mine they seemed to creep about them as though endowed with a volition of their own. I could feel them gliding almost stealthily, searching greedily, it seemed, until they covered my entire mouth. Then came a sudden searing burn of pain which passed as quickly as it flashed across my lips, and she

seemed inhaling deeply, desperately, as though to pump the last faint gasp of breath up from my lungs. A humming sounded in my ears; everything went dark around me as if I had been plunged in some abysmal flood; a spell of dreamy lassitude was stealing over me when she pushed me from her so abruptly that I staggered back against the iron railing of the gallery.

“I gasped and fought for breath like a winded swimmer coming from the water, but the half-recaptured breath seemed suddenly to catch itself unbidden in my throat, and a tingling chill went rippling up my spine. The girl had dropped down to her knees, staring at the door which let into the house, and as I looked I saw a shadow writhe across the little pool of moonlight which lay upon the sill. Three feet or so in length it was, thick through as a man’s wrist, the faint light shining dully on its scaly armor and disclosing the forked lightning of its darting tongue. It was a cotton-mouth — a water moccasin — deadly as a rattlesnake, but more dangerous, for it sounds no warning before striking, and can strike when only half coiled. How it came there on the second-story gallery of a house so far from any swampland I had no means of knowing, but there it lay, bent in the design of a double *S* its wedge-shaped head swaying on upreared neck a scant six inches from the girl’s soft bosom, its forked tongue darting deathly menace. Half paralyzed with fear and loathing, I stood there in a perfect ecstasy of horror, not daring to move hand or foot lest I aggravate the reptile into striking. But my terror changed to stark amazement as my senses slowly registered the scene. The girl was talking to the snake and — it listened as a person might have done!

“‘*Non, non, grand’tante; halte là!*’ she whispered. ‘*Cela est à moi — il est dévoué!*’

“The serpent seemed to pause uncertainly, grudgingly, as though but half convinced, then shook its head from side to side, much as an aged person might when only half persuaded by a youngster’s argument. Finally, silently as a shadow, it slithered back again into the darkness of the house.

“Julie bounded to her feet and put her hands upon my shoulders.

“‘You mus’ go, my friend,’ she whispered fiercely. ‘Quickly, ere she comes again. It was not easy to convince her; she is old and very doubting. O, I am afraid — afraid!’

“She hid her face against my arm, and I could feel the throbbing of her heart against me. Her hands stole upward to my cheeks and pressed them between palms as cold as graveyard clay as she whispered, ‘Look at me, *mon beau*.’ Her eyes were closed, her lips were slightly parted, and beneath the arc of her long lashes I could see the glimmer of

fast-forming tears. ‘*Embrasse moi*’, she commanded in a trembling breath. ‘Kiss me and go quickly, but *O mon chère*, do not forget poor little foolish Julie d’Ayen who has put her trust in you. Come to me again tomorrow night!’

“I was reeling as from vertigo as I walked back to the Greenwald, and the bartender looked at me suspiciously when I ordered a sazarac. They’ve a strict rule against serving drunken men at that hotel. The liquor stung my lips like liquid flame, and I put the cocktail down half finished. When I set the fan to going and switched the light on in my room I looked into the mirror and saw two little beads of fresh, bright blood upon my lips. ‘Good Lord!’ I murmured stupidly as I brushed the blood away; ‘she bit me!’

“It all seemed so incredible that if I had not seen the blood upon my mouth I’d have thought I suffered from some lunatic hallucination, or one too many frappés at the Absinthe House. Julie was as quaint and out of time as a Directoire print, even in a city where time stands still as it does in old New Orleans. Her costume, her half-shy boldness, her — this was simply madness, nothing less! — her conversation with that snake!

“What was it she had said? My French was none too good, and in the circumstances it was hardly possible to pay attention to her words, but if I’d understood her, she’d declared, ‘He’s mine; he has dedicated himself to me!’ And she’d addressed that crawling horror as ‘*grand’tante* — great-aunt!’

“Feller, you’re as crazy as a cockroach!’ I admonished my reflection in the mirror. ‘But I know what’ll cure you. You’re taking the first train north tomorrow morning, and if I ever catch you in the *Vieux Carré* again, I’ll—’

“A sibilating hiss, no louder than the noise made by steam escaping from a kettle-spout, sounded close beside my foot. There on the rug, coiled in readiness to strike, was a three-foot cottonmouth, head swaying viciously from side to side, wicked eyes shining in the bright light from the chandelier. I saw the muscles in the creatures fore-part swell, and in a sort of horror-trance I watched its head dart forward, but, miraculously, it stopped its stroke half-way, and drew its head back, turning to glance menacingly at me first from one eye, then the other. Somehow, it seemed to me, the thing was playing with me as a cat might play a mouse, threatening, intimidating, letting me know it was master of the situation and could kill me any time it wished, but deliberately refraining from the death-stroke.

“With one leap I was in the middle of my bed, and when a squad of bellboys came running in response to the frantic call for help I telephoned, they found me crouched against the headboard, almost wild with fear.

“They turned the room completely inside out, rolling back the rugs, probing into chairs and sofa, emptying the bureau

drawers, even taking down the towels from the bathroom rack, but nowhere was there any sign of the water moccasin that had terrified me. At the end of fifteen minutes’ search they accepted half a dollar each and went grinning from the room. I knew it would be useless to appeal for help again, for I heard one whisper to another as they paused outside my door: ‘It ain’t right to let them Yankees loose in N’Orleans; they don’t know how to hold their licker.’

“I didn’t take a train next morning. Somehow, I’d an idea — crazy as it seemed — that my promise to myself and the sudden, inexplicable appearance of the snake beside my foot were related in some way. Just after luncheon I thought I’d put the theory to a test.

“‘Well,’ I said aloud, ‘I guess I might as well start packing. Don’t want to let the sun go down and find me here—’

“My theory was right. I hadn’t finished speaking when I heard the warning hiss, and there, poised ready for the stroke, the snake was coiled before the door. And it was no phantom, either, no figment of an overwrought imagination. It lay upon a rug the hotel management had placed before the door to take the wear of constant passage from the carpet, and I could see the high pile of the rug crushed down beneath its weight. It was flesh and scales — and fangs! — and it coiled and threatened me in my twelfth-floor room in the bright sunlight of the afternoon.

“Little chills of terror chased each other up my back, and I could feel the short hairs on my neck grow stiff and scratch against my collar, but I kept myself in hand. Pretending to ignore the loathsome thing, I flung myself upon the bed.

“‘Oh, well,’ I said aloud, ‘there really isn’t any need of hurrying. I promised Julie that I’d come to her tonight, and I mustn’t disappoint her.’ Half a minute later I roused myself upon my elbow and glanced toward the door. The snake was gone.

“‘Here’s a letter for you, Mr. Minton,’ said the desk clerk as I paused to leave my key. The note was on gray paper edged with silver-gilt, and very highly scented. The penmanship was tiny, stilted and ill-formed, as though the author were unused to writing, but I could make it out:

Adoré
Meet me in St. Denis Cemetery at sunset
À vous de cœur pour l’éternité

JULIE

“I stuffed the note back in my pocket. The more I thought about the whole affair the less I liked it. The flirtation had begun harmlessly enough, and Julie was as lovely and appealing as a figure in a fairy-tale, but there are unpleasant aspects to most fairy-tales, and this was no exception. That

scene last night when she had seemed to argue with a full-grown cottonmouth, and the mysterious appearance of the snake whenever I spoke of breaking my promise to go back to her — there was something too much like black magic in it. Now she addressed me as her adored and signed herself for eternity; finally named a graveyard as our rendezvous. Things had become a little bit too thick.

“I was standing at the corner of Canal and Batonne Streets, and crowds of office workers and late shoppers elbowed past me. ‘I’ll be damned if I’ll meet her in a cemetery, or anywhere else,’ I muttered. ‘I’ve had enough of all this nonsense—’

“A woman’s shrill scream, echoed by a man’s hoarse shout of terror, interrupted me. On the marble pavement of Canal Street, with half a thousand people bustling by, lay coiled a three-foot water moccasin. Here was proof. I’d seen it twice in my room at the hotel, but I’d been alone each time. Some form of weird hypnosis might have made me think I saw it, but the screaming woman and the shouting man, these panic-stricken people in Canal Street, couldn’t all be victims of a spell which had been cast on me. ‘All right, I’ll go,’ I almost shouted, and instantly, as though it had been but a puff of smoke, the snake was gone, the half-fainting woman and a crowd of curious bystanders asking what was wrong left to prove I had not been the victim of some strange delusion.

“Old Saint Denis Cemetery lay drowsing in the blue, faint twilight. It has no graves as we know them, for when the city was laid out it was below sea-level and bodies were stored away in crypts set row on row like lines of pigeonholes in walls as thick as those of mediæval castles. Grass-grown aisles run between the rows of vaults, and the effect is a true city of the dead with narrow streets shut in by close-set houses. The rattle of a trolley car in Rampart Street came to me faintly as I walked between the rows of tombs; from the river came the mellow-throated bellow of a steamer’s whistle, but both sounds were muted as though heard from a great distance. The tomb-lined bastions of Saint Denis hold the present out as firmly as they hold the memories of the past within.

“Down one aisle and up another I walked, the close-clipped turf deadening my footfalls so I might have been a ghost come back to haunt the ancient burial ground, but nowhere was there sign or trace of Julie. I made the circuit of the labyrinth and finally paused before one of the more pretentious tombs.

“‘Looks as if she’d stood me up,’ murmured. ‘If she has, I have a good excuse to—’

“‘But *non, mon coeur*, I have not disappointed you!’ a soft voice whispered in my ear. ‘See, I am here.’

“I think I must have jumped at sound of her greeting, for she clapped her hands delightedly before she put them on my shoulders and turned her face up for a kiss. ‘Silly one,’ she chided, ‘did you think your Julie was unfaithful?’

“I put her hands away as gently as I could, for her utter self-surrender was embarrassing. ‘Where were you?’ I asked, striving to make neutral conversation. ‘I’ve been prowling round this graveyard for the last half-hour, and came through this aisle not a minute ago, but I didn’t see you—’

“‘Ah, but I saw you, *chéri*; I have watched you as you made your solemn rounds like a watchman of the night. *Ohé*, but it was hard to wait until the sun went down to greet you, *mon petit!*’

“She laughed again, and her mirth was mellowly musical as the gurgle of cool water poured from a silver vase.

“‘How could you have seen me?’ I demanded. ‘Where were you all this time?’

“‘But here, of course,’ she answered naively, resting one hand against the graystone slab that scaled the tomb.

“I shook my head bewilderedly. The tomb, like all the others in the deeply recessed wall, was of rough cement encrusted with small seashells, and its sides were straight and blank without a spear of ivy clinging to them. A sparrow could not have found cover there, yet ...

“Julie raised herself on tiptoe and stretched her arms out right and left while she looked at me through half-closed, smiling eyes. ‘*Je suis engourdie* — I am stiff with sleep,’ she told me, stifling a yawn. ‘But now that you are come, *mon cher*, I am wakeful as the pussy-cat that rouses at the scampering of the mouse. Come, let us walk in this garden of mine.’ She linked her arm through mine and started down the grassy, grave-lined path.

“Tiny shivers — not of cold — were flickering through my cheeks and down my neck beneath my ears. I *had* to have an explanation ... the snake, her declaration that she watched me as I searched the cemetery — and from a tomb where a beetle could not have found a hiding-place — her announcement she was still stiff from sleeping, now her reference to a half-forgotten graveyard as her garden.

“‘See here, I want to know—’ I started, but she laid her hand across my lips.

“‘Do not ask to know too soon, *mon coeur*,’ she bade. ‘Look at me, am I not veritably *élégante*?’ She stood back a step, gathered up her skirts and swept me a deep curtsy.

“There was no denying she was beautiful. Her tightly curling hair had been combed high and tied back with a fillet of bright violet tissue which bound her brows like a diadem and at the front of which an aigret plume was set. In her ears were hung two beautifully matched cameos, outlined in gold and seed-pearls, and almost large as silver dollars; a necklace of antique dull-gold hung round her throat, and its pendant

was a duplicate of her ear-cameos, while a bracelet of matte-gold set with a fourth matched anaglyph was clasped about her left arm just above the elbow. Her gown was sheer white muslin, low cut at front and back, with little puff-sleeves at the shoulders, fitted tightly at the bodice and flaring sharply from a high-set waist. Over it she wore a narrow scarf of violet silk, hung behind her neck and dropping down on either side in front like a clergyman's stole. Her sandals were gilt leather, heel-less as a ballet dancer's shoes and laced with violet ribbons. Her lovely, pearl-white hands were bare of rings, but on the second toe of her right foot there showed a little cameo which matched the others which she wore.

"I could feel my heart begin to pound and my breath come quicker as I looked at her, but:

"You look as if you're going to a masquerade," I said.

"A look of hurt surprise showed in her eyes. 'A masquerade?' she echoed. 'But no, it is my best, my very finest, that I wear for you tonight, *mon adoré*. Do not you like it; do you not love me, Édouard?'

"No," I answered shortly, 'I do not. We might as well understand each other Julie. I'm not in love with you and never was. It's been a pretty flirtation nothing more. I'm going home tomorrow, and—'

"But you will come again? Surely you will come again?" she pleaded. 'You can not mean it when you say you do not love me, Édouard. Tell me that you spoke so but to tease me—'

"A warning hiss sounded in the grass beside my foot, but I was too angry to be frightened. 'Go ahead, set your devilish snake on me,' I taunted. 'Let it bite me. I'd as soon be dead as—'

"The snake was quick, but Julie quicker. In the split-second required for the thing to drive at me she leaped across the grass-grown aisle and pushed me back. So violent was the shove she gave me that I fell against the tomb, struck my head against a small projecting stone and stumbled to my knees. As I fought for footing on the slippery grass I saw the deadly, wedge-shaped head strike full against the girl's bare ankle and heard her gasp with pain. The snake recoiled and swung its head toward me, but Julie dropped down to her knees and spread her arms protectingly about me.

"Non, non, *grand'tante!*" she screamed; 'not this one! Let me—' Her voice broke on a little gasp and with a retching hiccup she sank limply to the grass.

"I tried to rise, but my foot slipped on the grass and I fell back heavily against the tomb, crashing my brow against its shell-set cement wall. I saw Julie lying in a little huddled heap of white against the blackness of the sward, and, shadowy but clearly visible, an aged, wrinkled Negress with turbaned head and cambric apron bending over her, nursing her head against her bosom and rocking back and forth

grotesquely while she crooned a wordless threnody. Where had she come from? I wondered idly. Where had the snake gone? Why did the moonlight seem to fade and flicker like a dying lamp? Once more I tried to rise, but slipped back to the grass before the tomb as everything went black before me.

"The lavender light of early morning was streaming over the tomb-walls of the cemetery when I waked. I lay quiet for a little while, wondering sleepily how I came there. Then, just as the first rays of the sun shot through the thinning shadows, I remembered. Julie! The snake had bitten her when she flung herself before me. She was gone; the old Negress — where had *she* come from? — was gone, too, and I was utterly alone in the old graveyard.

"Stiff from lying on the ground, I got myself up awkwardly, grasping at the flower-shelf projecting from the tomb. As my eyes came level with the slab that scaled the crypt I felt the breath catch in my throat. The crypt, like all its fellows, looked for all the world like an old oven let into a brick wall overlaid with peeling plaster. The sealing-stone was probably once white, but years had stained it to a dirty gray, and time had all but rubbed its legend out. Still, I could see the faint inscription carved in quaint, old-fashioned letters, and disbelief gave way to incredulity, which was replaced by panic terror as I read:

*Ici repose malheureusement
Julie Amélie Marie d'Ayen
Nationale de Paris France
Née le 29 Aout 1788
Décédée a la N O le 2 Juillet 1807*

"Julie! Little Julie whom I'd held in my arms, whose mouth had lain on mine in eager kisses, was a corpse! Dead and in her grave more than a century!"

The silence lengthened. Ned stared miserably before him, his outward eyes unseeing, but his mind's eye turned upon that scene in old Saint Denis Cemetery. De Grandin tugged and tugged again at the ends of his mustache till I thought he'd drag the hairs out by the roots. I could think of nothing which might ease the tension till:

"Of course, the name cut on the tombstone was a piece of pure coincidence," I hazarded. "Most likely the young woman deliberately assumed it to mislead you—"

"And the snake which threatened our young friend, he was an assumption, also, one infers?" de Grandin interrupted.

"N-o, but it could have been a trick. Ned saw. an aged Negress in the cemetery, and those old Southern darkies have strange powers—"

"I damn think that you hit the thumb upon the nail that time, my friend," the little Frenchman nodded, "though you

do not realize how accurate your diagnosis is.” To Ned:

“Have you seen this snake again since coming North?”

“Yes,” Ned replied. “I have. I was too stunned to speak when I read the epitaph, and I wandered back to the hotel in a sort of daze and packed my bags in silence. Possibly that’s why there was no further visitation there. I don’t know. I do know nothing further happened, though, and when several months had passed with nothing but my memories to remind me of the incident, I began to think I’d suffered from some sort of walking nightmare. Nella and I went ahead with preparations for our wedding, but three weeks ago the postman brought me this—”

He reached into an inner pocket and drew out an envelope. It was of soft gray paper, edged with silver-gilt, and the address was in tiny, almost unreadable script:

*M. Édouard Minton,
30 Rue Carteret 30,
Harrisonville, N.J.*

“U’m?” de Grandin commented as he inspected it. “It is addressed *à la française*. And the letter, may one read it?”

“Of course,” Ned answered. “I’d like you to.”

Across de Grandin’s shoulder I made out the hastily-scrawled missive:

Adoré

Remember your promise and the kiss of blood that sealed it. Soon I shall call and you must come.

Pour le temps et pour l’éternité.

JULIE.

“You recognize the writing?” de Grandin asked. “It is—”

“Oh, yes,” Ned answered bitterly. “I recognize it; it’s the same the other note was written in.”

“And then?”

The boy smiled bleakly. “I crushed the thing into a ball and threw it on the floor and stamped on it. Swore I’d die before I’d keep another rendezvous with her, and—” He broke off, and put trembling hands up to his face.

“The so mysterious serpent came again, one may assume?” de Grandin prompted.

“But it’s only a phantom snake,” I interjected. “At worst it’s nothing more than a terrifying vision—”

“Think so?” Ned broke in. “D’ye remember Rowdy, my airedale terrier?”

I nodded.

“He was in the room when I opened this letter, and when the cottonmouth appeared beside me on the floor he made a dash for it. Whether it would have struck me I don’t know, but it struck at him as he leaped and caught him squarely in the throat. He thrashed and fought and the thing held on with

locked jaw till I grabbed a fire-shovel and made for it; then, before I could strike, it vanished.

“But its venom didn’t. Poor old Rowdy was dead before I could get him out of the house, but I took his corpse to Doctor Kirchoff, the veterinary, and told him Rowdy died suddenly and I wanted him to make an autopsy. He went back to his operating-room and stayed there half an hour. When he came back to the office he was wiping his glasses and wore the most astonished look I’ve ever seen on a human face. ‘You say your dog died suddenly — in the house?’ he asked.

“‘Yes,’ I told him; ‘just rolled over and died.’”

“‘Well, bless my soul, that’s the most amazing thing I ever heard!’ he answered. ‘I can’t account for it. That dog died from snake-bite; copperhead, I’d say, and the marks of the fangs show plainly on his throat.’”

“But I thought you said it was a water moccasin,” I objected. Now Doctor Kirchoff says it was a copperhead—”

“*Ah bah!*” de Grandin laughed a thought unpleasantly. “Did no one ever tell you that the copperhead and moccasin are of close kind, my friend? Have not you heard some ophiologists maintain the moccasin is but a dark variety of copperhead?” He did not pause for my reply, but turned again to Ned:

“One understands your chivalry, *Monsieur*. For yourself you have no fear, since after all at times life can be bought too dearly, but the death of your small dog has put a different aspect on the matter. If this never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized serpent which comes and goes like the *boîte à surprise* the how do you call him? Jack from the box? — is enough a ghost thing to appear at any time and place it wills, but sufficiently physical to exude venom which will kill a strong and healthy terrier, you have the fear for Mademoiselle Nella, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Precisely, you—”

“And you are well advised to have the caution, my young friend. We face a serious condition.”

“What do you advise?”

The Frenchman teased his needlepoint mustache-tip with a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. “For the present, nothing,” he replied at length. “Let me look this situation over; let me view it from all angles. Whatever I might tell you now would probably be wrong. Suppose we meet again one week from now. By that time I should have my data well in hand.”

“And in the meantime—”

“Continue to be coy with Mademoiselle Nella. Perhaps it would be well if you recalled important business which requires that you leave town till you hear from me again. There is no need to put her life in peril at this time.”

“If it weren’t for Kirchoff’s testimony I’d say Ned Minton had gone raving crazy,” I declared as the door closed on our visitors. “The whole thing’s wilder than an opium smoker’s dream — that meeting with the girl in New Orleans, the snake that comes and disappears, the assignation in the cemetery — it’s all too preposterous. But I know Kirchoff. He’s as unimaginative as a side of sole-leather, and as efficient as he is unimaginative. If he says Minton’s dog died of snake-bite that’s what it died of, but the whole affair’s so utterly fantastic—”

“Agreed,” de Grandin nodded; “but what is fantasy but the appearance of mental images as such, severed from ordinary relations? The ‘ordinary relations’ of images are those to which we are accustomed, which conform to our experience. The wider that experience, the more ordinary will we find extraordinary relations. By example, take yourself: You sit in a dark auditorium and see a railway train come rushing at you. Now, it is not at all in ordinary experience for a locomotive to come dashing in a theater filled with people, it is quite otherwise; but you keep your seat, you do not flinch, you are not frightened. It is nothing but a motion picture, which you understand. But if you were a savage from New Guinea you would rise and fly in panic from this steaming, shrieking iron monster which bears down on you. *Tiens*, it is a matter of experience, you see. To you it is an everyday event, to the savage it would be a new and terrifying thing.

“Or, perhaps, you are at the hospital. You place a patient between you and the Crookes’ tube of an X-ray, you turn on the current, you observe him through the fluoroscope and *pouf!* his flesh all melts away and his bones spring out in sharp relief. Three hundred years ago you would have howled like a stoned dog at the sight, and prayed to be delivered from the witchcraft which produced it. Today you curse and swear like twenty drunken pirates if the Roentgenologist is but thirty seconds late in setting up the apparatus. These things are ‘scientific,’ you understand their underlying formulae, therefore they seem natural. But mention what you please to call the occult, and you scoff, and that is but admitting that you are opposed to something which you do not understand. The credible and believable is that to which we are accustomed, the fantastic and incredible is what we cannot explain in terms of previous experience. *Voilà, c’est, très simple, n’est-ce-pas?*”

“You mean to say you understand all this?”

“Not at all by any means; I am clever, me, but not that clever. No, my friend, I am as much in the dark as you, only I do not refuse to credit what our young friend tells us. I believe the things he has related happened, exactly as he has recounted them. I do not understand, but I believe. Accordingly, I must probe, I must sift, I must examine this

matter. We see it now as a group of unrelated and irrelevant occurrences, but somewhere lies the key which will enable us to make harmony from this discord, to gather these stray, tangled threads into an ordered pattern. I go to seek that key.”

“Where?”

“To New Orleans, of course. Tonight I pack my portmanteaux, tomorrow I entrain. Just now” — he smothered a tremendous yawn — “now I do what every wise man does as often as he can. I take a drink.”

Seven evenings later we gathered in my study, de Grandin, Ned and I, and from the little Frenchman’s shining eyes I knew his quest had been productive of results.

“My friends,” he told us solemnly, “I am a clever person, and a lucky one, as well. The morning after my arrival at New Orleans I enjoyed three Ramos fizzes, then went to sit in City Park by the old Dueling-Oak and wished with all my heart that I had taken four. And while I sat in self-reproachful thought, sorrowing for the drink that I had missed, behold, one passed by whom I recognized. He was my old schoolfellow, Paul Dubois, now a priest in holy orders and attached to the Cathedral of Saint Louis.

“He took me to his quarters, that good, pious man, and gave me luncheon. It was Friday and a fast day, so we fasted. *Mon Dieu*, but we did fast! On créole gumbo and oysters à la Rockefeller, and baked pompano and little shrimp fried crisp in olive oil and chicory salad and seven different kinds of cheese and wine. When we were so filled with fasting that we could not eat another morsel my old friend took me to another priest, a native of New Orleans whose stock of local lore was second only to his marvelous capacity for fine champagne. *Morbleu*, how I admire that one! And now, attend me very carefully, my friends. What he disclosed to me makes many hidden mysteries all clear:

“In New Orleans there lived a wealthy family named d’Ayen. They possessed much gold and land, a thousand slaves or more, and one fair daughter by the name of Julie. When this country bought the Louisiana Territory from Napoléon and your army came to occupy the forts, this young girl fell in love with a young officer, a Lieutenant Philip Merriwell. *Tenez*, army love in those times was no different than it is today, it seems. This gay young lieutenant, he came, he wooed, he won, he rode away, and little Julie wept and sighed and finally died of heartbreak. In her lovesick illness she had for constant company a slave, an old mulatress known to most as Maman Dragonne, but to Julie simply as *grand’tante*, great-aunt. She had nursed our little Julie at the breast, and all her life she fostered and attended her. To her little white ‘*mamselle*’ she was all gentleness and kindness, but to others she was fierce and frightful, for she

was a ‘conjon woman,’ adept at obeah, the black magic of the Congo, and among the blacks she ruled as queen by force of fear, while the whites were wont to treat her with respect and, it was more than merely whispered, retain her services upon occasion. She could sell protection to the duelist, and he who bore her charm would surely conquer on the field of honor; she brewed love-drafts which turned the hearts and heads of the most capricious coquettes or the most constant wives, as occasion warranted; by merely staring fixedly at someone she could cause him to take sick and die, and—here we commence to tread upon our own terrain — she was said to have the power of changing to a snake at will.

“Very good. You follow? When poor young Julie died of heartbreak it was old Maman Dragonne — the little white one’s *grand’tante* — who watched beside her bed. It is said she stood beside her mistress’ coffin and called a curse upon the fickle lover; swore he would come back and die beside the body of the sweetheart he deserted. She also made a prophecy. Julie should have many loves, but her body should not know corruption nor her spirit rest until she could find one to keep his promise and return to her with words of love upon his lips. Those who failed her should die horribly, but he who kept his pledge would bring her rest and peace. This augury she made while she stood beside her mistress’ coffin just before they sealed it in the tomb in old Saint Denis Cemetery. Then she disappeared.”

“You mean she ran away?” I asked.

“I mean she disappeared, vanished, evanesced, evaporated. She was never seen again, not even by the people who stood next to her when she pronounced her prophecy.”

“But—”

“No buts, my friend, if you will be so kind. Years later, when the British stormed New Orleans, Lieutenant Merriwell was there with General Andrew Jackson. He survived the battle like a man whose life is charmed, though all around him comrades fell and three horses were shot under him. Then, when the strife was done, he went to the grand banquet tendered to the victors. While gayety was at its height he abruptly left the table. Next morning he was found upon the grass before the tomb of Julie d’Ayen. He was dead. He died from snake-bite.

“The years marched on and stories spread about the town, stories of a strange and lovely *belle dame sans merci*, a modern Circe who lured young gallants to their doom. Time and again some gay young blade of New Orleans would boast a conquest. Passing late at night through Royal Street, he would have a flower dropped to him as he walked underneath a balcony. He would meet a lovely girl dressed in the early Empire style, and be surprised at the ease with which he pushed his suit; then — upon the trees in Chartres

Street appeared his funeral notices. He was dead, invariably he was dead of snake-bite. *Parbleu*, it got to be a saying that he who died mysteriously must have met the Lady of the Moonlight as he walked through Royal Street!”

He paused and poured a thimbleful of brandy in his coffee. “You see?” he asked.

“No, I’m shot if I do!” I answered. “I can’t see the connection between—”

“Night and breaking dawn, perhaps?” he asked sarcastically. “If two and two make four, my friend, and even you will not deny they do, then these things I have told you give an explanation of our young friend’s trouble. This girl he met was most indubitably Julie, poor little Julie d’Ayen on whose tombstone it is carved: ‘*Ici repose malheureusement* — here lies unhappily.’ The so mysterious snake which menaces young Monsieur Minton is none other than the aged Maman Dragonne — *grand’tante*, as Julie called her.”

“But Ned’s already failed to keep his tryst,” I objected. “Why didn’t this snake-woman sting him in the hotel, or—”

“Do you recall what Julie said when first the snake appeared?” he interrupted. ‘Not this one, *grand’tante*.’ And again, in the old cemetery when the serpent actually struck at him, she threw herself before him and received the blow. It could not permanently injure her; to earthly injuries the dead are proof, but the shock of it caused her to swoon, it seems. *Monsieur*,” he bowed to Ned, “you are more fortunate than any of those others. Several times you have been close to death, but each time you escaped. You have been given chance and chance again to keep your pledged word to the dead, a thing no other faithless lover of the little Julie ever had. It seems, *monsieur*, this dead girl truly loves you.”

“How horrible!” I muttered.

“You said it, Doctor Trowbridge!” Ned seconded. “It looks as if I’m in a spot, all right.”

“*Mais non*,” de Grandin contradicted. “Escape is obvious, my friend.”

“How, in heaven’s name?”

“Keep your promised word; go back to her.”

“Good Lord, I can’t do that! Go back to a corpse, take her in my arms — kiss her?”

“*Certainement*, why not?”

“Why — why, she’s *dead*!”

“Is she not beautiful?”

“She’s lovely, and alluring as a siren’s song. I think she’s the most exquisite thing I’ve ever seen, but—” he rose and walked unsteadily across the room. If it weren’t for Nella,” he said slowly, “I might not find it hard to follow your advice. Julie’s sweet and beautiful, and artless and affectionate as a child; kind, too, the way she stood between

me and that awful snake-thing, but — oh, it's out of the question!"

"Then we must expand the question to accommodate it, my friend. For the safety of the living — for Mademoiselle Nella's sake — and for the repose of the dead, you must keep the oath you swore to little Julie d'Ayen. You must go back to New Orleans and keep your rendezvous."

The dead of old Saint Denis lay in dreamless sleep beneath the palely argent rays of the fast-waxing moon. The oven-like tombs were gay with hardly-wilted flowers; for two days before was All Saints' Day, and no grave in all New Orleans is so lowly, no dead so long interred, that pious hands do not bear blossoms of remembrance to them on that feast of memories.

De Grandin had been busily engaged all afternoon, making mysterious trips to the old Negro quarter in company with a patriarchal scion of Indian and Negro ancestry who professed ability to guide him to the city's foremost practitioner of voodoo; returning to the hotel only to dash out again to consult his friend at the Cathedral; coming back to stare with thoughtful eyes upon the changing panorama of Canal Street while Ned, nervous as a race-horse at the barrier, tramped up and down the room lighting cigarette from cigarette and drinking absinthe frappé alternating with sharp, bitter sazarac cocktails till I wondered that he did not fall in utter alcoholic collapse. By evening I had that eery feeling that the sane experience when alone with mad folk. I was ready to shriek at any unexpected noise or turn and run at sight of a strange shadow.

"My friend," de Grandin ordered as we reached the grass-paved corridor of tombs where Ned had told us the d'Ayen vaults were, "I suggest that you drink this." From an inner pocket he drew out a tiny flask of ruby glass and snapped its stopper loose. A strong and slightly acrid scent came to me, sweet and spicy, faintly reminiscent of the odor of the aromatic herbs one smells about a mummy's wrappings.

"Thanks, I've had enough to drink already," Ned said shortly.

"You are informing me, *mon vieux*?" the little Frenchman answered with a smile. "It is for that I brought this draft along. It will help you draw yourself together. You have need of all your faculties this time, believe me."

Ned put the bottle to his lips, drained its contents, hiccuped lightly, then braced his shoulders. "That *is* a pick-up," he complimented. "Too bad you didn't let me have it sooner, sir. I think I can go through the ordeal now."

"One is sure you can," the Frenchman answered confidently. "Walk slowly toward the spot where you last saw Julie, if you please. We shall await you here, in easy call if we are needed."

The aisle of tombs was empty as Ned left us. The turf had been fresh-mown for the day of visitation and was as smooth and short as a lawn tennis court. A field-mouse could not have run across the pathway without our seeing it. This much I noticed idly as Ned trudged away from us, walking more like a man on his way to the gallows than one who went to keep a lovers' rendezvous ... and suddenly he was not alone. There was another with him, a girl dressed in a clinging robe of sheer white muslin cut in the charming fashion of the First Empire, girdled high beneath the bosom with a sash of light-blue ribbon. A wreath of pale gardenias lay upon her bright, fair hair; her slender arms were pearl-white in the moonlight. As she stepped toward Ned I thought involuntarily of a line from Sir John Suckling:

"Her feet ... like little mice stole in and out."

"*Édouard, chéri! O, coeur de mon coeur, c'est véritablement toi? Thou hast come willingly, unasked, petit amant?*"

"I'm here," Ned answered steadily, "but only—" He paused and drew a sudden gasping breath, as though a hand had been laid on his throat.

"*Chère,*" the girl asked in a trembling voice, "you are cold to me; do not you love me, then — you are not here because your heart heard my heart calling? O heart of my heart's heart, if you but knew how I have longed and waited! It has been *triste, mon Édouard*, lying in my narrow bed alone while winter rains and summer suns beat down, listening for your footfall. I could have gone out at my pleasure whenever moonlight made the nights all bright with silver; I could have sought for other lovers, but I would not. You held release for me within your hands, and if I might not have it from you I would forfeit it for ever. Do not you bring release for me, my Édouard? Say that it is so!"

An odd look came into the boy's face. He might have seen her for the first time, and been dazzled by her beauty and the winsome sweetness of her voice.

"Julie!" he whispered softly. "Poor, patient, faithful little Julie!"

In a single stride he crossed the intervening turf and was on his knees before her, kissing her hands, the hem of her gown, her sandaled feet, and babbling half-coherent, broken words of love.

She put her hands upon his head as if in benediction, then turned them, holding them palm-forward to his lips, finally crooked her fingers underneath his chin and raised his face. "Nay, love, Sweet love, art thou a worshipper and I a saint that thou should kneel to me?" she asked him tenderly. "See, my lips are famishing for thine, and wilt thou waste thy kisses on my hands and feet and garment? Make haste, my

heart, we have but little time, and I would know the kisses of redemption ere—”

They clung together in the moonlight, her white-robed, lissome form and his somberly-clad body seemed to melt and merge in one while her hands reached up to clasp his cheeks and draw his face down to her yearning, scarlet mouth.

De Grandin was reciting something in a mumbling monotone; his words were scarcely audible, but I caught a phrase occasionally: “... rest eternal grant to her, O Lord ... let light eternal shine upon her ... from the gates of hell her soul deliver ... *Kyrie eleison...*”

“Julie!” we heard Ned’s despairing cry, and:

“*Ha*, it comes, it has begun; it finishes!” de Grandin whispered gratingly.

The girl had sunk down to the grass as though she swooned; one arm had fallen limply from Ned’s shoulder, but the other still was clasped about his neck as we raced toward them. “*Adieu, mon amoureux; adieu pour ce monde, adieu pour l’autre; adieu pour l’éternité!*” we heard her sob. When we reached him, Ned knelt empty-armed before the tomb. Of Julie there was neither sign nor trace.

“So, assist him, if you will, my friend,” de Grandin bade, motioning me to take Ned’s elbow. “Help him to the gate. I follow quickly, but first I have a task to do.”

As I led Ned, staggering like a drunken man, toward the cemetery exit, I heard the clang of metal striking metal at the tomb behind us.

“What did you stop behind to do?” I asked as we prepared for bed at the hotel.

He flashed his quick, infectious smile at me, and tweaked his mustache ends for all the world like a self-satisfied tom cat furbishing his whiskers after finishing a bowl of cream. “There was an alteration to that epitaph I had to make you recall it read, ‘*Ici repose malheureusement* — here lies unhappily Julie d’Ayen’? That is no longer true. I chiseled off the *malheureusement*. Thanks to Monsieur Édouard’s courage and my cleverness the old one’s prophecy was fulfilled tonight; and poor, small Julie has found rest at last.

Tomorrow morning they celebrate the first of a series of masses I have arranged for her at the Cathedral.”

“What was that drink you gave Ned just before he left us?” I asked curiously. “It smelled like—”

“*Le bon Dieu* and the devil know — not I,” he answered with a grin. “It was a voodoo love-potion. I found the realization that she had been dead a century and more so greatly troubled our young friend that he swore he could not be affectionate to our poor Julie; so I went down to the Negro quarter in the afternoon and arranged to have a philtre brewed. *Eh bien*, that aged black one who concocted it assured me that she could inspire love for the image of a crocodile in the heart of anyone who looked upon it after taking but a drop of her decoction, and she charged me twenty dollars for it. But I think I had my money’s worth. Did it not work marvelously?”

“Then Julie’s really gone? Ned’s coming back released her from the spell—”

“Not wholly gone,” he corrected. “Her little body now is but a small handful of dust, her spirit is no longer earthbound, and the familiar demon who in life was old Maman Dragonne has left the earth with her, as well. No longer will she metamorphosize into a snake and kill the faithless ones who kiss her little mistress and then forswear their troth, but — *non*, my friend, Julie is not gone entirely, I think. In the years to come when Ned and Nella have long been joined in wedded bliss, there will be minutes when Julie’s face and Julie’s voice and the touch of Julie’s little hands will haunt his memory. There will always be one little corner of his heart which never will belong to Madame Nella Minton, for it will be for ever Julie’s. Yes, I think that it is so.”

Slowly, deliberately, almost ritualistically, he poured a glass of wine and raised it. “To you, my little poor one,” he said softly as he looked across the sleeping city toward old Saint Denis Cemetery. “You quit earth with a kiss upon your lips; may you sleep serene in Paradise until another kiss shall waken you.”

NOVEMBER

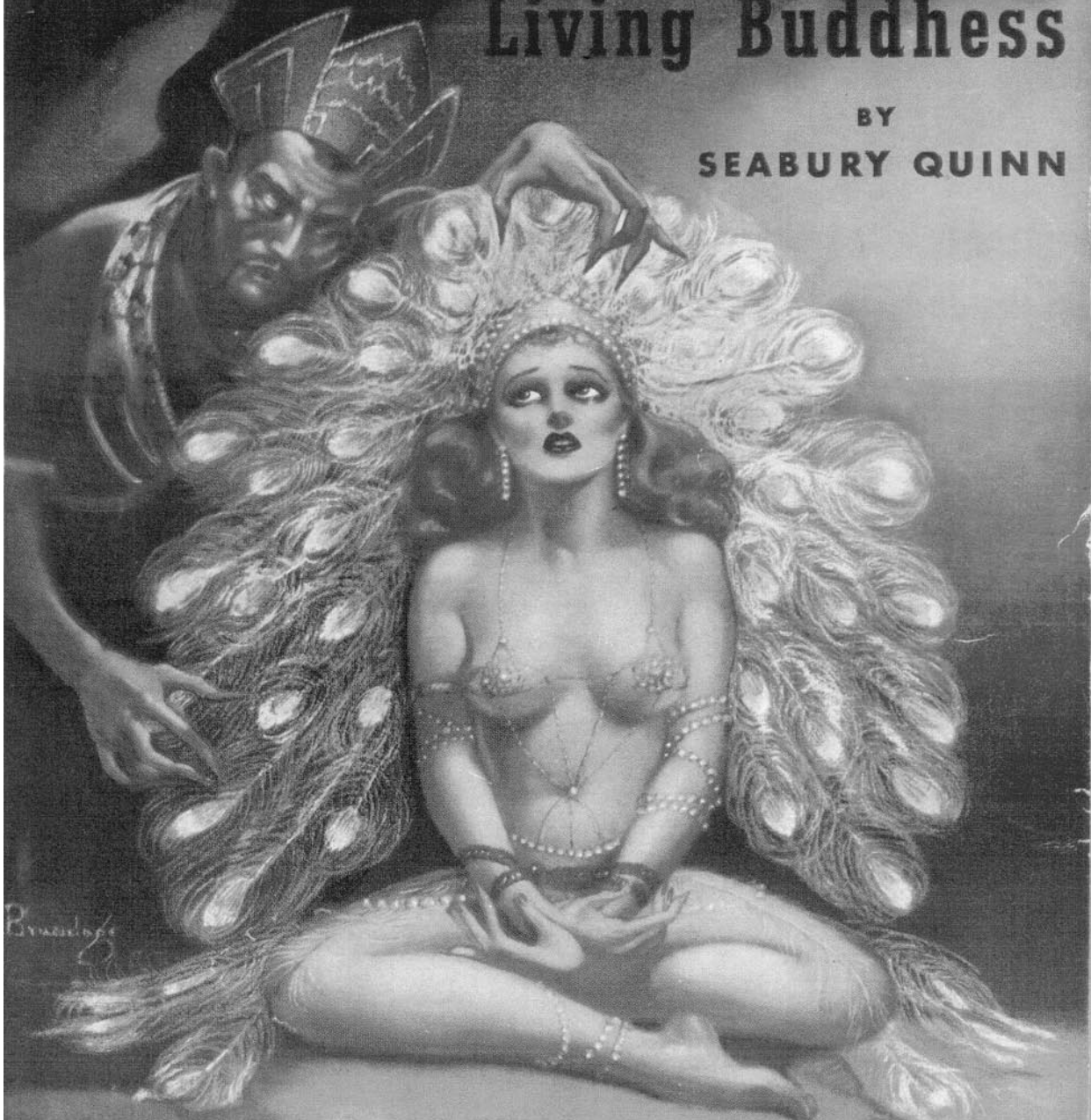
Weird Tales

25c

Living Buddhess

BY

SEABURY QUINN



A strange and curious thrill-tale of a living female Buddha

Living Buddhess

THE HOT, erotic rhythm of the rumba beat upon our ears with the repercussive vibrance of a voodoo drum. White dinner coated men guided partners clad in sheerest of sheer crêpes or air-light muslin in the mazes of the Negroid dance across the umber tiles which floored the Graystone Towers Roof. Waiters hastened silent-footed with their trays of tall, iced drinks. The purple, star-gemmed sky seemed near enough to touch.

“Tired, old chap?” I asked de Grandin as he patted back a yawn and gazed disconsolately at his glass of Dubonnet. “Shall we be going?”

“*Tiens*, we might as well,” he answered with a slightly weary smile; “there is small pleasure in watching others — *grand cochon vert*, and what is that?”

“What’s what?” I asked, noting with surprise how his air of boredom dropped away and little wrinkles of intensive thought etched suddenly about the corners of his eyes.

“The illumination yonder,” he nodded toward the bunting-wrapped stanchions on the parapet between which swung the gently-swaying festoons of electric lights, “surely that is not provided by the management. It looks like *feu Saint-Elme*.”

Following his glance I noticed that a globe of luminosity flickered from the tallest of the light-poles, wavering to and fro like a yellow candle-flame blown by the wind; but there was no wind; the night was absolutely stirless.

“H’m, it does look like St. Elmo’s fire, at that,” I acquiesced, “but how—”

“*Ps-s-s-t!*” he shut me off. “Observe him, if you please!”

Bobbing aimlessly, like a wasp that bounces on the ceiling of the room to which it has made inadvertent entrance, the pear-shaped globe of luminance had detached itself from the gilt ball at the top of the light standard, and was weaving an erratic pattern back and forth above the dancers. Almost at the center of the floor it paused uncertainly, as if it had been a balloon caught between two rival drafts, then suddenly dropped down, landing on the high-coiled copper-colored hair of a young woman.

It fluttered weavily above the clustered curls of her coiffure a moment like a Pentecostal flame, then with a sudden dip descended on the cupric hair, spread about it like a halo for an instant, and vanished; not like a bursting bubble, but slowly, like a ponderable substance being sucked in, as milk in a tall goblet vanishes when imbibed through a straw.

I do not think that anybody else observed the strange occurrence, for the dancers were too hypnotized by sensuous

motion and the moaning rhythm of the music, while the diners were preoccupied with food; but the scream the girl emitted as the flickering flame sank through her high-dressed hair brought everyone up standing. It was, I thought, not so much a cry of pain as of insanity, of strange disease and maniacal excitement. It frothed and spouted from her tortured mouth like a geyser of unutterable anguish.

“*Mordieu*, see to her, my friend, she swoons!” de Grandin cried as we dashed across the dance floor where the girl lay in a heap, like a lovely tailor’s dummy overturned and broken.

With the assistance of two waiters, chaperoned by an assistant manager in near-hysterics, we took her to the ladies’ rest room and laid her on a couch. She was breathing stertorously, her hands were clenched, and as I reached to feel her pulse I noticed that her skin was cold and clammy as a frog’s, and little hummocks of horripilation showed upon her forearms. “Every symptom of lightning-stroke,” I murmured as I felt her feeble, fluttering pulse and turned her lids back to find pupils so dilated that they all but hid her irides; “is there any sign of burns?”

“One moment, we will see,” de Grandin answered, stripping off her flaring-skirted frock of white organza and the clinging slip of primavera printed satin as one might turn a glove. We had no difficulty in examination, for except for a lace bandeau bound about her bosom and a pair of absolutely minimal gilt-leather sandals she was, as Jules de Grandin might have said, “as naked as his hand.” Her skin was white and fine and smooth, with that appearance of translucence seen so often in red-headed people, and nowhere did it show a trace of burn or blemish. But even as we finished our inspection a choking, rasping wheeze came in her throat, and her stiffened body fell back lax and flaccid.

“Quickly,” cried de Grandin as he turned her on her face, knelt above her and began administering artificial respiration; “have warm blankets and some brandy brought, my friend. I will keep her heart and lungs in action till the stimulants arrive.”

Almost an hour had elapsed when the girl’s lids finally fluttered up, disclosing sea-green eyes that held a dreamy, slightly melancholy look. “Where am — I?” she asked feebly, voicing the almost universal question of the fainting. “Why — you’re *men*, aren’t you?”

“We are so taken and considered, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin answered with a smile. “You had expected

otherwise?”

“I — don’t — know,” she answered listlessly; then, as she saw her badly frightened escort at the door: “Oh, George, I think I must have died for a few moments!”

De Grandin motioned the young man to a chair beside the couch, tucked a blanket-end more snugly round the girl’s slim shoulders, and bent a smile of almost fatherly affection on the lovers. “*Corbleu, Mademoiselle*, we — Doctor Trowbridge and I — feared you were going to die permanently,” he assured her. “You were a very ill young woman.”

“But what was it?” asked the young man. “One moment Sylvia and I were dancing peacefully, the next she screamed and fainted, and—”

“*Précisément, Monsieur*, one is permitted to indulge in speculation as to what it was,” de Grandin nodded. “One wonders greatly. To all appearances *le feu Saint Elme* — the how do you call him? Saint Elmo’s light? — took form upon a flagstaff by the dancing-roof, but that should happen only during periods of storm when the air is charged with electricity. No matter, it appeared to form and dance about the pole-tops like a naughty little child who torments a wandering blind man, then *pouf!* the globe of fire, he did detach himself and fall like twenty thousand bricks on *Mademoiselle*. This should not be. Saint Elmo’s light is usually harmless as the gleaming of the firefly in the dark. Like good old wine, it is beautiful but mild. Yet there it is; it struck your lady’s head and struck her all unconscious at the selfsame time.

“What was your sensation, *Mademoiselle*?” he added, turning from the young man to the girl.

“I hardly know,” she answered in a voice so weak it seemed to be an echo. “I had no warning. I was dancing with George and thinking how nice it would be when the rumba finished and we could go back and get a drink, when suddenly something seemed to fall on me — no, that’s not quite right, I didn’t feel as if a falling object struck me, but rather as if I had received a heavy, stunning blow from a club or some such weapon, and as though every hair in my head was being pulled out by the roots at the same time. Then something seemed to spread and grow inside my head, pushing out against my skull and flesh and skin until the pain became so great I couldn’t stand it. Then my whole head seemed to burst apart, like an exploding bomb, and—”

“And there you were,” the young man interrupted with a nervous laugh.

She gave him a long, troubled look from heavily-fringed eyes. “There I was,” she assented. “But where?”

“Why, knocked all in a heap, my dear. We thought you were a goner. You would have been, too, if these two gentlemen hadn’t happened to be doctors, and dining at the table next to us.”

“That isn’t what I mean,” she answered with a little, puzzled frown. “I was — I *went* somewhere while I was unconscious, dear. I — I half believe I died and had a glimpse of Paradise — only it wasn’t at all as I’d imagined it.”

“Oh, nonsense, Syl,” her sweetheart chided. “Maybe you imagined you saw something while you were out cold, but—”

“Tell us what it was you saw, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin interrupted in a soothing voice. “How did your vision differ from your preconceived idea of Paradise?”

She lay in quiet thought a moment, her green eyes wide and dreamy, almost wistful. Finally: “I seemed to be in a great Oriental city. The buildings were of stone and towered like the Empire State and Chrysler buildings. Their tops were overlaid with gold leaf or sheet copper that shone so brilliantly that it fairly burned my eyes as the fierce sun beat down from a cloudless sky. I was on a portico or terrace of some sort, looking down a wide street reaching to a thick, high-gated wall, and through this gate came a procession. Hundreds of men on horseback carried lances from which silk flags fluttered, and after them came musicians with drums and flutes and tambourines and cymbals, and the music that they made was lovely. Then there were marching women, walking with a kind of dancing step and singing as they came. There were jewels and flowers in their straight, black hair, jewels in their ears and noses, necklaces of beaten gold and pearls and rubies and carved coral around their throats, and jeweled bands of gold around their arms and wrists. Bright gems flashed in the chain-gold belts that clasped their waists; around their ankles they had wire circlets hung with bells that chimed like laughter as they walked. They wore skirts of bright vermilion tied with girdles of blue silk, and their hands and toes and lips and nipples were all dyed brilliant red. Next came a great array of soldiers bearing shields and lances, then more musicians, and finally a herd of elephants which, like the women, wore belled bands of gold around their ankles. But while the women’s bells were sweet and clear and high, the gongs upon the elephants were deep and soft and mellow, like the deep notes of marimbas, and the bass and treble bell-notes blended in a harmony that set the pulses going like the beat of syncopated music.”

“*Eh bien, Mademoiselle*, this Paradise you saw was colorful, however much it may have lacked in orthodoxy,” de Grandin smiled. But there was no answering gleam of humor in the girl’s green eyes as she looked at him almost beseechingly.

“It thrilled me and elated me,” she said. “I seemed to understand it all, and to know that this procession was for me, and me alone; but it frightened me, as well.”

“You were afraid? But why?”

“Because, although I knew what it was all about, I didn’t.”

De Grandin cast a look of humorous entreaty at the young man seated by the couch. “Will you translate for me, *Monsieur*? Me, I have resided in your so splendid country but a scant twelve years, and I fear I do not understand the English fluently. I thought I heard her say she understood, yet failed to understand. But no, it cannot be. My ears or wits play the *mauvaise farce* with me.”

“I don’t quite know how to express it,” the girl responded. “I seemed to be two people, myself and another. It was that other one who understood the pageant and who gloried in it, and that’s what frightened me, for that other one who knew that the procession was to honor him was a man, while I was still a woman, and—” She paused, and tears formed in her eyes, but whether she were weeping for lost womanhood or from vexation at her inability to find the words to frame her explanation I could not decide.

“Come, come, young lady; that’s enough,” I ordered in my sternest bedside manner. “You’ve suffered from a heavy shock, and people in such cases often have queer visions. There’s nothing medically curious in your having seen this circus parade while you were unconscious, and that feeling of dual personality is quite in keeping, too. If you feel strong enough, I suggest you get your clothes on and let us take you home.”

“Queer what aberrations people have following electric shock,” I mused as we paused in the pantry for a final good-night drink. “I remember when I was an interne at City Hospital I had an ambulance case where a woman had been struck by a live wire fallen from a trolley pole. All the way back to the hospital she insisted that she was a cow, and lowed continuously. Now, take this Dearborn girl—”

“Precisely, take her, if you please,” de Grandin nodded, his mouth half full of cheese and biscuit, a foaming mug of beer raised half-way to his lips. “Is hers not a case to marvel at? She is struck down all but dead by a ball of harmless *feu Saint-Elme*, and while unconscious sees the vision of a thing entirely outside her experience or background. She could not have dreamed it, for we dream only that of which we know at least a little, yet—” He drained his mug of beer, dusted off his fingers and raised his shoulders in a shrug. “*Tenez*,” he yawned, “let the devil worry with it. Me, I have the craving for ten hours’ sleep.”

It was shortly after dinner the next evening that my office telephone began a clangor which refused to be denied. When, worn down at last by the persistence of the caller, I barked a curt “Hullo?” into the instrument, a woman’s voice came tremblingly. “Doctor Trowbridge, this is Mrs. Henry Dearborn of 1216 Passaic Boulevard. You and Doctor de

Grandin attended my daughter Sylvia when she fainted at Graystone Towers last night?”

“Yes,” I admitted.

“May I ask you to come over? Doctor Rusholt, our family physician, is out of town, and since you’re already familiar with Sylvia’s case—”

“What seems to be the trouble?” I cut in. “Any evidence of burning? Sometimes that develops later in such cases, and—”

“No, thank heaven, physically she seems all right, but a little while ago she complained of feeling nervous, and declared she couldn’t be comfortable in any position. She took some aromatic spirits of ammonia and lay down, thinking it would pass away, but found herself too much wrought up to rest. Then she started walking up and down, and suddenly she began muttering to herself, clasping and unclasping her hands and twitching her face like a person with Saint Vitus’ dance. A few minutes ago she fainted, and seems to be in some sort of delirium, for she’s still muttering and twitching her hands and feet—”

“All right,” I cut the flow of symptoms short; “we’ll be right over.”

“Looks as if the Dearborn girl’s developing chorea following her shock last night,” I told de Grandin as we headed for the patient’s house. “Poor child, I’m afraid she’s in for a bad time.”

“Agreed,” he nodded solemnly. “I fear that he has managed to break in—”

“Whatever are you maundering about? — at your confounded ghost-hunting again?” I interrupted testily.

“Not at all, by no means; quite the contrary,” he assured me. “This time, my friend, I damn think that the ghost has hunted us. He has, to use your quaint American expression, absconded with our garments while we bathed.”

Sylvia Dearborn lay upon the high-dressed bed, her burnished-copper hair and milky skin a charming contrast to her apple-green percale pajamas. She was not conscious, but certainly she was not sleeping, for at times her eyes would open violently, as though they had been actuated by an unoiled mechanism, and her arms and legs would twitch with sharp, erratic gestures. Sometimes she moaned as though in frightful torment; again her lips would writhe and twist as though they had volition of their own, and once or twice she seemed about to speak, but only senseless jabber issued from her drooling mouth.

De Grandin leant across the bed, listening intently to the gibberish she babbled, finally straightened with a shrug and turned to me. “*La morphine*?” he suggested.

“I should think so,” I replied, preparing a half-grain injection. “We must control these spasms or she’ll wear her-

self out.”

Deftly he swabbed her arm with alcohol, took a fold of skin between his thumb and forefinger and held it ready for the needle. I shot the mercy-bearing liquid home, and stood to wait results. Gradually her grotesque movements quieted, her moans became more feeble, and in a little while she slept.

“Give her this three times a day, and see that she remains in bed,” I ordered, writing a prescription for Fowler’s solution. “I don’t think you’ll need us, but if any change occurs please don’t hesitate to call.”

Mrs. Dearborn took me at my word. The blue, fading twilight of early dawn limned the windows of my chamber when the bedside telephone began its heartless, sleep-destroying stutter, and I groaned with something close akin to anguish as I reached for it.

“Oh, Doctor Trowbridge, won’t you come at once?” the mother’s frightened voice implored. “Sylvia’s had another seizure, worse — much worse — this time. She’s talking almost constantly, but it seems she’s speaking in a foreign language, and somehow she seems changed!”

Years of practise had made me adept at quick dressing, but de Grandin bettered my best efforts. He was waiting for me in the hall, debonair and well-groomed with his usual spruce immaculateness, and had even found time to select a flower for his buttonhole from the *epergne* in the dining-room.

A single glance sufficed to tell us that our patient suffered something more than simple chorea. The pseudo-purposive gesticulations were no longer evident; indeed, she seemed as rigid as she had been the night before when we treated her for lightning-shock, and her skin was corpse-cold to the touch. But her lips were working constantly, and a steady flow of words ran from them. At first I thought it only senseless gabble, but a moment’s listening told me that the sounds were words, though of what language I could not determine. They were sing-songed, now high, now low, with irregularly stressed accents, and, somehow, reminded me of the jargon Chinese laundrymen are wont to use when talking to each other. Queerly, too, at times her voice assumed a different timbre, almost high falsetto, but definitely masculine. Constantly recurring through her mumbled gabble was the phrase: “*Oom mani padme — oom mani padme! Hong!*”

“Do something for her, Doctor! Oh, for the love of heaven, help her!” Mrs. Dearborn begged as she ushered us into her daughter’s bedroom; then, as I laid my kit upon a chair: “Look — look at her face!”

Whatever changes may be present in his patients’ — or his patients’ relatives’ — appearance, a doctor has to keep a

poker face, but retaining even outward semblance of unruffled nerves was hard as I looked in Sylvia Dearborn’s countenance. A weird, uncanny metamorphosis seemed taking place. As though her features had been formed of plastic substance, and that substance was being worked by the unseen hands of some invisible modeler, her very cast of countenance was in process of transshaping. Somehow, the lips seemed thickened, bulbous, and drooped at the comers like those of one whose facial muscles had been weakened by prolonged indulgence in the practise of all seven deadly sins, and as the mouth sagged, so the outer comers of the eyes appeared to lift, the cast of features was definitely Mongol; the slant-eyed, thick-lipped face of a Mongolian idiot was replacing Sylvia Dearborn’s cameo-clear countenance.

“*Oom mani padme — oom mani padme!*” moaned the girl upon the bed, and at each repetition her voice rose till the chant became a wail and the wail became a scream; dry-throated, rasping, horrible in its intensity: “*Oom mani padme — oom mani padme! Hong!*”

“Whatever—” I began, but de Grandin leaped across the room, staring as in fascination at the sick girl’s changing features, then turned to me with a low command:

“Morphine; much more morphine, good Friend Trowbridge, if you please! Make the dose so strong that one more millionth of a grain would cause her death; but give it quickly. We must throw her speaking-apparatus out of gear, make it utterly impossible for her to go through the mechanics of repeating that vile invocation!”

I hastened to comply, and as Sylvia sink into inertia from the drug:

“Come, my friend, come away,” he bade. “We must go at once and get advice from one who knows whereof he speaks. She will be all right for a short time; the drug will not wear off for several hours.”

“Where the dickens are we going?” I demanded as he urged me to make haste.

“To New York, my friend, to that potpourri of intermixed humanity that they call Chinatown. Oh, make speed, my friend! We must hasten, we must rush; we must travel with the speed of light if we would be in time, believe me!”

Where Doyers Street makes a snake-back turn on its way toward the Bowery stood the taciturn-faced red-brick house, flanked on one side by a curio-dealer’s ménage whose windows showed a bewildering miscellany of Chinese curiosa designed for sale at swollen prices to the tourist trade and on the other by a dingy eating-house grandiloquently mislabeled The Palace of Seven Thousand Gustatory Felicities. Shuttered windows like sleeping eyes faced toward the narrow, winding street; the door was flush with

the front wall and seemed at first glance to be rather inexpertly grained wood. A second look showed it was painted metal, and from the sharp, unvibrant sound the knocker gave as de Grandin jerked it up and down, I knew the metal was as thick and solid as the steel wall of a safe.

Three times the little Frenchman plied the knocker, beating a sharp, broken rhythm, and as he let the ring fall with a final thump there came an almost soundless *click* and a hidden panel in the door slipped back, disclosing a small peep-hole. Behind the spy-hole was an eye, small, sharp and piercing as a bird's, curious as a monkey's, which inspected us from head to foot. Then came a guttural "*Kungskee-kungskee*," and the metal door swung open to admit us to a hall where a lantern of pierced brass cast a subdued orange glow on apricot-hung walls, floors strewn with thick-piled Chinese rugs, carved black-wood chairs and tables, last of all a crystal image of the Buddha enthroned upon a pedestal of onyx.

Our usher was a small man dressed in the black-silk jacket and loose trousers once common to Celestials everywhere, but now as out of date with them as Gladstone collars and bell-shaped beaver hats are in New York. Tucking hands demurely in his jacket sleeves, he made three quick bows to de Grandin, murmuring the courteous "*Kungskee-kungskee*" at each bow. The little Frenchman responded in the same way, and, the ceremony finished, asked slowly, "Your honorable master, is he to be seen? We have traveled far and fast, and seek his counsel in a pressing matter."

The Oriental bowed again and motioned toward a chair. "Deign to take honorable seating — while this inconsequential person sees if the Most Worshipful may be approached," he answered in a flat and level voice. There was hardly any trace of accent in his words, but somehow I knew that he first formulated his reply in Chinese, then laboriously translated each syllable into English before uttering it.

"Who is it we have come to see?" I asked as the servant vanished silently, his footfalls noiseless on the deep-piled rugs as if he walked on sand.

"Doctor Wong Kim Tien, greatest living authority on Mongolian lore and Oriental magic in the world," de Grandin answered soberly. "If he cannot help us—"

"Good Lord, you mean you've dragged me from the bedside of a desperately sick girl to consult a mumbo-jumbo occultist — and a Chinaman in the bargain?" I blazed.

"Not a Chinaman, a Mongol and a Manchu," he corrected.

"Well, what the devil is the difference—"

"The difference between the rabbit and the stoat, *parbleu!* Do you not know history, my friend? Have you not read how this people conquered all the country from Tibet to the Caspian and from the Dnieper to the China Sea — how they laid the castles of the terrible Assassins in heaps of smoking

ruins—"

"Who cares what they did before Columbus crossed the ocean? The fact remains we've left a critically ill patient to go gallivanting over the country to consult this faker, and—"

"I would not use such words if I were you, my friend," he warned. "A Manchu's honor is a precious thing and his vanity is very brittle. If you were overheard—"

The messenger's return cut short our budding quarrel. "The Master bids you come," he told us as if he were about to usher us into the presence of some potentate.

We climbed flight after flight of winding stairs, and as we went I was impressed with the fact that the place seemed more a fortress than an ordinary house. Steel doors were everywhere, shutting off the corridors, closing stairheads, making it impossible for anything less potent than a battery of field guns to force a passage from one floor to another, or even from the front to the rear of the building. Thick bars were at each window, and in the ceilings I caught glimpses of ammonia atomizers such as those they have in prisons to subdue unruly convicts. But if the place was strong, it was also lovely. Porcelains, silks, carved jades, choice pieces of the goldsmith's art, were everywhere. Walls were hung with draperies which even I could recognize as priceless, and the rugs we trod must have been well worth their area in treasury notes. Finally, when it seemed to me we had ascended more steps than those leading to the Woolworth Building's tower, our guide came to a halt, held aside a brocade curtain and motioned us to pass through the steel door which had been opened for our coming. De Grandin led the way and we stepped into the study of Doctor Wong Kim Tien.

I had no preconceived impression of the man we were to meet, save that he would probably look like any Chinaman, butter-colored, broad-faced, button-nosed, probably immensely fat, and certainly a full head shorter than the average Caucasian.

The man who crossed the room to greet de Grandin was the opposite of my mind's picture. He was exceptionally tall, six feet three, at least, and lean and hard-conditioned as an athlete. Straight, black hair slanted sleekly upward from a high and rather narrow forehead, his nose was large and aquiline, his smooth-shaved lips were thin and firm, his high cheek-bones cased in skin of ruddy bronze, like that of a Sioux Indian. But most of all it was his eyes that fascinated me. Only slightly slanting, they were hooded by low-drooping lids, and were an indeterminate color, slate-gray, perhaps, possibly agate; certainly not black. They were meaningful eyes, knowing, weary, slightly bitter — as if they had seen from their first opening that the world was a tiresome place and that its ever-changing foibles were as meaningless as ripples on a shallow brooklet's surface.

The room in which we stood was as unusual in appearance as its owner. It was thirty feet in length, at least, and occupied the full width of the house. Casement windows, glazed with richly painted glass, looked out upon the rooftops of the buildings opposite and the festooned backyard clotheslines of the tenements that clustered to the north. Chinese rugs woven when the Son of Heaven bore the surname Ming strewed the polished floors, and the place was warmly lighted by two monster lamps with pierced brass shades. The furniture was oddly mixed, lacquered Chinese pieces mingling with Turkish ottomans like overgrown boudoir pillows, and here and there a bit of Indian cane-ware. Book-shelves ran along one wall, bound volumes in every language of the Occident and Orient sharing space with scrolls of silk wound on ivory rods. Other shelves were filled with vases, small and large, with rounding surfaces of cream-colored crackle, or blood-red glaze or green or blue-and-white that threw back iridescent lights like reflections from a softly changing kaleidoscope. Upon a high stand was an aquarium in which swam several goldfish of the most gorgeous coloring I had ever seen, while near the northern windows was a refectory table of old oak littered with chemical apparatus. Glass-sided cases held a startling miscellany — mummified heads and hands and feet, old weapons, ancient tablets marked with cuneiform inscriptions. An articulated skeleton swung from a metal stand and leered at us sardonically.

“*Kungskee-kungskee*, little brother,” our host greeted, clasping his hands before his blue-and-yellow robe and bowing to de Grandin, then advancing to shake hands in Western fashion. “What fair wind has brought you here?”

“*Tiens*, I hardly know myself,” the little Frenchman answered as he performed the rites of introduction and the Manchu almost crushed my knuckles in a vise-like grip. “It is about a woman that we come, an American young woman who suffered from a seeming lightning-stroke two nights ago and now lies babbling in her bed.”

The Manchu doctor smiled at him ironically. “This one is honored that the learned, skillful Jules de Grandin, graduate of the Sorbonne and once professor at the *École Médical de Paris* should seek his humble aid,” he murmured. “Have you perhaps administered the usual remedies, given her hypnotics to control her nervousness—”

“*Grand Dieu des artichauts!*” the Frenchman interrupted; “this is no time to jest, my old one. I said a *seeming* lightning-stroke, if you will recall, and if you will attend me carefully I shall show you why it is I seek your so distinguished help.”

Quickly he rehearsed the incidents of Sylvia’s mishap, recalled the floating ball of fire which struck her down, told of her vision of the Orient city; finally, dramatically: “Now

she lies and murmurs, ‘*Oom mani padme — oom mani padme!*’” he concluded. “Am I, or am I not, entitled to your counsel?”

“My little one, you are!” the other answered. “Wait while I change my clothes and I will go at once to see this girl who chants the Buddhist litany in her delirium, yet has never been outside this country.”

Arrayed in tweeds and Panama the Oriental savant joined us in a little while and we set out for Sylvia Dearborn’s.

“What is that chant she keeps repeating?” I asked as we left the tunnel and started on the road across the meadows.

“‘*Oom mani padme*’ is literally ‘Hail the Jewel of the Lotus,’ Doctor Wong replied, “but actually it has far more significance than its bare translation into English would suggest. Gautama Siddhartha, or Buddha, as you know him, is generally shown as seated in a giant lotus blossom, you know, and for that reason is poetically referred to as the Jewel of the Lotus. But this phrase of worship has acquired a special significance through countless repetitions. It is the constant prayer of the devout Buddhist, it is inscribed on his sacred banners and on his prayer wheels, and one ‘acquires merit’ — something like obtaining an indulgence in the Roman Catholic faith — by constantly repeating it. To the followers of Buddha it is like the *Allah Akbar* to the Mohammedan or the *Gloria Patri* to the Christian. It is at once praise and prayer in all Buddhistic ceremonies, and with it they are all begun and ended. For a Buddhist to say it is as natural as to draw his breath, but for an American young lady, especially of such narrow background as your patient’s, to begin intoning it is more than merely strange; it is incredible, perhaps indicative of something very dreadful.”

The morphine torpor was relinquishing its hold on Sylvia when we readied her. From time to time she rolled her head upon the pillow, moaning like a person who dreams dreadful dreams. Once or twice she seemed about to speak, but only thick-tongued sounds proceeded from her mouth. De Grandin tiptoed to the window and raised the blind to bring the patient’s face in clearer definition and as the lances of bright sunlight slanted sharply down upon the bed the girl rose to a sitting posture, flung out her arms as though to ward off an assailant and cried out in a voice honed sharp with fear, “No, no, I tell you; I won’t let you! You can’t have me! I won’t—” As suddenly as it had commenced, her outburst ceased, and she fell back on the pillows, breathing with the heavy, gasping respiration of one totally exhausted.

De Grandin bent and rearranged the bed-clothes. “You see?” he asked the Manchu. “She suffers from the fixed idea that someone or some thing seeks to enter in her — *grand Dieu*, it comes again, *l’extase perverse!* Behold her, how she metamorphosizes!”

A subtle change had come into the young girl's face. The corners of her eyes went up, her mouth drooped at the corners, and her firmly molded lips appeared to swell and thicken. A sly, triumphant smile spread across her altered countenance, and she roused again, glancing sidewise at us with a cunning leer.

"*Empad inam moo!*" she exclaimed suddenly, for all the world like a naughty child who giggles a forbidden phrase. "*Empad inam moo!*" But the voice that spoke the singsong words was never hers. It was a high, cracked tone, like the utterance of an adolescent whose voice has not quite finished changing, or the treble of a senile graybeard, but it was definitely masculine.

"*Dor-je-tshe-ring!*" Doctor Wong exclaimed, and:

"*Kilao yeh hsieh ti to lo!*" that alien voice replied ironically, speaking through the girl's fast-thickening lips as a ventriloquist might make his words appear to issue from his dummy's painted mouth.

Doctor Wong addressed a very diatribe of hissing gutturals at the girl, and she answered with a flow of singsong syllables, shaking her head, grinning at him with a sly malevolence. They seemed to be in deadly argument, Wong urging something with great earnestness, Sylvia replying with cool irony, as though she were defying him.

At last the Manchu turned away. "Renew the opiate, my friend," he ordered wearily. "It will not last as long this time, but while she is unconscious she will rest. Afterward" — he smiled a hard-lipped smile "—we shall see what can be done."

"You have a plan of treatment?" I inquired.

"I have," he answered earnestly, "and unless it is successful it would be much better that you made this dose of morphine fatal."

The girl fought like a tigress when we tried to give her the narcotic. Scratching, biting, screaming imprecations in that strange heathen tongue, she beat us off repeatedly with the frenzied strength of madness, and it was not until they fairly hurled themselves upon her and held her fast that I was able to administer the morphine. This time the drug worked slowly, and almost an hour had elapsed before we saw her eyelids droop and she sank into a troubled sleep.

"I think it would be well if we secured two nurses used to handling the insane," advised de Grandin as we quit our bedside vigil. "It would be nothing less than murder to administer another dose of morphine after this; yet she must be protected from herself and we cannot remain here. We have important duties to perform elsewhere."

I telephoned the agency and in less than half an hour two stout females who looked as if they might be champion wrestlers in their leisure time reported at the Dearborn home. "*Pipe d'un chameau!*" de Grandin chuckled as he viewed

our new recruits; "I damn think Mademoiselle Sylvia will have more trouble with those ones than she had with Doctor Wong and me, should she take a notion to go walking in our absence!"

Instructions given to the nurses, we set out once more for New York, Wong and de Grandin talking earnestly in whispers, I with a feeling I had blundered inadvertently into a fairy-tale, or come upon a modern version of the Mad Hatter's tea party.

Luncheon waited at the house in Chinatown and was served by Doctor Wong's diminutive factotum, who had changed his black-silk uniform for a short jacket of bright red worn above a skirt of blue, both embroidered in large circles of lotus flowers around centers of conventional good-fortune designs. The meal consisted of a clear soup in which boiled chestnuts and dice of apple floated, followed by stewed shellfish and mushrooms, steamed shark fin served with ham and crabmeat, roast duck stuffed with young pine needles, preserved pomegranates and plums, finally small cups of rice wine. Throughout the courses our cups of steaming, fragrant jasmine tea were never allowed to be more than half empty.

"A question, *mon ami*," de Grandin asked as he raised his thrice-replenished cup of rice wine; "what was it Mademoiselle Dearborn said when first the change came on her? It sounded like—"

"It was the anagram of '*Oom mani padme — empad inam moo.*'" Doctor Wong's words were crisp and brittle, without a trace of accent. "To say it in a Buddhist's presence is gratuitous sacrilege, much like repeating a Christian prayer backward, as the witches of the Middle Ages were supposed to do when meeting for their sabbats. It is the *bong* or sign manual of certain heretical Buddhist sects, notably those who have blended the *Bon-Pal*, or ancient devil-worship of Tibet, with Buddhist teachings."

"And what was it you said to her?" I asked.

Doctor Wong broke the porcelain stopper from a teapot-shaped container of *n'gapi* and decanted a double-thimbleful of the potent, amber-colored liquid into his cup before he answered. "Buddhism, Doctor Trowbridge, is like every other old religion. It far outdates Christianity, you know, and for that reason has had just that many more centuries in which to acquire incrustations of heresy. Like Christianity and Mohammedanism, it has been preached around the world, and its convents number millions. But the old gods die hard. Indeed, I think it might be said they never truly die; they merely change their names. Exactly as one may see survivals of the deities of ancient Rome none too thickly veiled in the pantheon of Christian saints, or discern strong vestiges of Gallic Druidism in the pow-wows and Hex

practises of the Pennsylvania yokels, so the informed observer has no difficulty in seeing the ill-favored visages of the savage elder gods peering through the fabric of many heretical Buddhist sects. Some of these are harmless, as the Maryology of certain sects of Christians is. Some are extremely mischievous, as was the grafting of demonolatriy on mediæval Christianity, with witchcraft persecutions, heresy huntings and other bloody consequences.”

He lit an amber-scented cigarette, almost as long and thick as a cigar, and blew a cloud of fragrant smoke toward the red-and-gold ceiling, looking quizzically at me through the drifting wreaths. “You know the Khmers?”

“Never heard of them,” I confessed.

His thin lips drew back in a smile, and little wrinkles formed against the ruddy-yellow skin stretched tight across his temples, but his heavy-hooded eyes retained their look of brooding speculation. “I should have strongly doubted your veracity if you had answered otherwise,” he told me frankly.

“Long ago, so long that archaeologists have refused to place the time, there boiled up out of India one of those strange migrations which have marked Asia since the first tick on the clock of time. It was a people on the march; across the lowlands, up the foothills, over the dragon-toothed mountains they came, kings with their elephants, priests in their golden carts, warriors a-horseback, the common people trudging arm to arm with their goods and chattels and their household gods in bundles on their backs. They swarmed across broad rivers, splashed neck-deep through marshes, crashed through the darkness of the matted jungle land. And finally they came to rest in that part of lower Asia which we call Cambodia today. There they built a mighty nation. They raised great cities in the jungle waste — not only Angkor Thom, their capital, which had a population of a million and a half — but other towns of brick, and stone, stretching clear across the Cambodian peninsula. Brahmanism was their state religion, and the temples which they built to Siva the Destroyer are the puzzle and despair of modern archaeologists. Later — sometime in the Fifth Century as the West reckons time — missionaries came preaching the religion of the Lord Gautama, and Buddhism became the chief faith in the land. But the old gods die hard, Doctor Trowbridge. While images of Buddha replaced the Siva idols in the temples the philosophy of Buddha did not replace Brahmanism in the people’s hearts, and the old religion mingled with and fouled the new system. In their sculpture they show the Lord Gautama seated side by side with the seven-headed cobra; some of their ornamental friezes show whole rows of Buddhas carrying a giant serpent. It was a degenerate and schismatic sect that flourished in the jungle.”

He paused and helped himself daintily to another stoup of

rice wine. Then:

“Two hundred years after Indian missionaries had preached the doctrines of the Buddha to the Khmers, other zealous *bonzes* penetrated far Tibet. The new faith took quick root, but it was like the seed that fell on stony ground in your Gospel parable. Pure Buddhism could not flourish into blossom in those devil-haunted uplands of the Himalayas. The thing which finally grew was a superstitious system which resembled Indian and Chinese Buddhism about as closely as the hierarchy of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church did the Twelve Apostles who followed your great teacher. With its crude admixture of the *Bon-Pal* of ancient Tibet and degenerate Buddhism, it is almost pure demonolatriy, and the outgrowth of it is that queer system known as Lamaism. Sacrilegiously — when everything is taken into account — the leading lamas please to call themselves Buddhas, and centuries ago the doctrine that the Buddha never dies, but is reincarnated in his priests and lamas from one generation to another, was announced.

“There is more than one ‘Living Buddha.’ Besides the Dalai Lama of Tibet there are several ‘living gods’ in outer Mongolia, all lineal descendants of the Lord Gautama through infant-reincarnation.”

“Infant-reincarnation?” I echoed, mystified.

“Exactly. As each successive Living Buddha falls into his final illness, subordinate lamas seek a fitting substitute in some infant born at the time the Living Buddha breathes his last, and into the body of the new-born child the soul of Buddha passes. So, according to tradition, it has been passed and repassed for countless generations.

“But there was among the ancient lamas a man who did not wish to have his soul incorporated in the new flesh of a whimpering infant; who did not want to start life with no recollection of his former incarnation, and this man, named ‘The Thunderbolt’ — *Dor-je-tshe-ring* in the Tibetan — decided to develop magic powers whereby he could pass consciously into the body of a living adult person, crowd out the other’s soul — or consciousness or personality, whichever term you choose — and continue living with the full retention of his faculties and in the vigor of young manhood. It came about as close to immortality as any earthly thing could, you see.”

“I should say so, if it could be worked.”

“It could, and has. There is ample testimony in the ancient records that he did it not once but many times. Nor was it merely poetry that named him Thunderbolt. When he was about to expire from one body, the records tell us, his soul was seen to issue from his lips in the form of a small ball of fire, and pass from his old body to the new one. The body of the person struck by this fiery ball at once collapsed, with every evidence of being struck by lightning. Sometimes it

would struggle, as if it had been seized with nervous spasms, but eventually these fits of resistance passed, and when they did, the stricken body spoke with Dor-je-tshe-ring's voice, acted as he had in his former fleshy habitation and, to a great degree, assumed his facial aspects.

"Tibet is superstition-ridden and the sorcerers and lamas can do things there no other country would permit, but it appears the Thunderbolt became unbearable even there; so with a thousand vengeful hillmen in pursuit, he fled down to the lowlands of Cambodia where, sometime in the period corresponding to the Western calendar's Eighth Century, he appeared in all his glory, having assumed the body of the reigning Buddhist dignitary as his own. Dor-je-tshe-ring was probably the foremost heretic of his day. He was among the earliest, if not the very first, to institute recital of *Oom mani padme* in reverse — offering conscious and intended insult to the Buddha by chanting *Empad inam moo* at Buddhist ceremonies.

"He ruled high-handedly in Angkor Thom for many years, and — this is believed by many historians — it was he who led them to oblivion. However that may be, the fact remains that the disappearance of the Khmers is one of the great mysteries of all time. There they were, a mighty nation with a high degree of culture, owners of proud cities, populous and powerful. Then one day, as abruptly and mysteriously as they came, they vanished. Their crowded cities were left empty as a tomb despoiled by grave-robbers, their market-places were deserted, their sanctuaries had no priests to serve them. Overnight, apparently, the Khmer Empire, the Khmer culture, the entire Khmer nation, disappeared. They did not die. Explorers have found no skeletal remains to evidence a plague or widespread massacre in their great, empty cities. They simply vanished, and the tiger and the lizard occupied their courts, the jungle flowed back to their streets and squares and palaces and temples."

"Quite so, but what's all this to do with Sylvia Dearborn?" I asked.

"Everything, by blue!" de Grandin answered quickly. "Tell him, *mon vieux* — tell him what you told me of the Khmer capital!"

Doctor Wong inclined his head. "Doctor de Grandin is correct," he nodded. "I think there is a strong connection. You recall Miss Dearborn's telling you about her vision of an ancient Oriental city? Her description closely parallels that of a countryman of mine, Tcheou-Ta-Quan, who was ambassador to Angkor Thom in the early Thirteenth Century."

Going to a lacquered bookcase he took down a slim volume bound in vellum, thumbed through its crackling parchment pages, and began to read:

"When the king of Angkor leaves his palace he moves with a troop of horsemen at the head of his column. After the guard of cavalry are standard-bearers with fluttering flags, and behind them march the music-makers. Next in the procession are hundreds of concubines and girls of the palace ... after them are other women of the palace carrying objects of gold and silver. Following them are the men-at-arms, the soldiers of the palace guard. In their wake come chariots and royal carriages all of gold and drawn by bulls. Behind these are the elephants in which ride nobles and ministers of the government. Each rides beneath a red umbrella.

"In carriages or golden chairs or thrones borne on the backs of elephants are the wives and favorite concubines of the king, and their parasols are golden.

"The king himself comes last, standing on an elephant and holding in his hand the sacred sword, while soldiers riding elephants or horses crowd closely by his side as he proceeds through the city.

"The similarity between Miss Dearborn's vision and Tcheou-Ta-Quan's description of a state procession in the Khmer capital is very close, and when it is remembered that the Living Buddha of Angkor occupied an ecclesiastical position analogous to that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, if not quite as exalted as that of mediæval Popes, the meaning of her vision is quite plain. In my mind there is no doubt that *through the eyes of Dor-je-tshe-ring* she watched a ceremonial procession in which the king and his retinue marched through Angkor Thom to do their Living Buddha honor. That accounts for her saying 'one part of me seemed to understand it, while the other didn't', and also for her feeling of a dual personality, as if she were man and woman in one body."

"You see?" de Grandin asked.

"I don't think—"

"Then in heaven's name, do not boast of it, my friend. Cannot you understand? How else could this American young lady, this girl who never in her life had been to Europe, much less to lower Asia, behold that ceremonial march of ghosts from a long-forgotten past? This never-sufficiently-to-be-deprecated old one has struck down Mademoiselle Dearborn with his 'thunderbolt' and has entered into her. He is forcing forth her mind, he is making her assume the features of his so vile monkey-face; he is leaving her a living body while he kills her soul!"

"But how could he come over here, and why should he assume a woman's body? I thought the Living Buddha always is a man—"

Doctor Wong smiled frostily. "'The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley,'" he quoted. "According to the ancient chronicles his soul in fire-ball form passed seven times about the earth with the speed of sound before it struck the body of his victim. We do not know where Dor-je-tshe-

ring's former body was when physical death took place, but we may allow for some deviation in his calculations. Instead of returning to China, or Manchukuo, or perhaps Korea or Siam, where his expiring body lay, his malignant spirit came to rest on that hotel rooftop in New Jersey. He may have been disconcerted by this happening, or, more probably, he intended to strike down the nearest masculine body to his place of rest, but through another error in his calculations, he struck Miss Dearborn's body instead. There seems to be a definite limit to his power. Once before he made an error; that time he entered the body of a cripple, and as he could not leave his earthly tenement till natural death ensued, he led the poor, unfortunate bit of deformed flesh a miserable dance until he literally wore it out. Then he was able to transfer his headquarters to a home more suited to his wishes."

"But certainly," de Grandin seconded. "Our learned friend knew all these things, and being a mathematician as well as a philosopher, he found that two and two made four when added. Accordingly he damn suspected that the finger of this execrable Dor-je-tshe-ring was in the pie up to the elbow, and when he heard the poor young woman reciting Buddhist invocations in reverse, he taxed the villain with his act of trespass, calling him by name. And what was it he said? '*Ki lao yeh hsieh ti to lo*, — the honorable gentleman has my thanks,' by dammit. The sixty-times-accursed scoundrel not only admitted his so vile identity, he thanked our friend for recognizing him!"

My senses whirled from their wild talk no less than from the unfamiliar rice wine. "If what you say is true," I asked, "how are we to call back Sylvia's wandering spirit and expel this other from her?"

"That is for Doctor Wong to say," de Grandin answered.

"That is for me to try," the Oriental amended. "I will do the best I can. Whether I succeed or fail is for whatever gods may be to say. If you have completed luncheon, we can begin to make our preparations, gentlemen."

Wong's apparatus was assembled quickly. At his sharply-spoken order the servant brought a slab of lucent, polished jade from one of the tall lacquered cabinets and laid it on the long refectory table. It must have been of priceless value, for it was at least a foot in length by a full eight inches wide, and certainly not less than one inch thick. Going to a locked steel chest Wong took a tiny phial of bright ruby glass, spilled a single drop of amber fluid from it on the slab of jade and began to polish it with a wad of gleaming yellow silk. As he rubbed the oil across the jade slab's gleaming face there crept through the room a perfume of an almost nameless sweetness, so rich and heady that my senses fairly reeled with it. For perhaps five minutes he worked silently, then,

apparently satisfied, laid his silken buffer by and wrapped the jade block in a bolt of violet tissue.

In a tall, glass-fronted case stood a row of ancient bottles, fragile objects of exquisite delicacy, flat-bodied, small-mouthed, each with a tiny spoon attached to its stopper. One of shadowed malachite, one of glowing amber, one of richly-gleaming coral he lifted from their shelves, and from each he scooped a minute portion of fine powder, stirred them carefully with a thin amber rod, then dusted them into a phial of gray agate and closed the bottle-neck with a rock crystal plug.

Finally, while the servant brought a Buddhist prayer wheel with disk of polished silver and uprights of age-black poplar wood, he took two tall, thick candles of blue wax set in crystal standards, wrapped them in a length of silken tissue, drew a censer of antique red gold from its case of cinnabar and ivory, and nodded to us.

"If you are quite ready, let us go," he suggested courteously.

"Has she rested quietly, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin asked the more feminine-looking of the amazonian nurses when we arrived at Sylvia's room.

"Yes, sir, mostly. Once or twice she's been delirious, muttering and groaning, but she really hasn't given us much trouble."

"Thank you," he responded with a bow. "Now if you and your companion will await us in the hall, we shall begin our treatment. Come quickly if we call, but on no account come in the room or permit anyone else to enter till we give the word."

They made their preparations quickly. Sylvia's bed was moved until her head lay to the west and her feet east, that she might receive the natural magnetic currents of the earth. They stripped her green pajamas off, anointed her forehead, breasts, hands and feet with some pungently sweet-smelling oil, then crossed her hands upon her bosom, the right one uppermost, and bound her wrists together with a length of purple silk, that she might not change her posture. Her slender ankles were then crossed as they had crossed her wrists, and bound firmly with a red-silk sash. Beneath her head they put a pillow of bright-yellow silk embroidered with a swastika design in black. At one side of the bed they set the jade slab upright, and across from it they stood the dark-blue candles with the silver prayer wheel behind them. Doctor Wong filled the golden censer from the agate bottle, snapped a very modern cigarette-lighter into flame, lit the candles and set the incense glowing.

The scented smoke filled the room as wine may fill a bottle, penetrating every cranny, every crevice, every nook, sinking deep into the rugs and draperies, billowing and

rolling back from walls and ceiling. It was curiously and pungently sweet, yet lacked the heavy, cloying fragrance of the usual incense.

They had drawn the blinds and pulled the curtains to, and the only light within the chamber came from the two tall candles which burned straight-flamed in the unwavering air, sending their yellow rays to beat upon the mirror-lustered surface of the slab of jade.

De Grandin put his hand upon the prayer wheel and at a word from Wong began to spin its disk. Astonishingly, the polished silver of the whirling disk caught up the candle rays, focused them as a lens will focus sunlight, and shot them back in a single sword-straight ray against the slab of glowing jade. Queerly, too, although he did not move the wheel's base, the beam of light moved up and down and crosswise on the jade mirror; then, as though it were a liquid stream, it seemed to ebb and flow as moonlight spreads on gently-running water.

Doctor Wong was chanting in a low, monotonous voice, long, singsong words which rose and fell and seemed to slip and glide into one another until his canticle was more like a continuous flow of sound than words and sentences and phrases.

The nude girl on the bed stirred restlessly. She sought to take her hands down from her bosom, to uncross her feet, but the bandages prevented, and she lapsed back in what seemed a quiet sleep.

The long-drawn, uninflected chant proceeded, and the incense thickened in the room until I felt that I was being smothered. Where the prayer wheel whirled there came a low, monotonous humming, something like the droning hum made by an electric fan, but more penetrating, more insistent. It seemed to come from earth and air and sky, from the walls themselves, and to fill the atmosphere to overflowing with a spate of quivering sound that tore the nerves to tatters, shattering all inhibitions and dredging up dark memories and hates from the murk of the subconscious mind. I felt that I was going mad, that in another instant I should scream and tear my garments, or fall driveling and mouthing to the floor, when the sudden change in Sylvia's face caught and centered my attention.

Something alien had flowed into her features. Atop the perfect, cream-white body lying bound upon the bed was another face, an old face, a wicked face, a face with Mongoloid features steeped and sodden in foul malice.

A whining child-moan trickled from the thickening lips; then with a scream of fear surcharged with hatred she sat up struggling on the bed, tearing at the bonds that held her wrists, fighting like a thing possessed against the bandages that held her long, slim feet crossed on each other. But the silken fetters held — they had been tied with seven knots

and sealed with red wax stamped with the ideograph of Lord Gautama!

And the low, monotonous chant went on, the incense foamed and frothed and billowed through the room, the gleaming candlelight pulsed throbbingly against the jade reflector, the silver wheel whirled on, giving off its nerve-destroying murmur.

"*Grand Dieu!*" I heard de Grandin's whisper rasping through the whirring of the wheel. "Observe her — look, Friend Trowbridge, he comes; he is emerging!"

Wearied by her futile struggles, Sylvia had fallen back upon the bed, and as her head sank flaccidly upon the black-embroidered yellow pillow, from her mouth, squared in a scream, there came a flow of luminance. Yet it was not merely light, it was a shining thing of ponderable substance, swelling as it reached the air till it hung above her face like a pear-shaped phosphorescent bubble joined to her by a single gossamer thread of fiery brilliance.

Idiotically — like a nervous woman tittering at a funeral — I giggled. More than anything else the dreadful tableau reminded me of a conjurer disgorging the collapsible property egg he has pretended to swallow.

The beam reflected from the swiftly whirling prayer wheel's silver disk cut athwart her face and, as if it had been a sharpened sword, clipped the ligature of luminance tethering the pyriform excrescence to her lips.

The brightly-glowing globe seemed to shrink in upon itself, to acquire added weight and solidarity, yet oddly to become more buoyant. For an instant it hovered in midair above her face, as though undecided which way it should float; then, suddenly, like an iron-filing drawn to a strong magnet, it dropped upon the light-beam slanting from the prayer wheel to the plinth of jade and slid along the lucent track like a brakeless motor car gone headlong down a hill.

The impact was terrific. The jade rang like a smitten gong, a dreadful clang of sound, a shrill, high, wailing note as though it — or the ball of luminosity — had cried out in mortal anguish, a note of tortured outcry that thinned and lengthened to a sickening scream of torment. It hung and quivered in the incense-saturated air for what seemed an eternity, until I could not say if I still heard it or if tortured ear-drums held it in remembrance, and would go on remembering it till madness wiped the recollection out.

The jade was shattered in a thousand slivered fragments and the light-globe was dissolved in vapor thin as cirrous clouds that race before the rushing storm-wind, and blended with the hovering brume of incense. But a foul odor, rank and sickening as the fetor from decaying flesh, spread through the room, blotting out the perfume of the incense, bringing tears to our eyes and retchings to our stomachs.

"*Barbe bleu*, he had the fragrance of the rotten fish, that

one!” exclaimed de Grandin as he raced across the room to fling the windows open and began to fan the air with a bath towel.

I looked at Sylvia. The invading presence had withdrawn and her lovely features were composed and calm. She lay there flaccidly, only the light flutter of her bosom telling us she was alive. I took her wrist between my thumb and forefinger. Her pulse was striking eighty clear-cut beats a minute. Normal. She was well.

They cut the silken bandages from wrists and ankles, drew her green pajamas on and tucked her in beneath the bedclothes. Then, while I went to order broth and brandy ready for her waking, Wong and de Grandin packed their apparatus in its soft silk swaddling clothes, swept up the bits of shattered jade and drew their chairs up to the bedside.

We sat beside her till the dawnlight blushed across the eastern sky and day, advancing, trod upon the heels of night.

With the coming of the day she wakened. She lay against the heaped-up pillows, warm, relaxed and faintly smiling. One arm was underneath her head and the attitude showed her lines of gracious femininity; charming, tenderly and softly curved. Against the whiteness of the pillows and the counterpane her copper hair and fresh-blown cheeks glowed like an apricot that ripens in the sun.

But when she sat up with a sudden start her lovely color drained away and violet semicircles showed beneath her eyes. The glint of waking laughter that had kindled in her face was stilled and we could see fear flooding in her glance as blood wells through a sodden bandage. She licked dry lips with a tongue that had gone stiff, and her hands fluttered to her mouth in the immemorial, unconscious gesture of a woman sick with mortal terror. “Oh” — she began, and we heard the hot breath press against her words, as if her laboring heart were forcing it against them — “I thought—”

“Do not attempt to do so, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin told her with firm gentleness. “You have been severely ill; this is no time for thought, unless you wish to think of getting well all soon, and of the one who comes tonight — *eh bien*, my little pigeon, have I not seen it in his eyes? But certainly! Drink this, if you please; then compose yourself to think of Monsieur Georges and the pretty compliments that he will whisper when he sees you lying here so beautiful — and filled to overflowing with returning strength. But certainly; yes, of course!”

We paused upon the Dearborn porch, weary with our vigil, but happy with the happiness of men who see their plans succeed. “How did you do it—” I began, but de Grandin cut my question off half uttered.

“Those things of Doctor Wong’s were ancient things — and good things,” he explained. “For more generations than the three of us have hairs upon our heads they have served the good of mankind — the sacred incense from the very tree beneath which Buddha sat in contemplation, the oil with which the Emperors of China were anointed, the clear, pellucid jade that casts back only good reflections, the candles made from wax of bees that drew their nectar in the very fields in which Gautama walked and preached, and last of all the prayer wheel that has recorded countless holy men’s devout petitions to the Lord of Good — call Him what you will, He is the same in every heart filled with the love of man, whatever name He bears.

“Against these things, and against the ancient formulæ our friend Wong chanted, the evil one was powerless. *Parbleu*, they drew him forth from her as one withdraws the fish of April from the brooklet with a hook!”

“But,” I ventured doubtfully, “is there a chance he may come back to plague—”

“I hardly think so,” Doctor Wong replied. “He smashed the sacred mirror of *pi yü* — jade, that is — but in breaking it he also broke himself. You smelled the stench? That was his evil spirit vanishing. For almost countless generations he had occupied the flesh, first in one body then another. Dissolution — putrefaction — was long in overtaking him, but at last it sought him out. No, Doctor Trowbridge, I think the world has seen the last of Dor-je-tshe-ring, ‘The Thunderbolt.’ He has struck down his last victim, he has sucked in his last—”

“*Morbleu*, I am reminded by your reference to the sucking in!” de Grandin interrupted as he glanced at the small watch strapped on his wrist.

We looked at him in wonder. “Of what are you reminded, little brother?” asked Doctor Wong.

“In fifteen little minutes they will open. If we hurry, we can be among the first!”

“The first? What is it that you want?”

“Three, four, perhaps half a dozen of those magnificent old-fashioned cocktails; those with the so lovely whisky in them. Come, let us hasten!”

Flames of Vengeance

WITH INTENTLY narrowed eyes, lips pursed in concentration, Jules de Grandin stood enveloped in a gayly flowered apron while he measured out the olive oil as an apothecary might decant a precious drug. In the casserole before him lay the lobster meat, the shredded bass, the oysters, the crab-meat and the eel. Across the stove from him Nora McGinnis, my household factotum and the finest cook in northern Jersey, gazed at him like a nun breathless with adoration.

“*Mon Dieu*,” he whispered reverently, “one little drop too much and he is ruined, a single drop too few and he is simply spoiled! Observe me, *ma petite*, see how I drop *l’essence de l’olive*—”

The door-bell’s clangor broke the silence like a raucous laugh occurring at a funeral service. Nora jumped a full six inches, the olive oil ran trickling from the cruet, splashing on the prepared sea-food in the sauce-pan. Small Frenchman and big Irishwoman exchanged a look of consternation, a look such as the Lord Chancellor might give the Lord Chief Justice if at the moment of anointment the Archbishop were to pour the ampulla’s entire contents on the unsuspecting head of Britain’s new-crowned king. The bouillabaisse was ruined!

“Bring him here!” bade Jules de Grandin in a choking voice. “Bring the vile miscreant here, and I shall cut his black heart out; I shall pull his so vile nose! I shall—”

“Indade an’ ye’ll not,” protested Nora. “’Tis meself as’ll take me hand off’n th’ side of ’is face—”

“I’d better leave you with your sorrow,” I broke in as I tiptoed toward the door. “It’s probably a patient, and I can’t afford to have you commit mayhem on my customers.”

“Doctor de Grandin?” asked the young man at the door. “I’ve a letter to you from—”

“Come into the study,” I invited. “Doctor de Grandin’s occupied right now, but he’ll see you in a minute.”

The visitor was tall and lean, not thin, but trained down to bone and muscle, and his face possessed that brownish tinge which tells of residence in the tropics. His big nose, high cheekbones and sandy hair, together with his smartly clipped mustache, would have labeled him a Briton, even had he lacked the careless nonchalance of dress and Oxford accent which completed his ensemble.

“Jolly good of Sergeant Costello to give me a chit to you,” he told de Grandin as the little Frenchman came into the study and eyed him with cold hatred. “I’m sure I don’t know where I could have looked for help if he’d not thought of

you.”

De Grandin’s frigid manner showed no sign of thawing. “What can I do for you, *Monsieur le Capitaine* — or is it *lieutenant*?” he asked.

The caller gave a start. “You know me?” he demanded.

“I have never had the pleasure of beholding you before,” the Frenchman answered. His tone implied he was not anxious to prolong the scrutiny.

“But you knew I was in the service?”

“Naturally. You are obviously English and a gentleman. You were at least eighteen in 1914. That assures one you were in the war. Your complexion shows you have resided in the tropics, which might mean either India or Africa, but you called the sergeant’s note a chit, which means you’ve spent some time in India. Now, if you will kindly state your business—” he paused with raised eyebrows.

“It’s a funny, mixed-up sort o’ thing,” the other answered. “You’re right in saying that I’ve been in India; I was out there almost twenty years. Chucked it up and went to farmin’; then a cousin died here in the province of New Jersey, leavin’ me a mass o’ rock and rubble and about two hundred thousand pounds, to boot.”

The look of long-enduring patience deepened on de Grandin’s features. “And what is one to do?” he rejoined wearily. “Help you find a buyer for the land? You will be going back to England with the cash, of course.”

The caller’s tanned complexion deepened with a flush, but he ignored the studied insult of the question. “No such luck. I’d not be takin’ up your time if things were simple as that. What I need is someone to help me duck the family curse until I can comply with the will’s terms. He was a queer blighter, this American cousin of mine. His great-grandfather came out to the provinces — the States, I should say — without so much as a pot to drink his beer from or a window he could toss it out of; cadet of the family, and all that, you know. He must have prospered, though, for when he burned to death he left half the bally county to his heirs at law, and provided in his will that whoever took the estate must live at least twelve months in the old mansion house. Sort o’ period of probation, you see. No member of the family can get a penny of the cash till he’s finished out his year of residence. I fancy the old duffer got the wind up at the last and was bound he’d show the heathens that their blighted curse was all a lot of silly rot.”

De Grandin’s air of cold hostility had been moderating

steadily. As the caller finished speaking he leant forward with a smile. "You have spoken of a family curse, *Monsieur*; just what is it, if you please?"

An embarrassed look came in the other's face. "Don't think that I'm an utter ass," he begged. "I know it sounds a bit thick when you put it into words, but — well, the thing *has* seemed to work, and I'd rather not take chances. All right for me, of course; but there's Avis and the little chap to think of.

"Old Albert Pemberton, my great-grandfather's brother and the founder of the family in America, left two sons, John and Albert, junior. They were willing enough to pass their year of residence, but neither of 'em finished it. John left two sons, and they died trying to live out the year at Foxcroft. So did their two sisters, and their husbands. The chap I take it from was the younger daughter's son, and not born on the property. There's never been a birth in the old manor house, though there have been twelve sudden deaths there; for every legatee attempting to observe the dictates of old Albert's will has died. Yet each generation has passed the estate down with the same proviso for a year's residence as condition precedent to inheritance. Seems as if they're all determined to defy the curse—"

"*Mille tourments*, this everlasting curse; what is this seven times accursèd curse of which you speak so glibly and tell us absolutely nothing?"

For answer Pemberton reached in his jacket and produced a locket. It was made of gold, slightly larger than an old-time watch, and set with rows of seed-pearls round the edge. Snapping it open, he disclosed two portraits painted with minute detail on ivory plaques. One was of a young man in a tightly-buttoned jacket of white cloth, high-collared, gilt-braided, with insignia of some military rank upon the shoulders. Upon his head he wore a military cap shaped something like the *képi* which the French wore in Algeria about the middle of the Nineteenth Century, hooded in a linen sheath which terminated in a neck-cloth trailing down between his shoulders. Despite the mustache and long sideburns the face was youthful; the man could not have been much more than three and twenty.

"That's Albert Pemberton," our visitor announced. "And that's his wife Maria, or, as she was originally known, Sarastai."

"*Parbleu!*"

"Quite so. Lovely, wasn't she?"

She was, indeed. Her hair, so black it seemed to have the blue lights of a cockerel's ruff within its depths, was smoothly parted in the middle and brought down each side her face across the small and low-set ears, framing an oleander-white forehead. Her wide-spaced, large, dark eyes and her full-lipped mouth were exquisite. Her nose was

small and straight, with fine-cut nostrils; her chin, inclined to pointedness, was cleft across the middle by a dimple. Brows of almost startling black curved in circumflexes over her fine eyes in the "flying gull" formation so much prized by beauty connoisseurs of the early eighteen hundreds. Pearl-set pendants dangled from her ear-lobes nearly to the creamy shoulders which her low-necked gown exposed. One hand was laid upon her bosom, and the fingers were so fine and tapering that they seemed almost transparent, and were tipped by narrow, pointed nails almost as red as strawberries. She was younger than her husband by some three or four years, and her youthful look was heightened by the half-afraid, half-pleading glance that lay in her dark eyes.

"*Que c'est belle; que c'est jeune!*" de Grandin breathed. "And it was through her—"

Our caller started forward in his chair. "Yes! How'd you guess it?"

I looked at them in wonder. That they understood each other perfectly was obvious, but what it was they were agreed on I could not imagine.

De Grandin chuckled as he noticed my bewilderment. "Tell him, *mon ami*," he bade the Englishman. "He cannot understand how one so lovely — *morbleu*, my friend," he turned to me, "I bet myself five francs you do not more than half suspect the lady's nationality!"

"Of course I do," I answered shortly. "She's English. Anyone can see that much. She was Mrs. Pemberton, and—"

"*Non, non*," he answered with a laugh, "that is the beauty of the tropics which we see upon her face. She was — correct me if I err, *Monsieur*" — he bowed to Pemberton — "she was an Indian lady, and, unless I miss my guess, a high-caste Hindoo, one of those in whom the blood of Alexander's conquering Greeks ran almost undefiled. *Nest-ce-pas?*"

"Correct!" our visitor agreed. "My great-great-uncle met her just before the Mutiny, in 1856. It was through her that he came here, and through her that the curse began, according to the family legend."

Lights were playing in de Grandin's eyes, little flashes like heat-lightning flickering in a summer sky, as he bent and tapped our caller on the knee with an imperative forefinger. "At the beginning, if you please, *Monsieur*," he bade. "Start at the beginning and relate the tale. It may help to guide us when we come to formulate our strategy. This Monsieur Albert Pemberton met his lady while he served with the East India Company in the days before the Sepoy Mutiny. How was it that he met her, and where did it occur?"

Pemberton smiled quizzically as he lighted the cigar the Frenchman proffered. "I have it from his journal," he replied. "They were great diarists, those old boys, and my uncle rated

a double first when it came to setting down the happenings of the day with photographic detail. In the fall of '56 he was scouting up Bithoor way with a detail of North Country *sowars* — mounted troops, you know — henna-bearded, swaggering followers of the Prophet who would cheerfully have slit every Hindoo throat between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. They made temporary camp for tiffin in a patch of wooded land, and the fires had just been lighted underneath the troopers' cook-pots when there came a sort of ominous murmur from the roadway which wound past the woodland toward the river and the burning-ghats beyond. Little flickers of the flame that was about to burst into a holocaust next year were already beginning to show, and my uncle thought it best to take no chances; so he sent a file of troopers with a *subadar* to see what it was all about. In ten or fifteen minutes they came back, swearing such oaths as only Afghan Mussulmans can use when speaking of despised Hindoos.

“‘Wah, it is a burning, Captain *Sahib*,’ the *subadar* reported. ‘The Infidels — may Allah make their faces black! — drag forth a widow to be burnt upon her husband’s funeral pyre.’

“Now the British Raj forbade suttee in 1829, and made those taking any part in it accessories to murder. Technically, therefore, my uncle’s duty was to stop the show, but he had but twenty *sowars* in his detail, and the Hindoos probably would number hundreds. He was, as you Americans say, in a decided spot. If he interfered with the religious rite, even though the law forbade it, he’d have a first-class riot on his hands, and probably lose half of his command, if the whole detail weren’t massacred. Besides, his orders were to scout and bring reports in to the Residency, and he’d not be able to perform his mission if he lost too many men, or was killed in putting down a riot. On the other hand, here was a crime in process of commission under his immediate observation, and his duty was to stop it, so—”

“*Morbleu*, one understands!” de Grandin chuckled. “He was, as one might say, between the devil and the ocean. What did he do, this amiable ancestor of yours, *Monsieur*? One moment, if you please—” he raised his hand to shut off Pemberton’s reply. “I make the wager with myself. I bet me twenty francs I know the answer to his conduct ere you tell it. *Bon*, the wager is recorded. Now, if you please, proceed.”

A boyish grin was on the Briton’s face as he replied: “It was a tight fix to be in, but I think the old boy used his head, at that. First of all, he bundled his dispatches in a packet and told a *sowar* off to take them to the Residency. It was no child’s-play to select a messenger, for every man in his command itched to sink a saber-blade in Hindoo flesh; so finally they compromised by drawing lots. They’re a bunch of fatalistic johnnies, those Mohammedans, and the chap

who drew the short straw said it was the will of Allah that he be denied the pleasure of engaging in the shindy, and rode away without another murmur. Then my uncle told the men to stand to arms while he left them with the *subadar* and took two others to go scouting with him.

“At the forest edge they saw the Hindoos coming; and it must have been a sight, according to his diary. They were raising merry hell with drums and cymbals and tom-toms, singing and wailing and shrieking as if their luncheon disagreed with them. In the van came Brahmin priests, all decked out in robes of state and marching like a squad of sergeants major on parade. Then came a crowd of *gurus* — they’re holy men, you know, and my uncle knew at once that these were specially holy; for whereas the average fakir shows enough bare hide to let you guess at his complexion, these fellows were so smeared with filth and ashes that you couldn’t tell if they were black or white, and you could smell ’em half a mile away if you happened to get down-wind of ’em. They were jumpin’ and contortin’ round a four-wheeled cart to which a span of bullocks had been harnessed, and in which stood a ten-foot image of the goddess Kali, who’s supposed to manifest the principles of love and death. If you’ve ever seen those idols you know what this one looked like — black as sin and smeared with goat’s blood, four arms branchin’ from its shoulders, tongue hangin’ out and all awash with betel-juice and henna. There’s a collar o’ skulls strung round its neck and a belt of human hands tied round its waist. Not an appetizin’ sight at any time, when it’s plastered thick with half-dried blood and rancid butter it’s enough to make a feller gag.

“Followin’ the Kali-cart was another crowd o’ Brahmins, all dressed up for a party, and in their midst they dragged — for she could scarcely walk — a girl as white as you or I.”

“A white woman, you say?” I interrupted.

“You ought to know, you’ve just looked at her picture,” answered Pemberton, raising the locket from his knee and holding out the sweet, pale face for my inspection. “That was my Aunt Maria — or Sarastai, as she was then.

“I suppose she must have looked a little different in her native dress, but I’ll wager she was no less beautiful. My uncle’s diary records that she was fairly loaded down with jewels. Everywhere a gem could find a resting-place had been devoted to her decoration. There was a diadem of pearls and rubies on her head; a ‘golden flower,’ or fan-like ornament of filigree in which small emeralds and seed-pearls were set, had been hung in her nose, and dropped so low across her lips that he could hardly see her mouth. Her ears and neck and shoulders and arms and wrists and ankles and every toe and finger bore some sort of jewel, and her gold-embroidered sari was sewn about the border with more gems, and even her white-muslin veil was edged with seed-

pearls.

“Two Brahmins held her elbows, half leading and half dragging her along, and her head swayed drunkenly, now forward on her breast, now falling to one shoulder or the other as she lurched and staggered on the road.

“Last of all there marched a company of men with simitars and pistols and a few long-barreled muskets. In their midst they bore a bier on which a corpse lay in full-dress regalia, pearl-embroidered turban, robe of woven silk and gold, waist-shawl set with diamonds. From the richness of the widow’s jewels and the magnificent accouterments the corpse displayed, as well as by the size of the escort, my uncle knew the dead man was of great importance in the neighborhood; certainly a wealthy landlord, probably an influential nobleman or even petty prince.”

“Poor child!” I murmured. “No wonder she was frightened to the point of fainting. To be burned alive—”

“It wasn’t terror, sir,” said Pemberton. “You see, to be *sati*, that is, to offer oneself as a voluntary sacrifice upon the funeral pyre, was considered not only the most pious act a widow could perform, it enhanced her husband’s standing in the future world. Indian women of that day — and even nowadays — had that drilled into them from infancy, but sometimes the flesh is weaker than the spirit. In Sarastai’s case her husband was an old man, so old that she had never been his wife in anything but name, and when he died she flinched at the decree that she must burn herself upon his funeral pyre. To have a widow backslide, especially the widow of such an influential man as he had been, would have cast dishonor on the family and brought undying scandal to the neighborhood; so they filled her up with opium and *gunjah*, put her best clothes on her and marched her to the burning-ghat half conscious and all but paralyzed with drugs—”

“Ah, yes, one comprehends completely,” broke in Jules de Grandin. “But your uncle, what of him? What did he then do?”

“You can’t use cavalry in wooded terrain, and the forest came down thick each side the road. Besides, my uncle had but two men with him, and to attempt a sortie would have meant sure death. Accordingly he waited till the procession filed past, then hurried back to his command and led them toward the burning-ghat. This lay in a depression by the river bank, so that the partly burned corpses could be conveniently thrown into the stream when cremation rites were finished. The Hindoos had a quarter-hour start, but that was just as well, as they took more time than that to make their preparations. The funeral pyre had been erected, and over it they poured a quantity of sandal-oil and melted butter. Paraffin was not so common in the Orient those days.

“When all had been prepared they took the dead man’s costly garments off and stripped the widow of her jewels and gorgeous sari, wrapping each of them in plain white cotton cloth like winding-sheets and pouring rancid butter over them. They laid the corpse upon the pyre and marched the widow seven times around it with a lighted torch held in her hand. Then they lifted her up to the pyre, for the poor kid still was only semi-conscious, made her squat cross-legged, and laid the dead man’s head upon her knees. A Brahmin gave the signal and the dead man’s eldest son ran forward with a torch to set the oil-soaked wood afire, when my uncle rode out from the woods and ordered them to halt. He spoke Hindustani fluently, and there was no mistaking what he said when he told them that the Raj had banned suttee and commanded them to take the widow down.

“The thing the blighters didn’t know was that nineteen Afghan cavalymen were waiting in the underbrush; praying as hard as pious men could pray that the Hindoos would refuse to heed my uncle’s orders.

“Allah heard their prayers, for the only answer that the Brahmins gave was a chorus of shrill curses and a barrage of stones and cow-dung. The dead man’s son ran forward to complete the rite, but before he could apply the torch my uncle drew his pistol and shot him very neatly through the head.

“Then all hell broke loose. The guard of honor brought their muskets into play and fired a volley, wounding several of the crowd and cutting branches from the trees behind my uncle. But when they drew their swords and rushed at him it was no laughing-matter, for there must have been two hundred of them, and those fellows are mean hands with the bare steel.

“‘Troop advance! Draw sabers! Trot, gallop, charge!’ When the natives heard my uncle’s order they halted momentarily, and it would have been a lot more healthy if they’d turned and run, for before they could say ‘knife’ the Afghans were among ’em, and the fat was in the fire.

“‘*Yah Allah, Allah—Allah!*’” cried the *subadar*, and his men gave tongue to the pack-cry that men of the North Country have used when hunting lowland Hindoos since the days when Moslem missionaries first converted Afghanistan.

“There were only nineteen of them, and my uncle, while the Hindoos must have totaled half a thousand, but” — the pride an honest man takes in his trade shone in his eyes as Pemberton grinned at us — “you don’t need more than twenty professional soldiers to scatter a mob of scum like that any more than you need even numbers when you set the beagles on a flock of rabbits!”

“*À merveille!*” de Grandin cried. “I knew that I should win my bet. Before you told us of your uncle’s actions you recall I made a wager with myself? *Bien*. I bet me that he would

not let that lot of monkey-faces commit murder. *Très bon.* Jules de Grandin, pay me what you owe!” Solemnly he extracted a dollar from his trouser pocket, passed it from his right hand to his left, and stowed it in his waistcoat. “And now — the curse?” he prompted.

“Quite so, the curse. They took Sarastai from the funeral pyre and carried her to safety at the station, but before they went a *guru* put a curse on all of them. None should die in bed, he swore. Moreover, none of them should ever take inheritance of land or goods till kinsman had shed kinsman’s blood upon the land to be inherited.

“And the maledictions seemed to work,” he ended gloomily. — My Uncle Albert married Sarastai shortly after he had rescued her, and though she was as beautiful as any English girl, he found that he was ostracized, and had to give up his commission. English folk were no more cordial when he brought his ‘tarbrush’ bride back home to Surrey. So he emigrated to the States, fought the full four years of your great Civil War, and founded what has since become one of the largest fortunes in New Jersey. Still, see the toll the thing has taken. Not one of Albert Pemberton’s descendants has long enjoyed the estate which he built, and death by fire has come to all his heirs. Looks as if I’m next in line.”

De Grandin looked at him with narrowed eyes. “Death by fire, *Monsieur?*”

“Quite. Foxcroft’s been burned down eight times, and every time it burned one or more of Albert Pemberton’s descendants died. The first fire killed old Albert and his wife; the second took his eldest son, and—”

“One would think rebuilding with materials impervious to fire would have occurred to them—”

“Ha!” Our visitor’s short laugh was far from mirthful. “It did, sir. In 1900 Robert Pemberton rebuilt Foxcroft of stone, with cement walls and floors. He was sitting in his libr’y alone at night when the curse took him. No fire was burning on the hearth, for it was early summer, but somehow the hearthrug got afire and the flames spread to the armchair where he dozed. They found him, burned almost to a crisp, next morning. Cyril Pemberton, from whom I take the estate, died in his motorcar three months ago. The thing caught fire just as he drove in the garage, and he fried like an eel before he could so much as turn the handle of the door.

“See here, Doctor de Grandin, you’ve just got to help me. When little Jim was born I resigned from the army so I could be with Avis and the kid. I bought a little farm in Hampshire and had settled down to be a country gentleman of sorts when Cyril died and news of this inheritance came. I sold the farm off at a loss to raise funds to come here. If I fail to meet the will’s provisions and complete the twelve months’ residence I’m ruined, utterly. You see the fix I’m in?”

“Completely,” Jules de Grandin nodded. “Is there any other of your family who could claim this estate?”

“H’m. Yes, there is. I’ve a distant cousin named John Ritter who might be next in line. We were at Harrow together. Jolly rotten chap he was, too. Sent down from Oxford when they caught him cheatin’ in a game o’ cards, fired out o’ the Indian Civil Administration for a lack of recognition of *meum et tuum* where other fellows’ wives were concerned. Now, if Avis and I don’t make good and live in this old rookery for a full twelve months, we forfeit our succession and the whole estate goes to this bounder. Not that he could make much use of it, but—”

“How so? Is he uninterested in money?”

“Oh, he’s interested enough, but he’s in jail.”

“*Hein?* In durance?”

“Quite. In a Bombay jail, doin’ a life stretch for killin’ an outraged husband in a brawl. Jolly lucky he was that the jury didn’t bring him in guilty of wilful murder, too.”

“One sees. And how long have you resided at Foxcroft?”

“Just six weeks, sir, and some dam queer things have taken place already.”

“By example—”

“Our first night there the bedroom furniture caught fire. My wife and I were sound asleep, dog-tired from gettin’ things in shape, and neither of us would have smelled the smoke until it was too late, but Laird, my Scottish terrier, was sleepin’ by the bed, and he raised such a row he woke us up. Queer thing about it, too. There was no fire laid in the room, and neither Avis nor I’d been smokin’, but the bedclothes caught fire, just the same, and we didn’t have a second’s spare time standin’ clear. Two days later Laird died. Some stinkin’ blighter poisoned him.

“The second week I was ridin’ out from the village with some supplies when something whizzed past my head, almost cuttin’ the tip o’ my nose off. When I dismounted for a look around I found a knife-blade almost buried in a tree beside the road.

“We’d stocked the place with poultry, so that we could have fresh eggs, and every bloomin’ chicken died. We can’t keep a fowl in the hen-house overnight.

“Not only that; we’ve heard the damn’dest noises round the house — things crashing through the underbrush, bangings at the doors and windows, and the most infernal laughter from the woods at dead of night. It’s got us nervy as a lot o’ cats, sir.

“My wife and I both want to stick it, as much from principle as for the money, but Annie, Avis’ old nurse, not to mention Appleby, my batman, are all for chuckin’ the whole business. They’re sure the curse is workin’.”

De Grandin eyed him thoughtfully. “Your case has interest, Monsieur Pemberton,” he said at last. “If it is

convenient, Doctor Trowbridge and I will come to Foxcroft tomorrow afternoon.”

We shook hands at the front door. “See you tomorrow afternoon,” I promised as our caller turned away, “if anything—”

Whir-r-r-rr! Something flashing silver-gray beneath the street lamp’s light came hurtling past my head, and a dull thud sounded as the missile struck the panel of the door.

“*Ha, scélérat, coquin, assassin!*” cried de Grandin, rushing out into the darkened street. “I have you!”

But he was mistaken. The sound of flying footsteps pounding down the street and vanishing around the corner was the sole clue to the mystery.

Breathing hard with rage as much as from exertion, he returned and wrenched the missile from my scarred front door. It was the blade of a cheap iron knife, such as may be bought at any ten-cent store, its point and edges ground to razor sharpness, its wooden helve removed and the blade-heel weighted with ten ounces of crude lead, roughly welded on.

“*Ah-ha!*” the little Frenchman murmured as he balanced the crude weapon in his palm. “*Ah-ha-ha!* One begins to understand. Tell me, *Monsieur*, was the other knife thrown at you like this one?”

“Yes, sir, just exactly!” gasped the Englishman.

“One sees, one comprehends; one understands. You may be out of India, my friend, but you are not away from it.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“Me, I have seen the knife-blade weighted in this manner for assassination, but only in one place.”

“Where?” asked Pemberton and I in chorus.

“In the interior of Burma. This weapon is as much like those used by *dakaitis* of Upper Burma as one pea is like another in the pod. Tell me, *Monsieur le Capitaine*, did you ever come to grips with them in India?”

“No, sir,” Pemberton replied. “All my service was in the South. I never got over into Burma.”

“And you never had a quarrel with Indian priests or fakirs?”

“Positive. Fact is, I always rather liked the beggars and got on with ’em first rate.”

“This adds the *moutarde piquante* to our dish. The coincidence of strange deaths you relate might be the workings of a fakir’s curse; this knife is wholly physical, and very deadly. It would seem we are attacked on two sides, by super-physical assailants operating through the thought-waves of that old one’s maledictions, and by some others who have reasons of their own for wishing you to be the center of attraction at a funeral. Good-night again, *Monsieur*, and a healthy journey home.”

Foxcroft lay among the mountains almost at the Pennsylvania border, and after consulting road maps we voted to go there by train. It was necessary to change cars at a small way station, and when the local finally came we found ourselves unable to get seats together. Fortunately for me there was a vacant place beside a window, and after stowing my duffle in the rack I settled down to read an interesting but not too plausible article on the use of tetraiodophenolphthalein in the diagnosis of diseases of the gall bladder.

Glancing up from my magazine once or twice while the baggage car was being filled, I noticed several young yokels white and black, lounging on the station platform, and wondered idly why two young Negroes failed to join the laughing group. Instead, they seemed intent or something down the track, finally rose from the luggage truck on which they lounged and walked slowly toward the train. Beneath the window where I sat they paused a moment, and I noticed they were thin almost to emaciation, with skins of muddy brown rather than the chocolate of the Negro full-blood. Their hair, too, was straight as wire, and their eyes slate-gray rather than the usual brown of Africans.

“Odd-looking chaps,” I mused as I resumed my reading.

Like most trains used in strictly local service, ours was composed of the railway’s almost cast-off stock. Doors would not stay shut, windows would not open. Before we’d gone two miles the air within our coach was almost fetid. I rose and staggered up the swaying aisle to get a drink of water, only to find the tank was empty. After several unsuccessful efforts I succeeded in forcing back the door to the next coach and was inserting a cent in the cup-vending machine when a furious hissing forward told me someone had yanked the emergency cord. The train came to a bumping stop within its length, and I stumbled back to our coach to find de Grandin, a trainman and several passengers gathered in a knot about the seat I had just vacated.

“This is *hideux*, my friend!” the little Frenchman whispered. “Observe him, if you please.”

I looked, and turned sick at the sight. The big countryman who had shared the seat with me was slumped down on the green-plush covered bench, his throat so deeply gashed the head sagged horribly upon one shoulder. A spate of blood from a severed jugular smeared clothing, seat and floor. The window beside which I’d sat was smashed to slivers, and bits of broken glass lay all around.

“How—what—” I stammered, and for answer Jules de Grandin pointed to the floor. Midway in the aisle lay something that gleamed dully, the counterpart of the lead-weighted blade which had been thrown at Pemberton as he left my house the night before.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed; “if I hadn’t gone for

water—”

“*Mais oui*,” de Grandin interrupted. “For the first time in a long and useful life I find that I can say a word for water as a beverage. Undoubtedly that knife was meant for you, my friend.”

“But why?”

“Are you not a friend of Monsieur Pemberton’s?”

“Of course, but—”

“No buts, Friend Trowbridge. Consider. There were two of those assassins at your house last night; at least I judge so from the noise they made in flight. You stood directly in the light from the hall lamp when we bid our guest goodnight; they must have made a note of your appearance. Apparently we have been under surveillance since then, and it is highly probable they heard us say that we would visit him today. *Voilà*.”

We descended from the car and walked along the track. “*Regardez-vous!*” he ordered as we reached the window where I had been seated.

Upon the car-side was the crude outline of a grinning skull drawn in white crayon.

“Good Lord — those brown men at the station!” I jerked out. “They must have drawn this — it seemed to me they were not Negroes—”

“But no. But yes!” he nodded in agreement. “Indubitably they were not Africans, but Burmans. And very bad ones, too. This skull is the official signet of the goddess Kali, patron deity of *thags*, and the cult of *thaggee* makes its headquarters in Burma. It is useless to attempt to apprehend the thrower of the knife. By now he has had time to run half-way to Burma. But it behooves us to be careful how we step. We know not where to look for it, or when the blow will fall, but deadly peril walks with us from this time on. I do not think this task which we have undertaken is a very healthy one, my friend.”

Dressed in shabby Oxford bags and a khaki shooting-coat, Pemberton was waiting for us at the little railway station.

“Cheerio!” he greeted as we joined him. “All quiet on the jolly old Potomac, what?”

“Decidedly,” de Grandin answered, then told him of the tragedy.

“By Jove!” our host exclaimed; “I’m shot if I don’t feel like cutting the whole rotten business. Taking chances is all right for me, just part of the game, but to lug my wife into this hornets’ nest—” he cranked the antiquated flivver standing by the platform, and we drove in moody silence through the groves of black-boughed, whispering pines that edged the roadway.

British genius for getting order out of chaos was evident as we arrived at Foxcroft. The straggling lawn was neatly

trimmed, the raffish privet hedge was clipped, on the small grass plot were several wicker chairs with brightly colored sailcloth cushions. A line of lush green weeping willows formed a background for the weather-mellowed, ivy-covered house with its many gables, mullioned windows and projecting bays. As we chugged and wheezed between the tall posts of the gateless entranceway a young woman quit a gayly-colored canvas hammock and walked toward us, waving cheerful greeting.

“Don’t say anything about what happened on the train, please,” begged Pemberton as he brought the coughing motor to a halt.

Though definitely brunette, Avis Pemberton was just as definitely British. She had wide-spaced, slightly slanting hazel eyes, straight, dark hair smoothly parted in the middle and drawn low across her ears, a broad, white forehead, a small straight nose set above a full-lipped rather wide and humorous mouth, and a small and pointed chin marked with the faint suspicion of a cleft. When she smiled, two dimples showed low in her cheeks, making a merrily incongruous combination with her exotic eyes. She was dressed in a twin sweater combination, a kilted skirt of Harris tweed, Shetland socks and a pair of Scotch grain brogues which, clumsy as they were, could not disguise the slimness of her feet. Every line of her was long, fine cut, and British as a breath of lavender.

“Hullo-hullo, old thing,” her husband greeted. “Anything untoward occur while the good old bread-winner was off?”

“Nothing, Lord and Master,” she answered smilingly as she acknowledged his quick introductions, but her hazel eyes were wide and thoughtful as the little Frenchman raised her fingers to his lips at presentation, and I thought I saw her cast a frightened glance across her shoulder as her husband turned to help us drag our duffle from the car.

Dinner was a rite at Foxcroft, as dinner always is with Britons. A flat bouquet of roses graced the table, four tall candles flickered in tall silver standards; the soup was cool and under-seasoned, the joint of mutton tough and underdone, the burgundy a little sour, the apple tart a sadly soggy thing which might have made a billy-goat have nightmares. But Pemberton looked spick and span in dinner clothes and his wife was a misty vision in rose lace. Appleby, the “bat man” who served Pemberton as servant through three army terms and quit the service to accompany him in civil life, served the meal with faultless technique and brought us something he called coffee when the meal was over and we congregated on the lawn beneath a spreading poplar tree. De Grandin’s air of gloom grew deeper by the minute. When the servant tendered him a Sèvres cup filled with the off-brown, faintly steaming mixture, I thought he would assault him. Instead, he managed something like a

smile as he turned to our hostess.

“I have heard Monsieur Pemberton speak of your son, *Madame*; is he with you in America?” he asked.

“Oh, dear, no; he’s with my father at Lerwick-on-Tyne. You see, we didn’t know just what conditions here might be, and thought that he’d be safer at the vicarage.”

“Your father is a churchman, then?”

“Very much so. It was not till after we had Little Jim that he managed to forgive me; even now I’m not quite sure that he regards me as a proper person to have custody of a small boy.”

“*Madame*, I am confused. How is it you say—”

The girl laughed merrily. “Father’s terribly low church and mid-Victorian. He classes foreigners and Anglo-Catholics, heathens, actors and Theosophists together. When I joined a troupe of unit dancers at the Palace he said public prayers for me; when I went out to the colonies to dance he disowned me as a vagabond. I met Big Jim while dancing in Bombay, and when I wrote I’d married him the only answer Father sent was a note congratulating me on having found an officer and gentleman to make an honest woman of me. I almost died when Little Jim was born, and the doctors said I could not stand the Indian climate, so Big Jim gave up his commission and we all went back to England. Father wouldn’t see us for almost a year, but when we finally took our baby to him for baptism he capitulated utterly. He’s really an old dear, when you penetrate his shell, but if he ever saw me do an Indian dance—”

“You’d have to start from scratch again, old thing,” her husband chuckled as he lit his pipe.

“She used to sneak off every chance she got and take instructions from the native dancers. Got so perfect in the technique that if she’d been a little darker-skinned she could have passed in any temple as a *deva-dasi* — by Jove, I say!” He looked at her as though he saw her for the first time.

“What is it, jim?”

“I say, you know, I never noticed it before, but there’s a look about you like Sarastai. Fine and beautiful, and all that sort of—”

“Oh, Jim darling, stop it! Anyone would think — what’s that?”

“’elp, ’elp, somebody — ’elp!” the shriek came from the house behind us, each quavering syllable raw-edged with terror.

We rushed around the angle of the building, through the neatly planted kitchen garden and up the three low steps that reached the kitchen door.

“What is it — who is here?” cried de Grandin as we paused upon the big room’s threshold.

In the corner farthest from the door crouched an aged

woman, or perhaps I should have said a creature with a woman’s body, but a face like nothing human. Seasoned and lined with countless wrinkles, yellowed teeth bared in a senseless grin, she squatted by an open casement, elbows stiffly bent, hands hanging loosely, as a begging terrier might hold its paws, and mouthed and gibbered at us as we stared.

“Good God!” our host ejaculated. “Annie—”

“Annie! Oh, my poor dear Annie!” cried our hostess as she rushed across the lamp-lit kitchen and threw her arms around the human caricature crouching in the angle of the wall. “What’s wrong with her?” she called across her shoulder as she hugged the mouthing crone against her bosom. “What’s — O God, she’s mad!”

The woman cringed away from the encircling arms. “You won’t ’urt ole Annie, will ’ee?” she whimpered. “You won’t let the black man get ’er? See” — she bared a skinny forearm — “’e ’urt me! ’e ’urt me with a shiny thing!”

De Grandin drew his breath in sharply as he examined the tiny wound which showed against the woman’s wrinkled skin. “Up to the elbow, *mes amis*,” he told us solemnly. “We have stepped in it up to the elbow. Me, I know this mark. But yes, I have seen him before. The devotees of Kali sometimes shoot a serum in a victim’s arm with such results. I know not what this serum is — and probably no white man does — but the Indian police know it. ‘Whom the gods destroy they first make mad’ is no idle proverb with the *thags* of Burma. *Non*. There is no antidote for it. This poor one will be gone by morning. Meantime” — he put his hands beneath the woman’s arms and raised her — “she might as well die in bed in Christian fashion. Will you lead us to her room, Friend Pemberton?”

De Grandin on one side, I on the other, we half led, half carried the chuckling, weeping crone along the passageway. A gust of wind swung the long casement open and I crossed to close it. From the night outside where thickly growing rhododendron shut the moonlight out there came a laugh like that the fiends of hell might give at the arrival of a new consignment of lost souls. “*Ha-ha!—ha-ha-ha!—ha-ha!*”

“*Sacré nom*, I’ll make you laugh upon the other side of your misshapen face!” de Grandin cried, dropping the old woman’s arm and rushing to the window where he leant across the sill and poured the contents of his automatic pistol at the shadows whence the ghostly laughter came.

A crash of twigs and the flapping-back of displaced branches answered, and from the further distance came an echo of the wild, malignant cachinnation: “*Ha-ha!—ha-ha-ha!—ha-ha!*”

“And now, my friends, it is for us to formulate our strategy,” de Grandin told us as we finished breakfast. “From the things which we have seen and heard I’d say we are

beset by human and subhuman agencies; possibly working independently, more probably in concert. First of all I must go to the village to make some purchases and notify the coroner of your late lamented servant's death. I shall return, but" — he cast the phantom of a wink at me — "not for luncheon."

He was back a little after noon with a large, impressive bundle which clanked mysteriously each time he shifted it. When the papers were removed he showed a set of heavy padlocks, each complete with hasp and staple. Together we went round the big house, fixing locks at doors and windows, testing fastenings repeatedly; finally, when our task was done, repairing to the lawn where Appleby awaited us with a teacart-load of toasted muffins, strawberry preserve and steaming oolong.

"What was in that old beer bottle that you stood beside the bed?" I asked. "It looked like ordinary water."

"Water, yes," he answered with a grin, "but not ordinary, I assure you. I have the — what you call him? — hunch? — my friend. Tonight, perhaps tomorrow, we shall have use for what I brought out from the village."

"But what—"

"Hullo, there, ready for a spot of tea?" called Pemberton. "I'm famished, and the little woman's just about to haul her colors down."

"You are distrait, *Madame*?" de Grandin asked, dropping into a willow chair and casting a suspicious glance upon the tray of muffins Appleby extended.

"Indeed, I am. I've been feeling devils all day long." She smiled at him a little wearily above her teacup rim. "Something's seemed to boil up in me — it's the queerest thing, but I've had an urge to dance, an almost irresistible impulse to put an Indian costume on and do the *Bramara* — the Bee-dance. I know it's dreadful to feel so, with poor old Annie's body lying by the wall and this menace hanging over us, but something seems to urge me almost past resistance to put my costume on and dance—"

"*Tiens, Madame*, one comprehends," he smiled agreement. "I, too, have felt these so queer urges. *Regardez, s'il vous plaît*: We are beset by mental stress, we look about us for escape and there seems none; then suddenly from somewhere comes an urge unbidden. Perhaps it is to take a drink of tea; maybe we feel impelled to walk out in the rain; quite possibly the urge comes to sit down and strum at the piano, or, as in your case, to dance. Reason is a makeshift thing, at best. We have used it but a scant half-million years; our instincts reach back to the days when we crawled in primeval ooze. Trust instinct, *Madame*. Something boils within you, you declare? *Très bien*. It is your ego seeking liberation. Permit the boiling to continue; then, when the effete matter rises to the top, we skim him off" — with his

hand he made a gesture as of scooping something up — "and throw him out. *Voilà*. We have got rid of that which worries us!"

"You think I should give way to it?"

"But certainly, of course; why not? This evening after dinner, if you still have the urge to dance, we shall delight to watch you and applaud your art."

Tea finished, Appleby, de Grandin and I set out on a reconnaissance. We walked across the grass plot to the copse of evergreens from which the weird laughter came the night before and searched the ground on hands and knees. Our search was fruitless, for pine needles lay so thick upon the ground that nothing like a footprint could be found.

Behind the house stood barn and hen-coops, the latter empty, Pemberton's archaic flivver and two saddle-horses tenanting the former. "It's queer the place should be so much run down, considering the family's wealth," I murmured as we neared the stable.

"The former howner was a most hexcentric man, sir," Appleby supplied. "'e never seemed to care about the plyce, and didn't live 'ere hany more than necess'ry. Hi've 'eard 'e honly used hit as a sort o' — my Gawd, wot's that?" He pointed to a little mound of earth beside the barn foundation.

De Grandin took a step or two in the direction of the little hillock, then paused, his small nose wrinkled in disgust. "It has the perfume of corruption," he remarked.

"W'y, hit's pore hold Laird, the master's dawg, sir," Appleby returned excitedly. "Who's done this thing to 'im? Hi dug 'is gryve meself, sir, w'en we found 'im dead, hand Hi took partic'lar pynes to myke hit deep hand strong. 'eaped a thumpin' boulder hon 'im, sir, Hi did, but now—"

"One sees, and smells," de Grandin interrupted. "He has been resurrected, but not restored to life."

The cockney leant above the violated grave to push the earth back in. "Picked clean 'e is, sir," he reported. "'e couldn't be no cleaner hif a stinkin' buzzard 'ad been hat 'im."

The little Frenchman tweaked the needle points of his wheat-blond mustache between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "It is possible — quite probable," he murmured. "They have imported every other sort of devilment; why not this one?"

"What?" I demanded. "Who's imported what—"

"*Zut!* We have work to do, my friend. Do you begin here at this spot and walk in ever-widening circles. Eventually, unless I miss my guess, you will come upon the tracks of a large dog. When you have found them, call me, if you please."

I followed his instructions while he and Appleby walked toward the house.

In fifteen or twenty minutes I reached a patch of soft earth where pine needles did not lie too thick to cover tracks, and there, plain as the cannibals' mark on the sands of Crusoe's island, showed the paw-print of a giant dog.

"Hullo, de Grandin!" I began. "I've found—"

A crashing in the undergrowth near by cut short my hail, and I drew the pistol which de Grandin had insisted that I carry as the thing or person neared me.

The rhododendron branches parted as a pair of groping hands thrust forth, and Appleby came staggering out. "Th' black 'un, sir," he gasped in a hoarse voice. "Hi passed 'im 'fore I knew it, sir, then seen 'is turban shinin' hin th' leaves. I myde to shoot 'im, but 'e stuck me with a forked stick. Hi'm a-dyin', sir, a-dy—"

He dropped upon the grass, the fatal word half uttered, made one or two convulsive efforts to regain his feet, then slumped down on his face.

"De Grandin!" I called frenziedly. "I say, de Grandin—"

He was beside me almost as I finished calling, and together we cut the poor chap's trouser leg away, disclosing two small parallel pin-pricks in the calf of his left leg. A little spot of ecchymosis, like the bruise left by a blow, was round the wounds, and beyond it showed an area of swelled and reddened skin, almost like a scald. When de Grandin made a small incision with his knife in the bruised flesh, then pressed each side the wounds, the blood oozed thickly, almost like a semi-hardened gelatin.

"*C'est fini*," he pronounced as he rose and brushed his knees. "He did not have a chance, that poor one. This settles it."

"What settles what?"

"This, *parbleu!* If we needed further proof that we are menaced by a band of desperate *dakait*s we have it now. It is the mark and sign-manual of the criminal tribes of Burma. The man is dead of cobra venom — but these wounds were not made by a snake's fangs."

"But good heavens, man, if this keeps up there won't be one of us to tell the tale!" cried Pemberton as we completed ministering to Appleby's remains. "Twice they almost got me with their knives; they almost murdered Doctor Trowbridge; they've done for Annie and poor Appleby—"

"*Exactement*," de Grandin nodded. "But this will not keep up. Tonight, this very evening, we shall call their promontory — *non*, I mean their bluff. The coincidences of your kinsmen's deaths by fire, those might have been attributed to Hindoo curses; myself, I think they are; but these deliberate murders and attempts at murder are purely human doings. Your cousin, Monsieur Ritter—"

"Not an earthly!" Pemberton smiled grimly. "Did you ever see a British Indian jail? Not quite as easy to walk out of 'em

as it is from an American prison—"

"Notwithstanding which, *Monsieur*" — the little Frenchman smiled sarcastically — "this Monsieur Ritter is at large, and probably within a gun-shot of us now. When I was in the village this forenoon I cabled the police at Bombay. The answer came within three hours:

John Ritter, serving a life term, escaped four months ago. His whereabouts unknown.

"You see? His jail-break almost coincided with the passing of your kinsman in America. He knew about the family curse, undoubtedly, and determined to make profit by it. But he was practical, that one. *Mais oui*. He did not intend to wait the working of a curse which might be real or only fanciful. Not he, by blue! He bought the service of a crew of Burman cutthroats, and they came with all their bag of villain's tricks — their knives, their subtle poisons, even an hyena! That it was your servants and not you who met their deaths is not attributable to any kindness on his part, but merely to good fortune. Your turns will come, unless—"

"Unless we hook it while we have the chance!"

"Unless you do exactly as I say," de Grandin finished without notice of the interruption. "In five minutes it will be ten o'clock. I suggest we seek our rooms, but not to sleep. You, *Monsieur*, and you, *Madame*, will see that both your doors and windows are securely fastened. Meantime, Doctor Trowbridge and I will repair to our chamber and — *eh bien*, I think we shall see things!"

Despite de Grandin's admonition, I fell fast asleep. How long I'd slept I do not know, nor do I recall what wakened me. There was no perceptible sound, but suddenly I was sitting bolt-upright, staring fascinated at our window's shadowed oblong. "Lucky thing we put those locks on," I reassured myself; "almost anything might—"

The words died on my tongue, and a prickling sensation traced my spine. What it was I did not know, but every sense seemed warning me of dreadful danger.

"De Grandin!" I whispered hoarsely. "De Grandin—"

I reached across the bed to waken him. My hand encountered nothing but the blanket. I was in that tomb-black room with nothing but my fears for company.

Slowly, scarcely faster than the hand that marks the minutes on the clock, the window-sash swung back. The heavy lock we'd stapled on was gone or broken. I heard the creak of rusty hinges, caught the faint rasp of a bar against the outer sill, and my breath went hot and sulfurous in my throat as a shadow scarcely darker than the outside night obscured the casement.

It was like some giant dog — a mastiff or great Dane — but taller, heavier, with a mane of unkempt hair about its

neck. Pointed ears cocked forward, great eyes gleaming palely phosphorescent, it pressed against the slowly yielding window-frame. And now I caught the silhouette of its hog-snouted head against the window, saw its parted, sneering lips, smelled the retching stench that emanated from it, and went sick with horror. The thing was a hyena, a grave-robber, offal-eater, most loathsome of all animals.

Slowly, inch by cautious inch, it crept into the room, fangs bared in a snarl that held the horrible suggestion of a sneer. "Help, de Grandin — help!" I shrieked, leaping from the bed and dragging tangled blankets with me as a shield.

The hyena sprang. With a cry that was half growl, half obscene parody of a human chuckle, it launched itself through the intervening gloom, and next instant I was smothered underneath its weight as it worried savagely at the protecting blanket.

"*Sa-ha, Monsieur l'Hyène*, you seek a meal? Take this!" Close above me Jules de Grandin swung a heavy kukri knife as though it were a headsman's ax, striking through the wiry mane, driving deep into the brute's thick neck, almost decapitating it.

"Get up, my friend; arise," he ordered as he hauled me from beneath the bedclothes, already soaking with the foul beast's blood. "Me, I have squatted none too patiently behind the bed, waiting for the advent of that one. *Morbleu*, I thought that he would never come!"

"How'd you know about it—" I began, but he cut me short with a soft chuckle.

"The laughter in the bush that night, the small dog's ravished grave, finally the tracks you found today. They made the case complete. I made elaborate show of opening our window, and they must have found the others fastened; so they determined to send their pet before them to prepare the way. He was savage, that one, but so am I, by blue! Come, let us tell our host and hostess of our visitor."

The next day was a busy one. Sheriff's deputies and coroner's assistants came in almost ceaseless streams, questioning endlessly, making notes of everything, surveying the thicket where Appleby was killed and the kitchen where old Annie met her fate. At last the dreary routine ended, the mortician took away the bodies, and the Pembertons faced us solemn-eyed across the dinner table.

"I'm for chucking the whole rotten business," our host declared. "They've got two of us—"

"And we have one of them," supplied de Grandin. "Anon we shall have—"

"We're cutting out of here tomorrow," broke in Pemberton. "I'll go to selling cotton in the city, managing estates or clerking in a shop before I'll subject Avis to this peril one more day."

"*C'est l'enfantillage!*" declared de Grandin. "When success is almost in your hand you would retreat? *Fi donc, Monsieur!*"

"*Fi donc* or otherwise, we're going in the morning," Pemberton replied determinedly.

"Very well, let it be as you desire. Meantime, have you still the urge to dance, *Madame?*"

Avis Pemberton glanced up from her teacup with something like a guilty look. "More than ever," she returned so low that we could scarcely catch her words.

"*Très bien*. Since this will be our last night in the house, permit that we enjoy your artistry."

Her preparations were made quickly. We cleared a space in the big drawing-room, rolling back the rugs to bare the polished umber tiles of which the floor was made. Upon a chair she set a small hand-gramophone, needle ready poised, then hurried to her room to don her costume.

"*Écoutez, s'il vous plaît*," de Grandin begged, tiptoeing from the drawing-room, returning in a moment with the water-filled beer bottle which he had brought from the village, the kukri knife with which he killed the hyena, and a pair of automatic pistols. One of these he pressed on me, the other on our host. "Have watchfulness, my friends," he bade in a low whisper. "When the music for the dance commences it is likely to attract an uninvited audience. Should anyone appear at either window, I beg you to shoot first and make inquiries afterward."

"Hadn't we better close the blinds?" I asked. "Because if we're likely to be watched—"

"*Mais non*," he negatived. "See, there is no light here save that the central lamp casts down, and that will shine directly on *Madame*. We shall be in shadow, but anyone who seeks to peer in through the window will be visible against the moonlight. You comprehend?"

"I'd like to have a final go at 'em," our host replied. "Even if I got only one, it'd help to even things for Appleby and Annie."

"I quite agree," de Grandin nodded. "Now—*s-s-sh*; silence. *Madame* comes!"

The chiming clink of ankle bells announced her advent, and as she crossed the threshold with a slow, sensuous walk, hips rolling, feet flat to floor, one set directly before the other, I leant forward in amazement. Never had I thought that change of costume could so change a personality. Yet there it was. In tweeds and Shetlands Avis Pemberton was British as a sunrise over Surrey, or a Christmas pageant Columbine; this sleekly black-haired figure rippling past us with the grace of softly flowing water was a daughter of the gods, a temple *deva-dasi*, the mystery and allure and unfathomable riddle of the East incarnate. Her bodice was of saffron silk, sheer as net. Cut with short shoulder-sleeves and

rounded neck it terminated just below her small, firm breasts and was edged with imitation emeralds and small opals which kindled into witch-fires in the lamplight's glow. From breast to waist her slim, firm form was bare, slender as an adolescent boy's, yet full enough to keep her ribs from showing in white lines against the creamy skin. A smalt-blue cincture had been tightly bound about her slender waist, emphasizing gently swelling hips and supporting a full, many-pleated skirt of cinnabar-red silken gauze. Across her smoothly parted blue-black hair was thrown a sari of deep blue with silver edging, falling down across one shoulder and caught coquettishly within the curve of a bent elbow. Silver bracelets hung with little hawk-bells bound her wrists; heavy bands of hammered silver with a fringe of silver tassels that flowed rippling to the floor and almost hid her feet were ringed about each ankle. Between her startlingly black brows there burned the bright vermilion of a caste mark.

Pemberton pressed the lever of the gramophone and a flood of liquid music flowed into the room. Deep, plaintive chords came from the guitar, the viols wept and crooned by turns, and the drums beat out an amatory rhythm. She paused a moment in the swing-lamp's golden disk of light, feet close together, knees straight, arms raised above her head, wrists interlaced, the right hand facing left, the left turned to the right, and each pressed to the other, palm to palm and finger against finger. The music quickened and she moved her feet in a swift, shuffling step, setting ankle bells a-chime, swaying like a palm tree in the rising breeze. She took the folds of her full skirt between joined thumbs and forefingers, daintily, as one might take a pinch of snuff, spread the gleaming, many-pleated tissue out fanwise, and advanced with a slow, gliding step. Her head bent sidewise, now toward this sleek shoulder, now toward that; then slowly it sank back, her long eyes almost closed, like those of one who falls into a swoon of unsupportable delight; her red lips parted, fell apart as though they had gone flaccid with satiety after ecstasy. Then she dropped forward in a deep salaam, head bent submissively, both hands upraised with thumbs and forefingers together.

I was about to beat my hands together in applause when de Grandin's grip upon my elbow halted me. "*Les flammes, mon ami, regardez-vous—les flammes!*" he whispered.

Across the vitric umber tiles that made the floor, a line of flame was rising, flickering and dancing, wavering, flaunting, advancing steadily, and I could smell the spicy-sweet aroma of burnt sandalwood. "It is the flame from that old, cheated funeral pyre," he breathed. "The vengeance-flame that burned the old one to a crisp while he lay in a fireproof room; the flame that set this house afire eight times;

the flame of evil genius that pursues this family. See how easily I conquer it!"

With an agile leap he crossed the room, raised the bottle he had brought and spilled a splash of water on the crackling, leaping fire-tongues. It was as if a picture drawn in chalks were wiped away, or an image on a motion picture screen obliterated as the light behind the film dies; for everywhere the drops of water fell, the flames died into blackness with a sullen, scolding hiss. Back and forth across the line of fire he hurried, throwing water on the fluttering, dazzling flares till all were dead and cold.

"The window, *mes amis*, look to the window! Shoot if you see faces!" he ordered as he fought the dying fire.

Both Pemberton and I looked up as he called out, and I felt a sudden tightening in my throat as my eyes came level with the window. Framed in the panes were three faces, two malignant, brown and scowling, one a sun-burned white, but no less savage. The dark men I remembered instantly. It was they who stood beside the train the day the knife was thrown to kill the man who shared the seat with me. But the frowning, cursing white man was a stranger.

Even as I looked I saw one of the brown men draw his hand back and caught the glimmer of a poised knife blade. I raised my pistol and squeezed hard upon the trigger, but the mechanism jammed, and I realized the knifeman had me at his mercy.

But Pemberton's small weapon answered to his pressure, and the stream of bullets crashed against the glass, sent it shattering in fragments, and bored straight through the scowling countenances, making little sharp-edged pits in them like those a stream of sprinkled water makes when turned upon damp clay, except that where these little pockmarks showed there spread a smear of crimson.

There was something almost comic in the look of pained surprise the faces showed as the storm of bullets swept across them. Almost, it seemed to me, they voiced a protest at an unexpected trick; as though they'd come to witness an amusing spectacle, only to discover that the joke was turned on them, and they had no relish for the rôle of victim.

"Yes, it's Ritter, all right," Pemberton pronounced as we turned the bodies over in the light of an electric torch. "Of course, he was a filthy rotter and all that, but — hang it all, it's tough to know you have a kinsman's blood upon your hands, even if—"

"*Parbleu; tu parles, mon ami!* — you've said it!" cried de Grandin in delight. "The ancient curse has been fulfilled, the wicked one's condition met. A kinsman has shed kinsman's blood upon the property inherited!"

"Why—"

"'Why' be doubled-damned stewed in Satan's sauce-pan;

I tell you it is so!" He swung his arm in an all-comprehensive gesture. "We have at once disposed of everything, my friend. The human villains who would murder you and Madame Pemberton, the working of the ancient curse pronounced so many years ago — all are eliminated!"

He leant above the body of a prostrate Indian, searching through his jacket with careful fingers. "Ah-ha, behold him!" he commanded. "Here is the thing that killed your so unfortunate retainer." He held a length of bamboo stick fitted at the end with something like a tuning-fork to which a rubber bulb was fixed. "Careful!" he warned as I reached out to touch it. "The merest prick of those sharp points is certain death."

Pressing the queer instrument against the wall, he pointed to twin spots of viscid, yellow liquid sticking to the stones. "Cobric acid — concentrated essence of the cobra's venom," he explained. "One drives these points into his victim's body — the sharp steel penetrates through clothing where a snake's fangs might not pierce — and *pouf!* enough snake-poison goes into the poor one's veins to cause death in three minutes. *Tiens*, it is a clever little piece of devilment *n'est-ce-pas.*"

"D'ye think we got em all?" asked Pemberton.

"Indubitably. Had there been more, they would have been here. Consider: First they set their foul beast on us, believing he will kill some one of us, at least. He does not return, and they are puzzled. Could it be that we disposed of him? They do not know, but they are worried. Anon they hear the strains of Indian music in the house. This are not the way things had been planned by them. There should be no celebration here. They wonder more, and come to see what happens. They observe *Madame* concluding her so lovely dance; they also see us all unharmed, and are about to use their knives when you forestall them with your pistol."

"But there were two Burmese at the railway station the other day, yet someone threw the knife intended to kill Doctor Trowbridge," objected Pemberton. "That would indicate a third one in reserve—"

De Grandin touched the white man's sprawling body with the tip of his small shoe. "There was, my friend, and this is he," he answered shortly. "Your charming cousin, Monsieur Ritter. It was he who hid beside the tracks and hurled the knife when he beheld the mark of Kali. The Burmans knew friend Trowbridge; had it been one of them who lay in ambush he would not have wasted knife or energy in killing the wrong man, but Ritter had no other guide than the skull chalked on the car. *Tenez*, he threw the knife that killed the poor young man to death."

"How do you account for the fire that broke out just as Mrs. Pemberton had finished dancing?" I asked.

"There is no scientific explanation for it, at least no

explanation known to modern chemistry or physics. We must seek deeper — farther — for its reason. Those Hindoo *gurus*, they know things. They can cast a rope into the air and make it stand so rigidly that one may climb it. They take a little, tiny seed and place it in the earth, and there, before your doubting eyes, it grows and puts forth leaves and flowers. Me, I have seen them take a piece of ordinary wood — my walking-stick, *parbleu!* — make passes over it, and make it burst in flames. Now, if their ordinary showmen can do things like that, how much more able are their true adepts to bring forth fire at will, or on the happening of specific things? The rescue of the Hindoo girl Sarastai left the funeral pyre without a victim, and so the old priests placed a curse on her and hers, decreeing fire should take its toll of all her husband's family till kinsman had shed kinsman's blood. That was the fire that followed every generation of the Pembertons. This fire burned this house again, and yet again, burned one when he lay in safety in a fireproof room — even set a motorcar afire to kill the late proprietor of the estate.

"Tonight conditions were ideal. The sacred music of the temple sounded from the gramophone, Madame Avis danced in Hindoo costume; danced an old, old dance, perhaps the very dance Sarastai used to dance. Our thoughts were tuned to India — indeed, there is no doubt the urge which prompted Madame Pemberton to dance a Hindoo dance in Hindoo costume came directly from the thought-waves set in motion by those old priests in the days of long ago. The very stones of this old house are saturated in malignant thought-waves — thoughts of vengeance — and Madame Avis was caught up in them and forced along the pathway toward destruction. All was prepared, conditions were ideal, the victims waited ready for the flames. Only one thing that old priest forgot to foresee.

"Jolly interestin'," murmured Pemberton. "What was it he forgot?"

"That you would ask advice of Jules de Grandin!" my little friend grinned shamelessly. "There it was he missed his trick. I am very clever. I looked the situation over and saw we were confronted by both physical and ghostly menaces. For the men we have the sword, the pistol and the fist. For the ghostly enemy we need a subtler weapon.

"Accordingly, when I go to the village to obtain the locks for doors and windows, I also stop to visit with the *curé* of the little church. Fortunately, he is Irish, and I do not have to waste a day convincing him. '*Mon père,*' I say, 'we are confronted with the devil of a situation. A crew of monkey-faces who give worship to the wicked ones of India are menacing a Christian family. They will undoubtedly attempt to burn them up with fire — not ordinary fire, but fire they make by wicked, sinful, heathen incantations. Now, for ordinary fire we use the ordinary water; what should we

use to put out fire that comes from hell, or hell's assistants?"

"That old priest smiles at me. He is no fool. 'My son,' he say, 'long, long ago the fathers of the Church discovered that it is hot work to fight the devil with fire. Therefore they invent holy water. How much of it will you be needing for your work?'

"He was a good and hospitable man, that priest. He had no whisky in the house, but he had beer. So we made a lunch of beer and cheese and biscuit, and when we finish, we clean a bottle out and fill him to the neck with *eau bénite*.

"'Bonjour, mon fils,' the old priest say, 'and when you win your fight with Satan's henchmen, remember that our church could use a new baptismal font.' You will remember that, I trust, *Monsieur*, when you get your inheritance?"

"By George, I'll build a new church for him, if he wants it!" promised Pemberton.

The locomotive gave a long-drawn, mournful wail as the train drew near the station and the smiling porter hurried through the car collecting luggage. "Well, we're home again," I remarked as the train slid to a stop.

"Yes, *grâce à Dieu*, we have escaped," de Grandin answered piously.

"It did look pretty bad at times," I nodded. "Especially when that fellow at the window poised his knife, and those devilish flames began to flicker—"

"Ah bah," he interrupted scornfully. "Those things? *Pouf*, they were not to be considered! I speak of something far more hideous we have escaped. That dreadful English cooking, that cuisine of the savage. That roast of mutton, that hell-brew they call coffee, that abominable apple tart!

"Come, let us take the fastest cab and hasten home. There a decent drink awaits us, and tonight in hell's despite I shall complete construction of the perfect bouillabaisse!"

FEBRUARY

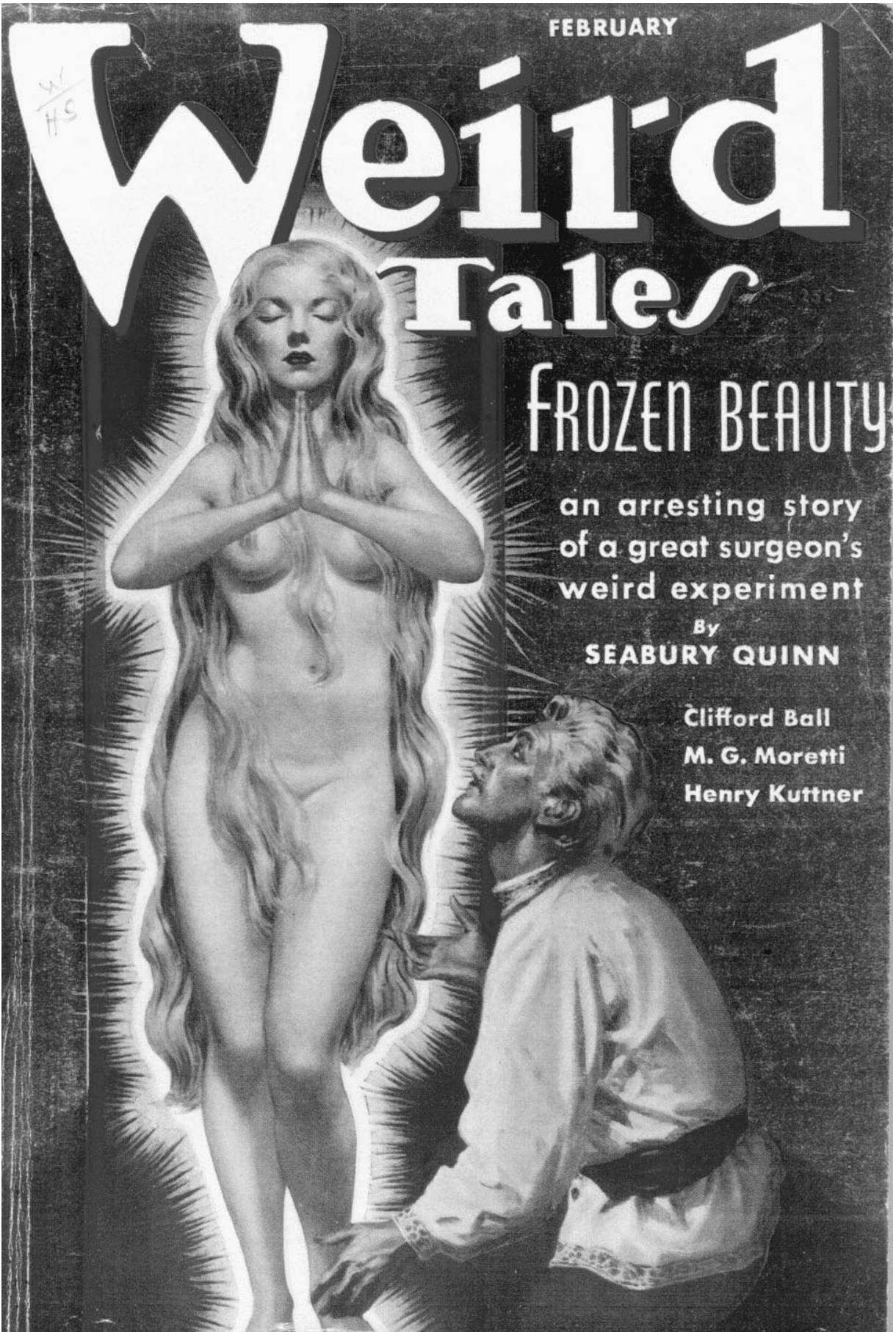
Weird Tales

FROZEN BEAUTY

an arresting story
of a great surgeon's
weird experiment

By
SEABURY QUINN

Clifford Ball
M. G. Moretti
Henry Kuttner



Frozen Beauty

THE HEAT had been intolerable all day, but now a rain was falling, a soft and cooling summer rain that spread a gleaming black veneer across the highway pavement and marked the traffic lamps with cross-shaped fuzzy glows of green and ruby. Falling on our faces as we drove home from the club with the roadster's canvas cover folded back it was cool and gracious, delicate and calm upon our brows as the light touch of a skillful nurse's fingers on a fever-patient's forehead, soothing nerves stretched taut by eighteen holes of golf played in a blistering sun.

My friend Jules de Grandin's satisfaction with himself was most annoying. He had ceased playing at the second hole, found a wicker rocker on the clubhouse porch and devoted the entire afternoon to devastation of gin swizzles.

"*Tiens,*" he chuckled, "you are droll, my friend, you English and Americans. You work like Turks and Tartars at your professional vocations, then rest by doing manual labor in the sun. Not I, by blue; I have the self-respect!"

He leant back on the cushions, turning up his forehead to the cooling rain and hummed a snatch of tune:

*"La vie est vaine,
Un peu d'amour—"*

With a strident screech of brakes I brought the roadster to a stop in time to keep from running down the man who stood before us in the headlights' glare, arm raised imperatively. "Good heavens, man," I rasped, "d'ye want to be run over? You almost—"

"You're a doctor?" he demanded in a sharp, thin voice, pointing to the Medical Society's green cross and gold caduceus on my radiator.

"Yes, but—"

"Please come at once, sir. It's the master, Doctor Pavlovitch. I—I think he's very ill, sir."

The ethics of the medical profession take no account of work-worn nerves, and with a sigh I headed toward the tall gate in the roadside hedge the fellow pointed out. "What seems to be the matter with the doctor?" I inquired as our guide hopped nimbly on the running-board after swinging back the driveway gate.

"I—I don't know, sir," he replied. "Some kind o' stroke, I think. Th' telephone went out of order just at dinner-time — lightning musta hit th' line when th' storm was blowin' up — an' I took th' station wagon to th' village for some things th' grocer hadn't sent. When I got back everythink

was dark an' couldn't seem to make th' lights work, but they flashed on all sudden-like, an there was Doctor Pavlovitch a-layin' in th' middle o' th' floor, with everythink all messed up in th' study, an' I couldn' seem to rouse him; so I tried to get th' village on th' phone, but it still won't work, and when I tried to start th' station wagon up I found that somethink had gone wrong with it; so I starts to walk down to th' village, an' just then you come down th' road, an' I seen th' little green cross on your car, so—"

"I'll have that darn thing taken off tomorrow," I assured myself; then, aloud, to stop the servant's endless chatter: "All right, we'll do everything we can, but we haven't any medicines or instruments; so maybe we shall have to send you for supplies."

"Yes, sir," he replied respectfully, and to my relief lapsed into momentary silence.

The big house Doctor Michail Pavlovitch had purchased two years previously and in which he lived in churlish solitude, attended only by his English houseman, sat back on a deep lawn thick-set with huge old trees, fenced against the highway by an eight-foot privet hedge and surrounded on the three remaining sides by tall brick walls topped with broken bottles set in mortar. As we circled up the driveway I could feel the eery atmosphere that hovered round the place. It was, I think, the lights which struck me queerly, or, to be more accurate, the absence of familiar lights in a place we knew to be inhabited. Blinds were drawn down tightly, with forbidding secrecy, at every window; yet between their bottoms and the sills were little lines of luminance which showed against the darkness like a line of gray-white eyeball glimpsed between the lowered eyelids of a corpse.

We hurried down the wide hall to a big room at the rear and paused upon the threshold as the glare of half a dozen strong, unshaded lamps stabbed at our eyes. Everything about the place was topsy-turvy. Drawers had been jerked from desks and literally turned out upon the floor, their contents scattered in fantastic heaps as though they had been stirred with a gigantic spoon. The davenport was pulled apart, its mattress tipped insanely sidewise; pillows were ripped open and gaped like dying things, their gasping mouths disgorging down and kapok. The whole room might have been a movie set at the conclusion of a slapstick farce, except for that which occupied the center of the floor.

In the midst of the fantastic jumble lay a man in dinner clothes, save for the jacket which, sleeves turned half out and

linings slit to tatters, was crumpled on a chair. He lay upon his back, his partly opened eyes fixed on the ceiling where a cluster of electric bulbs blazed white and hard as limelight. He was a big man with a big mustache curled in the fashion of the pre-war days, and what hair he had was touched with gray.

"Gawd, sir, he ain't moved since I left 'im!" the houseman whispered. "Is 'e paralyzed, d'ye think?"

"Completely," nodded Jules de Grandin. "He is very dead, my friend."

"Dead?"

"Like a herring, and unless I miss my guess, he died of murder."

"But there's no blood, no sign of any wound," I interrupted. "I don't believe there was a struggle, even. The place has been ransacked, but—"

"No wound, you say, *mon vieux*?" he broke in as he knelt beside the dead man's head. "*Regardez, s'il vous plaît.*" He raised the massive, almost hairless head, and pointed with a well-groomed finger to a gleaming silver stud protruding from the flesh. Plunged in the rather beefy neck a tiny silver-headed bodkin showed. Less than half an inch of haft protruded, for the little awl was driven deep into that fatal spot, the medulla oblongata, with deadly accuracy. Death had been instantaneous and bloodless.

"How—" I began, but he shut me off with an unpleasant laugh as he rose and brushed his knees.

"*Cherchez la femme,*" he murmured. "This is undoubtedly a woman's work, and the work of one who knew him quite well. All the evidence suggests it. A little, tiny bodkin driven into the brain; a woman's weapon. Probably she did it with her arms about his neck; a woman's finesse, that. Who she was and why she did it, and what she and her confederates looked for when they made a bears' den of this place is for the police to determine."

Turning to the servant he demanded: "This Doctor Pavlovitch, did he have callers in the afternoon?"

"No, sir, not as I knows of. He was a queer 'un, sir, though he was a proper gentleman. Never had no callers I remember, never used th' telephone while I was here. If anybody ever come to see 'im they done it while I was away."

"One sees. Did he ever mention fearing anyone, or suspecting that he might be robbed?"

"Him? Lor, sir, no! Six foot three in 'is stockin's, 'e was, an' could bend iron bars in 'is bare hands. I seen 'im do it more'n once. Had a regular harsenal o' guns an' things, too, 'e did, an' kept th' house locked like a jail. Didn't take no chances on a robbery, sir, but I wouldn't say he was afraid. He'd 'a been a nasty customer in a row; if anyone 'ad broken in he'd 'a give 'em what-for good an' proper, sir."

"U'm?" Going to the telephone the little Frenchman raised the instrument from its forked cradle and held it to his ear. "*Parbleu!*" he pressed the contact bar down with a triple rattle, then dropped the speaking-tube back in its rack. "Remain here, if you please," he bade the servant as he motioned me to follow. Outside, he whispered: "There is no dial tone discernible. The line is cut."

We circled round the house seeking the connection, and beside a chimney found the inlet. The wires had been neatly clipped, and the fresh-cut copper showed as bright against the severed insulation as a wound against dark flesh.

"What d'ye make of it?" I asked as he knelt on the wet grass and searched the ground for traces of the wire-cutters. "Think that chap inside knows more than he pretends?"

"Less, if possible," he said shortly. "Such stupidity as his could not be simulated. Besides, I know his type. Had he been implicated in a murder or a robbery he would have set as great a distance between him and the crime-scene as he could." With a shrug of resignation he straightened to his feet and brushed the leaf-mold from his trousers. "No tracks of any sort," he murmured. "The grass grows close against the house, and the rain has washed away what little tale the miscreants' footprints might have told. Let us go back. We must inform the police and the coroner."

"Want me to take the car and notify 'em?" I asked as we turned the corner of the house. "It's hardly safe to trust the servant out of sight before the officers have had a chance to question him, and you don't drive, so—"

The pressure of his fingers on my elbow silenced me, and we drew back in the shelter of the ivy-hung wall as the crunch of wheels came to us from the lower driveway.

"What the deuce?" I wondered as I glimpsed the vehicle between the rain-drenched trees. "What's an express van doing here this time o' night?"

"Let us make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible," he cautioned in a whisper. "It may be that they plan a ruse for entering the house, and—"

"But good heavens, man, they've already gone through it like termites through a log," I interjected.

"*Ah bah,* you overlook the patent possibilities, my friend. What do we really know? Only that Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered and his study ransacked. But why do people search a place? To find something they want, *n'est-ce-pas*? That much is obvious. Still, we do not know they found the thing they sought, or, if they found it, we cannot say that others do not also seek it. It must have been a thing of value to have caused them to do murder."

"You mean there may be two gangs hunting something Pavlovitch had hidden in his house?"

"It is quite possible. He was a Russian, and Russia is

synonymous with mystery today. The old *noblesse* have smuggled fortunes from the country, or have plans for getting out the treasures they could not take with them in flights; plots and counterplots, intrigue, plans for assassination or revenge are natural to a Russian as fleas are to a dog. I think it wholly possible that more than one conspiracy to deprive the amiable Pavlovitch of life and fortune has been in progress, and he would not have been a good insurance risk even if the ones who murdered him tonight had done their work less thoroughly."

The big green truck had drawn up at the steps and a man in express uniform hopped out., "Doctor Pavlovitch?" he asked when the houseman answered to his thunderous banging at the knocker.

"No-o, sir," gulped the servant, "the doctor isn't home just now—"

"Okay, pal. Will you sign for this consignment and give us a lift with it? It's marked urgent."

With grunts and exclamations of exertion, plus a liberal allowance of the sort of language prized by soldiers, stevedores and sailors, the great packing-case was finally wrestled up the steps and dropped unceremoniously in the hall. The express van turned down the drive, and we slipped from our concealment to find Pavlovitch's houseman gazing at the giant parcel ruefully.

"What'll I do with it now, sir?" he asked de Grandin. "I know th' doctor was expectin' somethink of th' sort, for he told me so hisself this mornin'; but 'e didn't tell me what it was, an' I don't know whether I should open it or leave it for th' officers."

De Grandin tweaked an end of waxed mustache between his thumb and forefinger as he regarded the great crate. It was more than six feet long, something more than three feet wide, and better than a yard in height.

"*Eh bien*," he answered, "I think the citizens of Troy were faced with the same problem. They forbore to open that which came to them, with most deplorable results. Let us not be guilty of the same mistake. Have you a crowbar handy?"

Whoever put that case together had intended it to stand rough usage, for the two-inch planks that formed it were secured with mortises and water-swollen dowels, so though the three of us attacked it furiously it was upward of an hour ere we forced the first board loose; and that proved only the beginning, for so strongly were the shooks attached to one another that our task was more like breaking through a solid log than ripping a joined box apart. Finally the last plank of the lid came off and revealed a packing of thick felt.

"*Que diable?*" snapped de Grandin as he struck his crowbar on the heavy wadding. "What is this?"

"What did you expect?" I queried as I mopped a

handkerchief across my face.

"A man, perhaps a pair of them, by blue!" he answered. "It would have made an ideal hiding-place. Equipped with inside fasteners, it could have been thrown open in the night, permitting those who occupied it to come forth and search the place at leisure."

"Humph, there's certainly room for a man or two in there," I nodded, prodding tentatively at the black felt wadding with my finger, "but how would he get air — I say!"

"What is it?" he demanded. "You have discovered something—"

"Feel this," I interrupted, "it seems to me it's—"

"*Parbleu*, but you have right!" he exclaimed as he laid his hand against the felt. "It is cool, at least ten degrees cooler than the atmosphere. Let us hasten to unearth the secret of this *sacré* chest, my friends, but let us also work with caution. It may contain a charge of liquid air."

"Liquid air?" I echoed as with the heavy shears the servant brought he started cutting at the layers of laminated felt.

"*Certainement*. Liquid air, my friend. Brought in sudden contact with warm atmosphere it would vaporize so quickly that the force of its expansion would be equal to a dynamite explosion. I have seen it—"

"But that's fantastic," I objected. "Who would choose such an elaborate—"

"Who would choose a woman's bodkin to dispatch the learned Doctor Pavlovitch?" he countered. "it would have been much simpler to have shot him; yet — *morbleu*, what have we here?"

The final layer of felt had been laid back, and before us gleamed a chest of polished dark red wood, oblong in shape, with slightly rounded top with chamfered edges and a group of Chinese ideographs incised upon it. I had seen a case like that but once before, but I recognized it instantly. A friend of mine had died while traveling in Mongolia, and when they shipped his body home ... "Why, it's a Chinese coffin!" I exclaimed.

"*Précisément, un cercueil de bois chinois*, but what in Satan's name does it do here? And behold, observe, my friend; it, too, is cold."

He was correct. The polished puncheon of Mongolian cedar was so cold that I could hardly bear to rest my hand upon it.

"I wonder what those characters stand for?" I mused. "If we could read them they might give some clue—"

"I do not think so," he replied. "I can make them out; they are the customary *hong* for Chinese coffins, and mean *cheung sang* — long life."

"'Long life!' — on a coffin lid?"

“But yes. *C’est drôle ça*,” he agreed. “It seems the heathen in his blindness has hopes of immortality, and does not decorate his tombs with skulls and cross-bones, or with pious, gloomy verses in the Christian manner. However” — he raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug — “we have still the puzzle of this so cold coffin to be solved. Let us be about it, but with caution.”

With more care than the average dentist shows when he explores a tooth, he bored a small hole in the cedar with an auger, pausing every now and then to test the temperature of the small bit against his hand. Some thirty seconds later he leaped back. “I have struck nothingness; the bit is through — stand clear!” he cautioned, and a gentle hissing followed like an echo of his warning as a plume-like jet of feathery remex geysered upward from the coffin lid.

“Carbon dioxide snow!” we chorused, and:

“*Tiens*, it seems we shall not listen to the angels’ songs immediately,” added Jules de Grandin with a laugh.

The casket followed usual Chinese patterns. Made from a single hollowed log with top and bottom joined by dowels, it was covered with successive coats of lacquer which made it seem an undivided whole, and it was not till we searched some time that we were able to discern the line between the lid and body. A series of small auger-holes was driven in the wood, and with these for starting points we had begun the arduous task of prizing off the heavy lid when the sudden screech of brakes before the house gave warning of a new arrival.

“Take cover!” bade de Grandin, dropping down behind the massive coffin as he drew his pistol. “If they think to carry us by storm we shall be ready for—”

“Michail — Michailovitch, has it come? Proudhon and Matrona are here; we must make haste! Where are you, man?” Rattling at the knob, kicking on the panels, someone clamored at the front door furiously, then, as we gave no sign, burst out in a torrent of entreaty phrased in words that seemed entirely consonants.

De Grandin left his ambush, tiptoed down the hall and shot the bolt back from the door, leaping quickly to one side and poising with bent knees, his pistol held in readiness. The heavy door swung inward with a bang and a young man almost fell across the sill.

“Michail,” he called hysterically, “they’re here; I saw them on the road today. Has it come, Michail — oh, my God! — as he saw the coffin stripped of its enclosures standing in the glaring light from the hall chandelier — “too late; too late!” He stumbled blindly a few steps, slumped down to his knees, then crept across the polished floor, dropping head and hands upon the coffin lid and sobbing broken-heartedly. “*Nikakova, radost moy!*” he entreated.

“Oh, too late; too late!”

“*Tenez, Monsieur*, you seem in trouble,” de Grandin moved from his concealment and advanced a step, pistol lowered but eyes wary.

“Proudhon!” the stranger half rose from his knees and a look of utter loathing swept his face. “You—” His furious expression faded and gave way to one of wonder. “You’re not — who are you?” he stammered.

“*Eh bien*, my friend, I think that we might say the same to you,” de Grandin answered. “It might be well if you explained yourself without delay. A murder has been done here and we seek the perpetrators—”

“A murder? Who—”

“Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered something like an hour ago; we are expecting the police—”

“Pavlovitch killed? It must be Proudhon was here, then,” the young man breathed. “Was this coffin like this when you found it?”

“It was not. It came after Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered. We suspected it might be connected with the crime and were about to force it when you came howling at the door—”

“Quick, then! We must take it off before—”

“One moment, if you please, *Monsieur*. A murder has been done and everyone about the place is suspect till he clears himself. This so mysterious parcel came while we were seeking clues, and neither it nor any other thing may be removed until the police—”

“We can’t wait for the police! They wouldn’t understand; they’d not believe; they’d wait until it is too late — oh, *Monsieur*, I don’t know who you are, but I beg that you will help me. I must remove this coffin right away; get it to a safe place and have medical assistance, or—”

“I am Doctor Jules de Grandin and this is Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, both at your service if you can convince us that you have no criminal intent,” the little Frenchman said. “Why must you rush away this casket which was brought here but a little while ago, and why should you desire to keep its presence hidden from the officers?”

A look of desperation crossed the other’s face. He laid his forehead on the chilly coffin top again and burst into a fit of weeping. Finally: “You are educated men, physicians, and may understand,” he murmured between sobs. “You must believe me when I tell you that unless we take this coffin out at once a terrible calamity will follow!”

De Grandin eyed him speculatively. “I will take the chance that what you say is true, *Monsieur*,” he answered. “You have a motorcar outside? Good. Doctor Trowbridge will accompany you and guide you to our house. I shall stay and wait until the police have been notified and aid them with such information as I have. Then I shall rejoin you.”

Turning to the servant he commanded: "Help us place this box upon the motor, if you please; then hasten to the nearest neighbor's and telephone the officers. I await you here."

With the long box hidden in the tonneau of his touring-car the young man hugged my rear fender all the way to town, and was at my side and ready to assist in packing the unwieldy case into the house almost before I shut my motor off. Once in the surgery, he crept furtively from one window to another, drawing down the blinds and listening intently, as though he were in mortal fear of spies.

"Well, now, young fellow," I began as he completed his mysterious precautions, "what's all this about? Let me warn you, if you've got a body hidden in that casket it's likely to go hard with you. I'm armed, and if you make a false move—" Reaching in my jacket pocket I snapped my glasses-case to simulate — I hoped! — the clicking of a pistol being cocked, and frowned at him severely.

The smile of child-like confidence he gave me was completely reassuring. "I've no wish to run away, sir," he assured me. "If it hadn't been for you they might have — Jesu-Mary, what is that?" He thrust himself before the red wood coffin as though to shield it with his body as a rattle sounded at the office door.

"*Salut, mes amis!*" de Grandin greeted as he strode into the surgery. "I am fortunate. The gendarmes kept me but a little while, and I rode back to town with the mortician who brought in the doctor's body. You have not opened it? *Très bon*. I shall be delighted to assist you."

"Yes, let us hurry, please," our visitor begged. "It has been so long—" a sob choked in his throat, and he put his hand across his eyes.

The wood was heavy but not hard, and our tools cut through it easily. In fifteen minutes we had forced a lengthwise girdle round the box, and bent to lift the lid.

"Nikakova!" breathed the young man as a worshipper might speak the name of some saint he adored.

"*Sacré nom d'un fromage vert!*" de Grandin swore.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

A coat of hoarfrost fell away in flakes, and beneath it showed a glassy dome with little tracteries of rime upon it. Between the lace-like meshes of the gelid veil we glimpsed a woman lying quiet as in sleep. There was a sort of wavering radiance about her not entirely attributable to the icy envelope enclosing her. Rather, it seemed to me, she matched the brilliant beams of the electric light with some luminescence of her own. Nude she was as any Aphrodite sculptured by the master-craftsmen of the Isle of Melos; a cloven tide of pale-gold hair fell down each side her face and rippled over ivory shoulders, veiling the pink nipples of the full-blown, low-set bosoms and coursing down the

beautifully shaped thighs until it reached the knees. The slender, shapely feet were crossed like those on mediaeval tombs whose tenants have in life made pilgrimage to Rome or Palestine; her elbows were bent sharply so her hands were joined together palm to palm between her breasts with fingertips against her chin. I could make out gold-flecked lashes lying in smooth arcs against her pallid cheeks, the faint shadows round her eyes, the wistful, half-pathetic droop of her small mouth. Oddly, I was conscious that this pallid, lovely figure typified in combination the austerity of sculptured saint, lush, provocative young womanhood and the innocent appeal of childhood budding into adolescence. Somehow, it seemed to me, she had lain down to die with a trustful resignation like that of Juliet when she drained the draft that sent her living to her family's mausoleum.

"Nikakova!" whispered our companion in a sort of breathless ecstasy, gazing at the quiet figure with a look of rapture.

"*Hein?*" de Grandin shook himself as though to free his senses from the meshes of a dream. "What is this, *Monsieur*? A woman tombed in ice, a beautiful, dead woman—"

"She is not dead," the other interrupted. "She sleeps."

"*Tiens*," a look of pity glimmered in the little Frenchman's small blue eyes, "I fear it is the sleep that knows no waking, *mon ami*."

"No, no, I tell you," almost screamed the young man, "she's not dead! Pavlovitch assured me she could be revived. We were to begin work tonight, but they found him first, and—"

"*Halte la!*" de Grandin bade. "This is the conversation of the madhouse, as meaningless as babies' babble. Who was this Doctor Pavlovitch, and who was this young woman? Who, by blue, are you, *Monsieur*?"

The young man paid no heed, but hastened around the coffin, feeling with familiar fingers for a series of small buttons which he pressed in quick succession. As the final little knob was pressed we heard a slowly rising, prolonged hiss, and half a dozen feathery jets of snowflakes seemed to issue from the icy dome above the body. The room grew cold and colder. In a moment we could see the vapor of our breaths before our mouths and noses, and I felt a chill run through me as an almost overwhelming urge to sneeze began to manifest itself.

"*Corbleu*," de Grandin's teeth were chattering with the sudden chill, "I shall take pneumonia; I shall contract coryza; I shall perish miserably if this continues!" He crossed the room and threw a window open, then leant across the sill, fairly soaking in the moist, warm summer air.

"Quick, shut the lights off!" cried our visitor. "They must not see us!" He snapped the switch with frenzied fingers, then leaned against the door-jamb breathing heavily, like one

who has escaped some deadly peril by the narrowest of margins.

As the outside air swept through the room and neutralized the chill, de Grandin turned again to the young man. “*Monsieur*,” he warned, “my nose is short, but my patience is still shorter. I have had enough — too much, *parbleu!* Will you explain this business of the monkey now, or do I call the officers and tell them that you carry round the body of a woman, one whom you doubtless foully murdered, and—”

“No, no, not that!” the visitor besought. “Please don’t betray me. Listen, please; try to realize what I say is true.”

“My friend, you cannot put too great a strain on my credulity,” de Grandin answered. “Me, I have traveled much, seen much, know much. The thing which I know to be true would make a less experienced man believe himself the victim of hallucinations. Say on, *mon vieux*; I listen.”

With steamer rugs draped around our shoulders we faced each other in the light of a small, shaded lamp. Our breath fanned out in vapory cumuli each time we spoke; before us gleamed the crystal-hooded coffin, like a great *memento mori* fashioned out of polar ice, and as it radiated ever-growing cold I caught myself involuntarily recalling a couplet from Bartholomew Dowling:

“And thus does the warmth of feeling
Turn chill in the coldness of death...”

Till then the rush of action had prevented any inventory of our visitor. Now as I studied him I found it difficult to fit him into any category furnished by a lifetime’s medical experience. He was young, though not as young as he appeared, for pale-blond coloring and slenderness lent him a specious air of youth which was denied by drooping shoulders, trouble-lines about his mouth and deep-set, melancholy eyes. His chin was small and gentle, not actually receding, but soft and almost feminine in outline. The mouth, beneath a scarcely-visible ash-blond mustache, suggested extreme sensitiveness, and he held his lips compressed against each other as though the trait of self-suppression had become habitual. His brow was wider and more high than common, his blue eyes almost childishly ingenuous. When he spoke, it was with hesitancy and with a painfully correct pronunciation which betrayed as plainly as an accent that his English came from study rather than inheritance and use.

“I am Serge Aksakoff,” he told us in his flat, accentless voice. “I met Nikakova Gapon when I was a student at the University of Petrograd and she a pupil at the Imperial Ballet Academy. Russia in 1916 was honeycombed with secret liberal societies, all loyal to the Little Father, but all intent on securing something of democracy for a land which had lain prostrate underneath the iron heel of autocrats for twenty

generations. Perhaps it was the thrill of danger which we shared; perhaps it was a stronger thing; at any rate we felt a mutual attraction at first meeting, and before the summer ended I was desperately in love with her and she returned my passion.

“Our society numbered folk of every social stratum, workmen, artisans, artists and professional people, but mostly we were students ranging anywhere from twenty to sixteen years old. Two of our foremost members were Boris Proudhon and Matrona Rimsky. He was a tailor, she the mistress of Professor Michail Pavlovitch of the University of Petrograd, who as a physicist was equal to Soloviev in learning and surpassed him in his daring of experiment. Proudhon was always loudest in debate, always most insistent on aggressive action. If one of us prepared a plan for introducing social legislation in the Duma he scoffed at the idea and insisted on a show of force, often on assassination of officials whose duties were to carry out unpopular ukases. Matrona always seconded his violent proposals and insisted that we take direct and violent action. Finally, at their suggestion, we signed our names beneath theirs to a declaration of intention in which we stated that if peaceful measures failed we favored violence to gain our ends.

“That night the officers of the Okhrana roused me from my bed and dragged me to the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. They locked me in a stinking, vermin-swarmed cell and left me there three weeks. Then they led me out and told me that because I was but seventeen they had decided to extend me clemency, so instead of being hanged or sent to the Siberian mines with most of my companions I was merely to be exiled to Ekaterinburg for a term of sixty months. During that time I was to be subjected to continuous surveillance, to hold no communication with my family or friends in Russia, and not engage in any occupation without express permission.”

“But you’d done nothing!” I protested. “The paper that you signed declared specifically that you favored peaceful measures; you merely said that if these measures failed—”

Aksakoff smiled sadly. “You didn’t have to be a criminal to be exiled,” he explained. “‘Political unreliability’ was sufficient cause, and the officers of the political police were sole judges of the case. You see, administrative exile, as they called it, was technically not a punishment.”

“Oh, that’s different,” I replied. “If you were merely forced to live away from home—”

“And to make a journey longer than from New York to Los Angeles dressed in prison clothes and handcuffed to a condemned felon, shuffling in irons so heavy that it was impossible to lift your feet, to be fed infrequently, and then on offal that nothing but a half-starved dog — or man — would touch,” he interrupted bitterly. “My only consolation

was that Nikakova had been also granted ‘clemency’ and accompanied me in exile.

“The officer commanding our escort came from a family some of whom had also suffered exile, and this made him pity us. He allowed us to converse an hour a day, although this was prohibited, and several times he gave us food and tea from his own rations. It was from him we learned that Proudhon and Matrona were *agents provocateurs* of the political police, paid spies whose duty was not only to worm their way into the confidence of unsuspecting children such as we, but to incite us to unlawful acts so we might be arrested and deported.

“Since I had no money and the Government did not care to fee me, I was graciously permitted to take service with a cobbler at Ekaterinburg, and Nikakova was allowed to do work for a seamstress. Presently I found a little cottage and she came to live with me.”

“It must have been some consolation to be married to the girl you loved, even in such terrible conditions—” I began, but the cynicism of the look he gave me stopped my well-meant comment.

“I said she came to live with me,” he repeated. “‘Politicos’ were not permitted marriage without special dispensation from the police, and this we could not get. We had no money to pay bribes. But whatever church and state might say, we were as truly man and wife as if we’d stood before the altar of St. Isaac’s and been married by the Patriarch. We pledged our love for time and all eternity kneeling on the floor of our mean cabin with a blessed ikon for our witness, and because we had no rings to give each other I took two nails and beat them into circlets. Look—”

He thrust his hand out, displaying a thin band of flattened wire on the second shaft of the third finger.

“She had one, too,” he added, beckoning us to look upon the body in the frost-domed coffin. Through the envelope of shrouding ice we saw the dull gleam of the narrow iron ring upon one of the shapely folded hands.

“In that northern latitude the twilight lasts till after ten o’clock, and my labors with the cobbler started with the sunrise and did not end till dark,” Aksakoff continued as he resumed his seat and lit the cigarette de Grandin proffered. “There is an English saying that shoemakers’ children go unshod. It was almost literally true in my case, for the tiny wage I earned made it utterly impossible for me to purchase leather shoes, and so I wound rags round my feet and ankles. Nikakova had a pair of shoes, but wore them only out of doors. As for stockings, we hadn’t owned a pair between us since the first month of our exile.

“One evening as I shuffled home in my rag boots I heard a groan come from the shadows, and when I went to look I

found an old man fallen by the way. He was pitifully thin and ragged, and his matted, unkempt beard was almost stiff with filth and slime. We who lived in utter poverty could recognize starvation when we saw it, and it needed but a single glance to see the man was famishing. He was taller by a head than I, but I had no trouble lifting him, for he weighed scarcely ninety pounds, and when I put my arm round him to steady him it was as if I held a rag-clothed skeleton.

“Nikakova helped me get his ragged clothing off and wash away the clotted filth and vermin; then we laid him on a pile of straw, for we had no bedsteads, and fed him milk and brandy with a spoon. At first we thought him too far gone for rescue, but after we had worked with him an hour or so his eyes came open and he murmured, ‘Thank you, *Gaspadin Aksakoff.*’

“‘*Gaspadin!*’ it was the first time I had heard that title of respect since the night the police dragged me from my bed almost a year before, and I burst out crying when the old man mumbled it. Then we fell to wondering. Who was this old rack of bones, clothed in stinking rags, filthy as a *mujik* and verminous as a mangy dog, who knew my name and addressed me with a courteous title? Exiles learn to suspect every change of light and shadow, and Nikakova and I spent a night of terror, starting at each footstep in the alley, almost fainting every time a creak came at our lockless door for fear it might be officers of the *gendarmerie* come to take us for affording shelter to a fugitive.

“The starving stranger rallied in the night and by morning had sufficient strength to tell us he was Doctor Pavlovitch, seized by the Okhrana as a politically dangerous person and exiled for five years to Ekaterinburg. Less fortunate than we, he had been unable to obtain employment even as a manual laborer when the Government, preoccupied with war and threat of revolution, had turned him out to live or starve as fate decreed. For months he’d wandered through the streets like a stray animal, begging *kopeks* here and there, fighting ownerless dogs and cats for salvage from swill-barrels; finally he dropped exhausted in his tracks within a hundred yards of our poor cabin.

“We had hardly food enough for two, and often less than the equivalent of a dime a week in cash, but somehow we contrived to keep our guest alive through the next winter, and when spring came he found work upon a farm.

“The forces of revolt had passed to stronger hands than ours, and while we starved at Ekaterinburg Tsar Nicholas came there as an exile, too. But though the *Bolsheviki* ruled instead of Nicholas it only meant a change of masters for the three of us. Petrograd and all of Russia was in the hands of revolutionists so busy with their massacres and vengeance that they had no time or inclination to release us from our exile, and even if we had been freed we had no place to go.

With the coming of the second revolution everything was communized; the Red Guards took whatever they desired with no thought of payment; tradesmen closed their shops and peasants planted just enough to keep themselves. We had been poor before; now we were destitute. Sometimes we had but one crust of black bread to share among us, often not even that. For a week we lived on Nikakova's shoes, cutting them in little strips and boiling them for hours to make broth.

"The Bolsheviks shot Nicholas and his family on July 17, and eight days later Kolchak and the Czechs moved into Ekaterinburg. Pavlovitch was recognized and retained to assist in the investigation of the murder of the royal family, and we acted as his secretaries. When the White Guards moved back toward Mongolia we went with them. Pavlovitch set up a laboratory and hospital at Tisingol, and Nikakova and I acted as assistants. We were very happy there."

"One rejoices in your happiness, *Monsieur*," de Grandin murmured when the young man's silence lengthened, "but how was it that Madame Aksakoff was frozen in this never quite sufficiently to be reprobated coffin?"

Our visitor started from his reverie. "There was fighting everywhere," he answered. "Town after town changed hands as Red and White Guards moved like chessmen on the Mongol plains, but we seemed safe enough at Tisingol till Nikakova fell a victim to taiga fever. She hovered between life and death for weeks, and was still too weak to walk, or even stand, when word came that the Red horde was advancing and destroying everything before it. If we stayed our dooms were sealed; to attempt to move her meant sure death for Nikakova.

"I told you Pavlovitch was one of Russia's foremost scientists. In his work at Tisingol he had forestalled discoveries made at great universities of the outside world. The Leningrad physicians' formula for keeping blood ionized and fluid, that it might be in readiness for instant use when transfusions were required, was an everyday occurrence at the Tisingol infirmary, and Carrell's experiment of keeping life in chicken hearts after they were taken from the fowls had been surpassed by him. His greatest scientific feat, however, was to take a small warmblooded animal — a little cat or dog — drug it with an opiate, then freeze it solid with carbonic oxide snow, keep it in refrigeration for a month or two, then, after gently thawing it, release it, apparently no worse for its experience.

"There is hope for Nikakova," he told me when the news came that the Bolsheviks were but two days away. "If you will let me treat her as I do my pets, she can be moved ten thousand miles in safety, and revived at any time we wish."

"I would not consent, but Nikakova did. 'If Doctor Pavlovitch succeeds we shall be together once again,' she

told me, 'but if we stay here we must surely die. If I do not live through the ordeal — *nichevo*, I am so near death already that the step is but a little one, and thou shalt live, my Serge. Let us try this one chance of escape.'

"Pavlovitch secured a great Mongolian coffin and we set about our work. Nikakova was too weak to take me in her arms, but we kissed each other on the mouth before she drank ten drops of laudanum which sent her into a deep sleep within half an hour. The freezing process had to be immediate, so that animation would come to a halt at once; otherwise her little strength would be depleted by contending with the chill and she would really die, and not just halt her vital processes. We stripped her bedrobe off and set her hands in prayer and crossed her feet as though she came back from a pious pilgrimage, then sealed her lips with flexible collodion and stopped her nasal orifices; then, before she had a chance to suffocate, we laid her on a sheet stretched on carbonic oxide snow, spread another sheet above her and covered her with a sheet-copper dome into which we forced compressed carbonic oxide. The temperature inside her prison was so low her body stiffened with a spasm, every drop of blood and moisture in her system almost instantly congealing. Then we laid her in a shallow bath of distilled water which we froze as hard as steel with dry ice, and left her there while we prepared the coffin which was to be her home until we reached a place of safety.

"Pavlovitch had made the coffin ready, putting tanks of liquefied carbonic oxide underneath the space reserved for the ice plinth and arranging vents so that the gas escaping from the liquid's slow evaporation might circulate continuously about the icy tomb in which my darling lay. Around the ice block we set a hollow form of ice to catch and hold escaping gases, then wrapped the whole in layer on layer of *yurta*, or tent-felt, and put it in the coffin, which we sealed with several coats of Chinese lacquer. Thus my loved one lay as still as any sculptured saint, sealed in a tomb of ice as cold as those *zaberegas*, or ice mountains, that form along the banks of rivers in Siberia when the mercury goes down to eighty marks below the zero line.

"We trekked across the Shamo desert till we came to Dolo Nor, then started down the Huang Ho, but just north of Chiangchun a band of Chahar bandits raided us. Me they carried off to hold for ransom, and it was three days before I made them understand I was a penniless White Russian for whom no one cared a *kopek*. They would have killed me out of hand had not an English prisoner offered them five pounds in ransom for me. Six months later I arrived at Shanghai with nothing but the rags I stood in.

"White Russians have no status in the East, but this was helpful to me, for jobs no other foreigner would touch were

offered me. I was in turn a ricksha boy, a German secret agent, a runner for a gambling-house, an opium smuggler and gun runner. At every turn my fortunes mounted. In ten years I was rich, the owner of concessions in Kalgan, Tientsin and Peiping, not much respected, but much catered to. *Maskee* — he raised his shoulders in a shrug — “I’d have traded everything I owned for that red coffin that had vanished when the Chahars captured me.

“Then at last I heard of Pavlovitch. He had been made the surgeon of the bandit party which co-operated with the one that captured me, and when they were incorporated in the Chinese army had become a colonel. When he saved a war lord’s life by transfusion of canned blood they presented him with half a City’s loot. Shortly afterward he emigrated to America. The coffin? When the Chahars first saw it they assumed that it was filled with treasure and were about to smash it open, but its unnatural coldness frightened them, and they buried it beneath the ice near Bouir Nor and scuttled off pellmell in mortal fear of the ten thousand devils which Pavlovitch assured them were confined in it.

“It cost me two years and a fortune to locate Nikakova’s burial-place, but finally we found it, and so deeply had they buried her beneath the *zaberega*’s never-melting ice that we had to blast to get my darling out. We wrapped the coffin in ten folds of tent-felt wet with ice-and-salt solution, and took it overland to Tientsin, where I put it in a ship’s refrigeration chamber and brought it to America. Yesterday I reached this city with it, having brought it here in a refrigeration car, and all arrangements had been made for Pavlovitch to revive Nikakova when — this afternoon I saw Proudhon and the Rimsky woman driving down the road toward Pavlovitch’s house and knew that we must hasten.”

“*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*, but why should seeing your confrères of Russian days impress you with this need for desperate haste?” de Grandin asked.

Aksakoff smiled bleakly. “Do you remember what befell the people who investigated the assassination of the Tsar?” he answered. “The assassins covered up their bloody work completely, so they thought; burned the bodies in a bonfire and threw the ashes down the shaft of an abandoned mine, but patient research under Sokoloff made all precautions useless. It was Pavlovitch whose work unearthed the evidence of crime. From the ashes in the old Isetsky mine he sifted little bits of evidence, the Emperor’s Maltese cross, six sets of steels from women’s corsets, a mixed assortment of charred buttons, buckles, parts of slippers, hooks and eyes, and a number of small dirty pebbles which, when cleaned and treated chemically, turned out to be pure diamonds. It was this evidence which proved the *Bolsheviki*’s guilt — after they bare-facedly denied all implication in the regicide, and all who helped to prove their guilt were marked for

‘execution’ — even those who occupied the posts of clerks have been run down and murdered by their secret agents. There is no doubt Proudhon and the woman who was Pavlovitch’s mistress — and whose betrayal caused his exile in the Tsarist days — were sent here to assassinate him. It was unquestionably that female Judas who killed Pavlovitch, and after he was dead she and Proudhon rummaged through his papers. Their task is not only to stop oral testimony of their Government’s guilt, but to destroy incriminating documents, as well.”

“One sees. And it is highly probable they found messages from you to him, advising him of your arrival. *Tiens*, I think that you were well advised to take this coffin from the house of death without delay.”

“But in killing Pavlovitch they killed my darling, too!” sobbed Aksakoff. “The technique of his work was secret. No one else can bring beloved Nikakova from her trance—”

“I would not say as much,” denied the little Frenchman. “I am Jules de Grandin, and a devilish clever fellow. Let us see what we shall see, my friend.”

“It’s the most fantastic thing I ever heard!” I told him as we went to bed. “There’s no doubt the freezing process has preserved her wonderfully, but to hope to bring her back to life — that’s utterly absurd. When a person dies, he’s dead, and I’d stake my reputation that’s nothing but a lovely corpse in there,” I nodded toward the bathroom where the plinth of ice stood in the tub and Aksakoff stretched on a pallet by the bolted door, a pistol ready in his hand.

De Grandin pursed his lips, then turned an impish grin on me. “You have logic and the background of experience to support your claims,” he nodded, “but as Monsieur Shakespeare says, heaven and earth contain things our philosophy has not yet dreamed of. As for logic, *eh bien*, what is it? A reasoning from collated data, from known facts, *n’est-ce-pas*? But certainly. Logically, therefore, wireless telegraphy was scientifically impossible before Marconi. Radio communication was logically an absurd dream till invention of the vacuum tube made former scientific logic asinine. Yet the principles that underlay these things were known to physicists for years; they simply had not been assembled in their proper order. Let us view this case:

“Take, by example, hibernating animals, the tortoise of our northern climates, the frog, the snake; every autumn they put by their animation as a housewife folds up summer clothes for winter storage. They appear to die, yet in the spring they sally forth as active as they were before. One versed in natural lore might come upon them in their state of hibernation and say as you just said, ‘This is a corpse.’ His experience would tell him so, yet he would be in error. Or take the fish who freezes in the ice. When spring dissolves

his icy prison he swims off in search of food as hungrily as if he had not paused a moment in his quest. The toad encrusted in a block of slate, such as we see unearthed in coal mines now and then, may have been ‘dead’ *le bon Dieu* only knows how many centuries; yet once release him from encasement and he hops away in search of bugs to fill his little belly. Again—”

“But these are all cold-blooded creatures,” I protested. “Mammals can’t suspend the vital process—”

“Not even bears?” he interrupted with mock-mildness. “Or those Indians who when hypnotized fall into such deep trances that accredited physicians do not hesitate to call them dead, and are thereafter buried for so long a time that crops of grain are sown and harvested above them, then, disinterred, are reawakened at the hypnotist’s command?”

“Humph,” I answered, nettled. “I’ve never seen such things.”

“*Précisément*. I have. I do not know how they can be. I only know they are. When things exist we know that they are so, whether logic favors them or not.”

“Then you think that this preposterous tale is true; that we can thaw this woman out and awaken her, after she’s lain dead and tombed in ice for almost twenty years?”

“I did not say so—”

“Why, you did, too!”

“It was you, not I, who called her dead. Somatically she may be dead — clinically dead, in that her heart and lungs and brain have ceased to function, but that is not true death. You yourself have seen such cases revived, even when somatic death has lasted an appreciable time. She was not diseased when animation was suspended, and her body has been insulated from deteriorative changes. I think it possible the vital spark still slumbers dormant and can be revived to flame if we have care — and luck.”

The bathroom vigil lasted five full days and nights. There seemed a steel-like quality to the icy catafalque that defied summer heat and gently-dripping water from the shower alike, as if the ice had stored up extra chill in the long years it lay locked in the frost-bound earth of Outer Mongolia, and several times I saw it freeze the water they dropped on it instead of yielding to the liquid’s higher temperature. At last the casing melted off and they laid the stiff, marmoreal body in the tub, then ran a stream of water from the faucet. For ten hours this was cool, and the gelid body showed no signs of yielding to it. Time after time we felt the stone-hard arms and hands, the legs and feet that seemed for ever locked in algid *rigor mortis*, the little flower-like breasts that showed no promise of waking from their frigid unresponsiveness. Indeed, far from responding to the water’s thermal action, the frozen body seemed to chill its bath, and we noticed little

thread-like lines of ice take form upon the skin, standing stiffly out like oversized mold-spores and overlaying the white form with a coat of jewel-bright, quill-like pelage.

“*Excellent, parfait, splendide; magnifique!*” de Grandin nodded in delight as the ice-fur coat took form. “The chill is coming forth; we are progressing splendidly.”

When the tiny icicles cleared away, they raised the water’s temperature a little, gradually blending it from tepid to blood-warm, and fifteen hours of immersion in the warmer bath brought noticeable results. The skin became resilient to the touch, the flesh was firm but flexible, the folded hands relaxed and slipped down to the sides, slim ankles loosed their interlocking grip and the feet lay side by side.

“Behold them, if you please, my friend,” de Grandin whispered tensely. “Her feet, see how they hold themselves!”

“Well?” I responded, “What—”

“*Ah bah*, has it been so long then since your student days that you do not remember the flaccidity of death? Think of the cadavers which you worked upon — were their feet like those ones yonder? By blue, they were not! They were prolapsed, they hung down on the ankles like extensions of the leg, for their flexor muscles had gone soft and inelastic. These feet stand out at obtuse angles to the legs.”

“Well—”

“*Précisément; tu parles, mon ami*. It is very well, I think. It may not be a sign of life, but certainly it negatives the flaccidness of death.”

Periodically they pressed the thorax and abdomen, feeling for the hardness of deep-seated frozen organs. At length, “I think we can proceed, my friends,” de Grandin told us, and we lifted the limp body from the bath and dried it hurriedly with warm, soft towels. De Grandin drew the plugs of cotton from the nostrils and wiped the lips with ether to dissolve the seal of flexible collodion, and this done he and Aksakoff began to rub the skin with heated olive oil, kneading with firm gentleness, massaging downward toward the hands and feet, bending arms and legs, wrists, neck and ankles. Somehow, the process repulsed me. I had seen a similar technique used by embalmers when they broke up *rigor mortis*, and the certitude of death seemed emphasized by everything they did.

“Now, *Dei gratia*, we shall succeed!” the Frenchman whispered as he turned the body on its face and knelt over it, applying his hands to the costal margins, bearing down with all his might. There was a gentle, sighing sound, as of breath slowly exhaled, and Aksakoff went pale as death.

“She lives!” he whispered. “O *Nikakova, lubimuimi moi, radost moyä—*”

I felt a sob of sympathy rise in my throat. Too often I had heard that vital simulation when air was forced between a

corpse's lips by sudden pressure. No physician of experience, no morgue attendant, no embalmer can be fooled by that...

"*Mordieu*, I think ... I think—" de Grandin's soft, excited whisper sounded from the bed. He had leant back, releasing pressure on the corpse, and as he did so I was startled to observe a swelling of the lower thorax. Of course it could be nothing but mechanical reaction, the natural tendency of air to rush into an emptied space, I told myself, but ...

He bent forward swiftly, pushing down upon the body with both hands, retained the pressure for a moment, then swung back again. Forward — back; forward — back, twenty times a minute by the swiftly-clicking second hand of his wrist watch he went through the movements of the Schaefer method of forced respiration, patiently, methodically, almost mechanically.

I shook my head despairingly. This hopeless labor, this unfounded optimism ...

"Quick, quick, my friend, the supradrenalin!" he gasped. "Put fifteen minims in the syringe, and hurry, if you please. I can feel a little, so small stirring here, but we must perform a cardiocentesis!"

I hastened to the surgery to prepare the suprarenal extract, hopeless as I knew the task to be. No miracle of medicine could revive a woman dead and buried almost twenty years. I had not spent a lifetime as a doctor to no purpose; death was death, and this was death if I had ever seen it.

De Grandin poised the trocar's point against the pallid flesh beneath the swell of the left breast, and I saw the pale skin dimple, as though it winced instinctively. He thrust with swift, relentless pressure, and I marveled at the skill which guided pointed, hollow needle straight into the heart, yet missed the tangled maze of vein and artery.

Aksakoff was on his knees, hands clasped, eyes closed, prayers in strangled Russian gushing from his livid lips. De Grandin pressed the plunger home, shooting the astringent mixture deep into a heart which had not felt warm blood in half a generation.

A quick, spasmodic shudder shook the pallid body and I could have sworn I saw the lowered eyelids flutter.

The Frenchman gazed intently in the calm, immobile face a moment; then: "*Non?*" he whispered tensely. "*Pardieu*, I say you shall! I will it!"

Snatching up a length of sterile gauze he folded it across her lightly parted lips, drew a deep breath and laid his mouth to hers. I saw his temple-veins stand out as he drained his lungs of air, raised his head to gasp more breath, then bent and breathed again straight in the corpse's mouth. Tears stood in his eyes, his cheeks seemed losing every trace of color, he was becoming cyanotic. "Stop it, de Grandin!" I exclaimed. "It's no use, man, you're simply—"

"*Triomphe, victoire; succès!*" he gasped exultantly. "She breathes, she lives, my friends; we have vanquished twenty years of death. *Embrasse-moi!*" Before I realized what he was about he had thrown both arms around me and planted a resounding kiss on both cheeks, then served the Russian in like manner.

"Nikakova — Nikakova, *radost moya* — joy of life!" sobbed Aksakoff. The almost-golden lashes fluttered for an instant; then a pair of gray-green eyes looked vaguely toward the sobbing man, unfocussed, unperceiving, like the eyes of new-born infants struggling with the mystery of light.

It was impossible, absurd and utterly preposterous. Such a thing could not have happened, but ... there it was. In the upper chamber of my house I had seen a woman called back from the grave. Sealed in a tomb of ice for almost twenty years, this woman lived and breathed and looked at me!

Physically she mended rapidly. We increased her diet of albumins, milk and brandy to light broth and well-cooked porridges in two days. She was able to take solid food within a week; but for all this she was but an infant magnified in size. Her eyes were utterly unfocussed, she seemed unable to do more than tell the difference of light and shade, when we spoke to her she gave no answer; the only sounds she made were little whimpering noises, not cries of pain or fear, but merely the mechanical responses of vocal cords reacting to the breath. Two nurses were installed and de Grandin scarcely left her side, but as the time drew out and it became increasingly apparent that the patient whom he nursed was nothing but a living organism without volition or intelligence, the lines about his eyes appeared more deeply etched each day.

A month went by without improvement; then one day he came fairly bouncing in to the study. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, come and see, but step softly, I implore you!" he commanded, clutching at my elbow and dragging me upstairs. At the bedroom door he paused and nodded, smiling broadly, like a showman who invites attention to a spectacle. Aksakoff knelt by the bed, and from the piled-up pillows Nikakova looked at him, but there was nothing infantile about her gaze.

"Nikakova, *radost moya* — joy of life!" he whispered, and:

"Serge, my love, my soul, my life!" came her murmured answer. Her pale hands lay like small white flowers in his clasp, and when he leant to her, her kisses flecked his cheeks, his brow, his eyelids like lightly fluttering butterflies.

"*Tiens*," de Grandin murmured, "our Snow Queen has awakened, it seems; the frosts of burial have melted, and — come away, my friend; this is not for us to see!"

He tweaked my sleeve to urge me down the hall. The

lovers' mouths were joined in a fierce, passionate embrace, and the little Frenchman turned away his eyes as though to look on them were profanation.

Nikakova seemed intent on catching up the thread of interrupted life, and she and Serge with de Grandin spent long hours shopping, going to the theatre, visiting museums and art galleries or merely taking in the myriad scenes of city life. The semi-nudity of modern styles at first appalled her, but she soon revised her pre-war viewpoint and took to the unstockinged, corsetless existence of the day as if she had been born when Verdun and the Argonne were but memories, instead of in the reign of Nicholas the Last. When she finally had her flowing pale-gold hair cut short and permanently waved in little tight-laid poodle curls she might have passed as twin to any of a million of the current crop of high school seniors. She had an oddly incomplete mode of expression, almost devoid of pronouns and thickly strewn with participles, a shy but briar-sharp sense of humor, and an almost infinite capacity for sweets.

"No, recalling nothing," she assured us when we questioned her about her long interment. "Drinking laudanum and saying good-bye to my Serge. Then sleep. Awakening finds Serge beside me. Nothing more — a sleep, a waking. Wondering could death — true death — be that way? To fall asleep and wake in heaven?"

As soon as Nikakova's strength returned they were to go to China where Serge's business needed personal direction, for now he had recovered his beloved the matter of accumulating wealth had reassumed importance in his eyes. "We suffered poverty together; now we shall share the joy of riches, *radost moya*," he declared.

De Grandin had gone to the county medical society, where his fund of technical experience and his Rabelaisian wit made him an always welcome guest. Nikakova, Aksakoff and I were in the drawing-room, the curtains drawn against the howling storm outside, a light fire crackling on the hearth. She had been singing for us, sad, nostalgic songs of her orphaned homeland; now she sat at the piano, ivory hands flitting fitfully across the ivory keys as she improvised, pausing every now and then to nibble at a peppermint, then, with the spicy morsel still upon her tongue, to take a sip of coffee. I watched her musingly. Serge looked his adoration. She bore little semblance to the pale corpse in its icebound coffin, this gloriously happy girl who sat swaying to the rhythm of her music in the glow of the piano lamp. She wore a gown of striped silk that flashed from green to orange and from gold to crimson as she moved. It was negligible as to bodice, but very full and long of skirt. Brilliants glittered on her cross-strapped sandals,

long pendants of white jade swayed from her ears.

In the trees outside, the wind rose to a wail, and a flock of gulls which flew storm-driven from the bay skirred like lost souls as they wheeled overhead. A mile away a Lackawanna locomotive hooted long and mournfully as it approached a crossing. Nikakova whirled up from her seat on the piano bench and crossed the room with the quick, feline stride of the trained dancer, her full skirt swirling round her feet, the firelight gleaming on her jewel-set sandals and on brightly lacquered toenails.

"Feeling devils," she announced as she dropped upon the hearth rug and crouched before the fire, chin resting in her palms, her fingers pressed against her temples. "Seeming to hear *zagovór* — 'ow you call heem? — weetches' spell-charm? On nights like this the weetches and the wairwolves riding — dead men coming up from graves; ghosts from dead past flocking back—"

She straightened to her knees and took a match-box from the tabouret, bent a match stave till it formed an *L* turned upside down and drove the end of the long arm into the box top. Breaking off another stave to make it match the first in height, she stood it with its head against that of the upturned *L*, then pressed her cigarette against the touching sulfurous heads.

"Now watching!" she commanded. A sudden flare of flame ensued, and as the fire ran down the staves the upright match curled upward and seemed to dangle from the crossbar of the *L*. "What is?" she asked us almost gleefully.

"The man on the flying trapeze?" I ventured, but she shook her head until her ear-drops scintillated in the firelight.

"But no, great stupid one!" she chided. "Is execution — hanging. See, this one" — she pointed to the fire-curved match, — "is criminal hanged on gibbet. Perhaps he was—"

"A Menshevik who suffered justly for his crimes against the People's Revolution?" Softly pronounced, the interruption came in slurring, almost hissing accents from the doorway, and we turned with one accord to see a man and woman standing on the threshold.

He was a lean, compactly put together man of something more than medium height, exceedingly ugly, with thin black eyebrows and yellowish-tinted skin. His head was absolutely hairless, yet his scalp had not that quality of glossiness we ordinarily associate with baldness. Rather, it seemed to have a suède-like dullness which threw no answering gleam back from the hall lamp under which he stood. His small, side-slanting eyes were black as obsidian and his pointed chin thrust out. His companion wore a blue raincoat, tight-buttoned to the throat, and above its collar showed her face, dead-white beneath short, jet-black hair brushed flat against her head. Her brows were straight and narrow, the eyes below them black as prunes; her lips were a thin, scarlet line.

She looked hard and muscular, not masculine, but sexless as a hatchet.

I saw terror like cold flame wither my companions' faces as they looked up at the trespassers. Although they said no word I knew the chill and ominous foreknowledge of sure death was on them.

"See here," I snapped as I rose from my chair, "what d'ye mean by coming in this way—"

"Sit down, old man," the woman interrupted in a low, cold voice. "Keep still and we'll not hurt you—"

"Old man?" I choked. To have my house invaded in this way was injury, to be called an old man — that was added insult. "Get out!" I ordered sharply. "Get out of here, or—" The gleam of light upon the visitors' pistol barrels robbed my protest of authority.

"We have come to execute these traitors to the People's Cause," the man announced. "You have doubtless heard of us from them. I am Boris Proudhon, commissar of People's Justice. This is Matrona Rimsky—"

"And you will both oblige me greatly if you elevate your hands!" Standing framed in the front door, Jules de Grandin swung his automatic pistol in a threatening arc before him. He was smiling, but not pleasantly, and from the flush upon his ordinarily pale cheeks I knew he must have hurried through the rain.

There was corrosive, vitriolic hatred in the woman's voice as she wheeled toward him. "Bourgeois swine; capitalistic dog!" she spat, her pistol raised.

There was no flicker in de Grandin's smile as he shot her neatly through the forehead, nor did he change expression as he told the man, "It is a pity she should go to hell alone, *Monsieur*. You had better keep her company." His pistol snapped a second spiteful, whip-like crack, and Boris Proudhon stumbled forward on the body of his companion spy and fellow murderer.

"*Tiens*, I've followed them for hours," the Frenchman said as he came into the drawing-room, stepping daintily around the huddled bodies. "I saw them lurking in the shadows when I left the house, and knew they had no good intentions.

Accordingly I circled back when I had reached the corner, and lay in wait to watch them. When they moved, so did I. When they so skillfully undid the front door lock all silently, I was at their elbows. When they announced intention to commit another murder — *eh bien*, it is not healthy to do things like that when Jules de Grandin is about."

"But it was scarcely eight o'clock when you went out; it's past eleven now. Surely you could have summoned the police," I protested. "Was it necessary that you shoot—"

"Not necessary, but desirable," he interrupted. "I know what's in your thought, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I can fairly see that Anglo-Saxon mind of yours at work. 'He shot a woman!' you accuse, and are most greatly shocked. *Pourquoi?* I have also shot the female of the leopard and the tiger when occasion called for it. I have set my heel upon the heads of female snakes. Had it been a rabid bitch I shot in time to save two lives you would have thought I did a noble service. Why, then, do you shudder with smug horror when I eliminate a blood-mad female woman? These two sent countless innocents to Siberia and death when they worked for the Tsarist government. As agents of the Soviets they fed their bloodlust by a hundred heartless killings. They murdered the great savant Pavlovitch in cold blood, they would have done the same for Nikakova and Serge had I not stopped them. *Tenez*, it was no vengeance that I did; it was an execution."

Aksakoff and Nikakova crossed the room and knelt before him, and in solemn turn took his right hand and raised it to their brows and lips. To me it seemed absurd, degrading, even, but they were Russians, and the things they did were ingrained as their thoughts. Also — I realized it with a start of something like surprise — Jules de Grandin was a Frenchman, emotional, mercurial, lovable and loving, but — a Frenchman. Therefore, he was logical as Fate, He lived by sentiment, but of sentimentality he had not a trace.

It was this realization which enabled me to stifle my instinctive feeling of repugnance as he calmly called police headquarters and informed them that the murderers of Doctor Pavlovitch were waiting at my house — "for the wagon of the morgue."

16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

MARCH

25c

*Incense of
Abomination*

• a daring story of
Devil-worship—the Black
Mass—strange suicides
By SEABURY QUINN

H. P. Lovecraft
Henry Kuttner
Thorp McClusky
Jack Williamson



Incense of Abomination

“... incense is an abomination unto me.”
— *Isaiah*, 1, 13.

DETECTIVE Sergeant Costello looked fixedly at the quarter-inch of ash on his cigar, as though he sought solution of his problem in its fire-cored grayness. “‘Tis th’ damndest mixed-up mess I’ve iver happened up against,” he told us solemnly. “Here’s this Eldridge felly, young an’ rich an’ idle, wid niver a care ter ’is name, savin’ maybe, how he’d spend th’ next month’s income, then zowie! he ups an’ hangs hisself. We finds him swingin’ from th’ doorpost of his bedroom wid his bathrobe girdle knotted around ’is neck an’ about a mile o’ tongue sthickin’ out. Suicide? Sure, an’ what else could it be wid a felly found thrung up in a tight-locked flat like that?”

“Then, widin a week there comes a call fer us to take it on th’ lam up to th’ house where Stanley Trivers lived. There he is, a-layin’ on his bathroom floor wid a cut across ’is throat that ye could put yer foot into, a’most. In his pajammies he is, an’ th’ blood’s run down an’ spoilt ’em good an’ proper. Suicide again? Well, maybe so an’ maybe no, fer in all me time I’ve niver seen a suicidal cut across a felly’s throat that was as deep where it wound up as where it sthatched. They mostly gits remorse afore th’ cut is ended, as ye know, an’ th’ pressure on th’ knife gits less an’ less; so th’ cut’s a whole lot shallower at th’ end than ’twas at th’ beginnin’. However, th’ coroner says it’s suicide, so suicide it is, as far as we’re concerned. Anyhow, gintlemen, in both these cases th’ dead men wuz locked in their houses, from th’ inside, as wuz plain by th’ keys still bein’ in th’ locks.

“Now comes th’ third one. ’Tis this Donald Atkins felly, over to th’ Kensington Apartments. Sthretched on th’ floor he is, wid a hole bored in ’is forehead an’ th’ blood a-runnin’ over everything. He’s on ’is back wid a pearl-stocked pistol in ’is hand. Suicide again, says Schultz, me partner, an’ I’m not th’ one ter say as how it ain’t, all signs pointin’ as they do, still—” He paused and puffed at his cigar till its gray tip glowed with sullen rose.

Jules de Grandin tweaked a needle-sharp mustache tip. “Tell me, my sergeant,” he commanded, “what is it you have withheld? Somewhere in the history of these cases is a factor you have not revealed, some denominator common to them all which makes your police instinct doubt your senses’ evidence—”

“How’d ye guess it, sor?” the big Irishman looked at him admiringly. “Ye’ve put yer finger right upon it, but—” He

stifled an embarrassed cough, then, turning slightly red: “‘Tis th’ perfume, sor, as makes me wonder.”

“Perfume?” the little Frenchman echoed. “What in Satan’s foul name—”

”Well, sor, I ain’t one o’ them as sees a woman’s skirts a-hidin’ back of ivery crime, though you an’ I both knows there’s mighty few crimes committed that ain’t concerned wid cash or women, savin’ when they’re done fer both. But these here cases have me worried. None o’ these men wuz married, an’, so far as I’ve found out, none o’ them wuz kapin’ steady company, yet — git this, sor; ’tis small, but maybe it’s important — there wuz a smell o’ perfume hangin’ round each one of ’em, an’ ’twas th’ same in ivery case. No sooner had I got a look at this pore Eldridge felly hangin’ like a joint o’ beef from his own doorpost than me nose begins a-twitchin’. ‘Wuz he a pansy, maybe?’ I wonders when I smelt it first, for ’twas no shavin’ lotion or toilet water, but a woman’s heavy scent, strong an’ swate an’ — what’s it that th’ ads all say? — distinctive. Yis, sor, that’s th’ word fer it, distinctive. Not like anything I’ve smelt before, but kind o’ like a mixin’ up o’ this here ether that they use ter put a man ter slape before they takes ’is leg off, an’ kind o’ like th’ incense they use in church, an’ maybe there wuz sumpin mixed wid it that wasn’t perfume afther all, sumpin that smelt rank an’ sickly-like, th’ kind o’ smell ye smell when they takes a floater from th’ bay, sor.

“Well, I looks around ter see where it’s a-comin’ from, an’ it’s strongest in th’ bedroom; but divil a sign o’ any woman bein’ there I find, ’ceptin’ fer th’ smell o’ perfume.

“So when we runs in on th’ Trivers suicide, an’ I smells th’ same perfume again, I say that this is sumpin more than mere coincidence, but th’ same thing happens there. Th’ smell is strongest in th’ bedroom, but there ain’t any sign that he’d had company th’ night before; so just ter make sure I takes th’ casin’s off th’ pillows an’ has th’ boys at th’ crime lab’ratory look at ’em. Divil a trace o’ rouge or powder do they find.

“Both these other fellies kilt theirselves at night or early in th’ mornin’, so, o’ course, their beds wuz all unmade, but when we hustle over ter th’ Kensington Apartments ter see about this Mither Atkins, ’tis just past three o’clock. Th’ doctor says that he’s been dead a hour or more; yet when I goes into his bedroom th’ covers is pushed down, like he’s been slapin’ there an’ got up in a hurry, an’ th’ perfume’s strong enough ter knock ye down, a’most. Th’ boys at th’ crime lab say there’s not a trace o’ powder on th’ linen, an’

by th' time I gits th' pillows to 'em th' perfume's faded out."

He looked at us with vaguely troubled eyes and ran his hand across his mouth. "'Tis meself that's goin' nuts about these suicides a-comin' one on top th' other, an' this perfume bobbin' up in every case!" he finished.

De Grandin pursed his lips. "You would know this so strange scent if you encountered it again?"

"Faith, sor, I'd know it in me slape!"

"And you have never met with it before?"

"Indade an' I had not, nayther before nor since, savin' in th' imaygate prisence o' them three dead corpses."

"One regrets it is so evanescent. Perhaps if I could smell it I might be able to identify it. I recall when I was serving with *le sûreté* we came upon a band of scoundrels making use of a strange Indian drug called by the Hindoos *chhota maut*, or little death. It was a subtle powder which made those inhaling it go mad, or fall into a coma simulating death if they inspired enough. Those naughty fellows mixed the drug with incense which they caused to be burned in their victims' rooms. Some went mad and some appeared to die. One of those who went insane committed suicide—"

"Howly Mither, an' ye think we may be up against a gang like that, sor?"

"One cannot say, *mon vieux*. Had I the chance to sniff this scent, perhaps I could have told you. Its odor is not one that was soon forgotten. As it is" — he raised his shoulders in a shrug — "what can one do?"

"Will ye be afther holdin' yerself in readiness ter come a-runnin' if they's another o' these suicides, sor?" the big detective asked as he rose to say good-night. "I'd take it kindly if ye would."

"You may count on me, my friend. *À bientôt*," the little Frenchman answered with a smile.

The storm had blown itself out early in the evening, but the streets were still bright with the filmy remnant of the sleety rain and the moon was awash in a breaking surf of wind-clouds. It was longer by the north road, but with the pavements slick as burnished glass I preferred to take no chances and had throttled down my engine almost to a walking pace as we climbed the gradient leading to North Bridge. De Grandin sank his chin into the fur of his upturned coat collar and nodded sleepily. The party at the Merrivales had been not at all amusing, and we were due at City Hospital at seven in the morning. "*Ah, bah*," he murmured drowsily, "we were a pair of fools, my friend; we forgot a thing of great importance when we left the house tonight."

"U'm?" I grunted. "What?"

"To stay there," he returned. "Had we but the sense *le bon Dieu* gives an unfledged gosling, we should have — *sapristi!* Stop him, he is intent on self-destruction!"

At his shouted warning I looked toward the footwalk and descried a figure in a heavy ulster climbing up the guard rail. Shooting on my power, I jerked the car ahead, then cut the clutch and jammed the brakes down hard, swinging us against the curb abreast of the intending suicide. I kicked the door aside and raced around the engine-hood, but de Grandin disdained such delays and vaulted overside, half leaping, half sliding on the slippery pavement and cannoning full-tilt against the man who sought to climb the breast-high railing. "*Parbleu*, you shall not!" he exclaimed as he grasped the other's legs with outflung arms. "It is wet down there, *Monsieur*, and most abominably cold. Wait for summer if you care to practise diving!"

The man kicked viciously, but the little Frenchman hung on doggedly, and as the other loosed his hold upon the rail they both came crashing to the pavement where they rolled and thrashed like fighting dogs.

I hovered near the mêlée, intent on giving such assistance as I could, but my help was not required; for as I reached to snatch the stranger's collar, de Grandin gave a quick twist, arched his body upon neck and heels and with a blow as rapid as a striking snake's chopped his adversary on the Adam's apple with his stiffened hand. The result was instantaneous. The larger man collapsed as if he had been shot, and my little friend slipped out from underneath him, teeth flashing in an impish grin, small blue eyes a-gleam. "A knowledge of jiu-jitsu comes in handy now and then," he panted as he rearranged his clothing. "For a moment I had fears that he would take me with him to a watery bed."

"Well, what shall we do with him?" I asked. "He's out completely, and we can't afford to leave him here. He'll surely try to kill himself again if—"

"*Parbleu! Attendez, s'il vous plaît!*" he interrupted. "*Le parfum* — do you smell him?" He paused with back-thrown head, narrow nostrils quivering as he sniffed the moist, cold air.

There was no doubt of it. Faint and growing quickly fainter, but plainly noticeable, the aura of a scent hung in the atmosphere. It was an odd aroma, not wholly pleasant, yet distinctly fascinating, seeming to combine the heavy sweetness of patchouli with the bitterness of frankincense and the penetrating qualities of musk and civet; yet underlying it there was a faint and slightly sickening odor of corruption.

"Why, I never smelled—" I began, but de Grandin waved aside my observation.

"Nor I," he nodded shortly, "but unless I am at fault this is the perfume which the good Costello told us of. Cannot you see, my friend? We have here our laboratory specimen, an uncompleted suicide with the redolence of this mysterious scent upon it. Help me lift him in the car, *mon vieux*, we

have things to say to this one. We shall ask him, by example, why it was—”

“Suppose that he won’t talk?” I broke in.

“*Ha*, you suppose that! If your supposition proves correct and he is of the obstinacy, you shall see a beautiful example of the third degree. You shall see me turn him inside out as if he were a lady’s glove. I shall creep into his mind, me. I shall — *mordieu*, before the night is done I damn think I shall have at least a partial answer to the good Costello’s puzzle! Come, let us be of haste; *en avant!*”

Despite his height the salvaged man did not weigh much, and we had no trouble getting him inside the car. In fifteen minutes we were home, just as our rescued human flotsam showed signs of returning consciousness.

“Be careful,” warned de Grandin as he helped the passenger alight. “If you behave we shall treat you with the kindness, but if you try the monkey’s tricks I have in readiness a second portion of the dish I served you on the *Pont du Nord*.”

“Here,” he added as we led our captive to the study, “this is the medicine for those who feel at odds with life.” He poured a gill of Scots into a tumbler and poised the siphon over it. “Will you have soda with your whisky,” he inquired, “or do you like it unpolluted?”

“Soda, please,” the other answered sulkily, drained his glass in two huge gulps and held it out again.

“*Eh bien*,” the Frenchman chuckled, “your troubles have not dulled your appetite, it seems. Drink, my friend, drink all you wish, for the evening is still young and we have many things to talk of, thou and I.”

The visitor eyed him sullenly as he took a sip from his fresh glass. “I suppose you think you’ve done your Boy Scout’s good deed for today?” he muttered.

“*Mais oui, mais certainement*,” the Frenchman nodded vigorously. “We have saved you from irreparable wrong, my friend. *Le bon Dieu* did not put us here to—”

“That’s comic!” the other burst out with a cackling laugh. “*Le bon Dieu* — much use *He* has for me!”

De Grandin lowered his arching brows a little; the effect was a deceptively mild, thoughtful frown. “So-o,” he murmured, “that is the way of it? You feel that you have been cast off, that—”

“Why not? Didn’t we — I — cast Him out? didn’t I deny Him, take service with His enemies, mock at Him—”

“Be not deceived, my friend” — the double lines between the Frenchman’s narrow brows was etched a little deeper as he answered in an even voice — “God is not mocked. It is easier to spit against the hurricane than jeer at Him. Besides, He is most merciful, He is compassionate, and His patience transcends understanding. Wicked we may be, but if we

offer true repentance—”

“Even if you’ve committed the unpardonable sin?”

“*Tiens*, this *péché irrémissible* of which the theologians prate so learnedly, yet which none of them defines? You had a mother, one assumes; you may have sinned against her grievously, disappointed her high hopes in you, shown ingratitude as black as Satan’s shadow, abused her trust or even done her bodily hurt. Yet if you went to her sincerely penitent and told her you were sorry, that you truly loved her and would sin no more, *parbleu*, she would forgive, you know it! Will the Heavenly Father be less merciful than earthly parents? Very well, then. Who can say that he has sinned past reconciliation?”

“I can; I did — we all did! We cast God out and embraced Satan—” Something that was lurking horror seemed to take form in his eyes, giving them a stony, glazed appearance. It was as if a filmy curtain were drawn down across them, hiding everything within, mirroring only a swift-mounting terror.

“Ah?” de Grandin murmured thoughtfully. “Now we begin to make the progress.” Abruptly he demanded:

“You knew Messieurs Eldridge, Trivers and Atkins?” He flung the words more like a challenging accusation than a query.

“Yes!”

“And they, too, thought they had sinned past redemption; they saw in suicide the last hope of escape; they were concerned with you in this iniquity?”

“They were, but no interfering busybody stopped them. Let me out of here, I’m going to—”

“*Monsieur*,” de Grandin did not raise his voice, but the look he bent upon the other was as hard and merciless as though it were a leveled bayonet, “you are going to remain right here and tell us how it came about. You will tell of this transgression which has caused three deaths already and almost caused a fourth. Do not fear to speak, my friend. We are physicians, and your confidence will be respected. On the other hand, if you persist in silence we shall surely place you in restraint. You would like to be lodged in a madhouse, have your every action watched, be strapped in a straitjacket if you attempted self-destruction, *hein?*” Slowly spoken, his words had the impact of a bodily assault, and the other reeled as from a beating.

“Not that!” he gasped. “O God, anything but that! I’ll tell you everything if you will promise—”

“You have our word, *Monsieur*; say on.”

The visitor drew his chair up closer to the fire, as if a sudden cold had chilled his marrow. He was some forty years of age, slim and quite attractive, immaculately dressed, well groomed. His eyes were brown, deep-set and drawn, as

if unutterably weary, with little pouches under them. His shoulders sagged as if the weight they bore was too much for them. His hair was almost wholly gray. "Beaten" was the only adjective to modify him.

"I think perhaps you knew my parents, Doctor Trowbridge," he began. "My father was James Balderson."

I nodded. Jim Balderson had been a senior when I entered college, and his escapades were bywords on the campus. Nothing but the tolerance which stamps a rich youth's viciousness as merely indication of high spirits had kept him from dismissal since his freshman year, and faculty and townsfolk sighed with relief when he took his sheepskin and departed simultaneously. The Balderson and Aldridge fortunes were combined when he married Bronson Aldridge's sole heir and daughter, and though he settled down in the walnut-paneled office of the Farmers Loan & Trust Company, his sons had carried on his youthful zest for getting into trouble. Drunken driving, divorce cases, scandals which involved both criminal and civil courts, were their daily fare. Two of them had died by violence, one in a motor smash-up, one when an outraged husband showed better marksmanship than self-restraint. One had died of poison liquor in the Prohibition era. We had just saved the sole survivor from attempted suicide. "Yes, I knew your father," I responded.

"Do you remember Horton Hall?" he asked.

I bent my brows a moment. "Wasn't that the school down by the Shrewsbury where they had a scandal? — something about the headmaster committing suicide, or—"

"You're right. That's it. I was in the last class there. So were Eldridge, Trivers and Atkins.

"I was finishing my junior year when the war broke out in 'seventeen. Dad got bulletproof commissions for the older boys, but wouldn't hear of my enlisting in the Navy. 'You've a job to do right there at Horton,' he told me. 'Get your certificate; then we'll see about your joining up.' So back I went to finish out my senior year. Dad didn't know what he was doing to me. Things might have turned out differently if I'd gone in the service.

"Everyone who could was getting in the Army or the Navy. We'd lost most of our faculty when I went back in 'eighteen, and they'd put a new headmaster in, a Doctor Herbules. Fellows were leaving right and left, enlisting from the campus or being called by draft boards, and I was pretty miserable. One day as I was walking back from science lab, I ran full-tilt into old Herbules.

"'What's the matter, Balderson?' he asked. 'You look as if you'd lost your last friend.'

"'Well, I have, almost,' I answered. 'With so many fellows off at training-camp, having all kinds of excitement—'

"'You want excitement, eh?' he interrupted. 'I can give it to you; such excitement as you've never dreamed of. I can make you—' He stopped abruptly, and it seemed to me he looked ashamed of something, but he'd got my curiosity roused.

"'You're on, sir,' I told him. 'What is it, a prize-fight?'

"Herbules was queer. Everybody said so. He couldn't have been much past thirty; yet his hair was almost snow-white and there was a funny sort o' peaceful expression on his smooth face that reminded me of something that I couldn't quite identify. He had the schoolmaster's trick of speaking with a sort of pedantic precision, and he never raised his voice; yet when he spoke in chapel we could understand him perfectly, no matter how far from the platform we were sitting. I'd never seen him show signs of excitement before, but now he was breathing hard and was in such deadly earnest that his lips were fairly trembling. 'What do you most want from life?' he asked me in a whisper.

"'Why, I don't know, just now I'd like best of all to get into the Army; I'd like to go to France and bat around with the *mademoiselles*, and get drunk any time I wanted—'

"'You'd like that sort of thing?' he laughed. 'I can give it to you, and more; more than you ever imagined. Wine and song and gayety and women — beautiful lovely, cultured women, not the street-trulls that you'd meet in France — you can have all this and more, if you want to, Balderson.'

"'Lead me to it,' I replied. 'When do we start?'

"'Ah, my boy, nothing's given for nothing. There are some things you'll have to do, some promises to make, something to be paid—'

"'All right; how much?' I asked. Dad was liberal with me. I had a hundred dollars every month for spending money, and I could always get as much again from Mother if I worked it right.

"'No, no; not money,' he almost laughed in my face. 'The price of all this can't be paid in money. All we ask is that you give the Master something which I greatly doubt you realize you have, my boy.'

"It sounded pretty cock-eyed to me, but if the old boy really had something up his sleeve I wanted to know about it. 'Count me in,' I told him. 'What do I do next?'

"There was no one within fifty yards of us, but he bent until his lips were almost in my ear before he whispered: 'Next Wednesday at midnight, come to my house.'

"'Private party, or could I bring a friend or two?'

"His features seemed to freeze. 'Who is the friend?' he asked.

"'Well, I'd like to bring Eldridge and Trivers, and maybe Atkins, too. They're all pretty good eggs, and I know they crave excitement—'

“‘Oh, by all means, yes. Be sure to bring them. It’s agreed, then? Next Wednesday night at twelve, at my house.’

“Herbules was waiting for us in a perfect fever of excitement when we tiptoed up his front-porch steps on Wednesday night. He had a domino and mask for each of us. The dominoes were fiery red, with hoods that pulled up like monks’ cowls; the masks were black, and hideous. They represented long, thin faces with out-jutting chins; the lips were purple and set in horrid grins; the eyebrows were bright scarlet wool and at the top there was another patch of bright red worsted curled and cut to simulate a fringe of hair. ‘Good Lord,’ said Atkins as he tried his on, ‘I look just like the Devil!’

“I thought that Herbules would have a stroke when he heard Atkins speak. ‘You’ll use that name with more respect after tonight, my boy,’ he said.

“After that we all got in his car and drove down toward Red Bank.

“We stopped about a mile outside of town and parked the car in a small patch of woods, walked some distance down the road, climbed a fence and cut across a field till we reached an old deserted house. I’d seen the place as I drove past, and had often wondered why it was unoccupied, for it stood up on a hill surrounded by tall trees and would have made an ideal summer home, but I’d been told its well was dry, and as there was no other source of water, nobody wanted it.

“We didn’t go to the front door, but tiptoed round the back, where Herbules struck three quick raps, waited for a moment, then knocked four more.

“We’d all put on our robes and masks while he was knocking, and when the door was opened on a crack we saw the porter was robed and masked as we were. Nobody said a word, and we walked through a basement entrance, down a long and narrow hall, and turned a corner where we met another door. Here Herbules went through the same procedure, and the door swung back to let us in.

“We were in a big room, twenty by forty feet, I guess, and we knew it was a cellar by the smell — stifflingly close, but clammy as a tomb at once. Rows of folding chairs like those used at bridge games — or funerals — were arranged in double rows with a passage like an aisle between, and at the farther end of the big room we saw an altar.

“In all my life I don’t believe I’d been to church ten times, but we were nominally Protestants, so what I saw had less effect on me than if I’d been a Catholic or Episcopalian; but I knew at once the altar wasn’t regulation. Oh, it was sufficiently impressive, but it had a sort of comic — no, not comic, grotesque, rather — note about it. A reredos of black

cloth was hung against the wall, and before it stood a heavy table more than eight feet long and at least six wide, covered by a black cloth edged with white. It reminded me of something, though I couldn’t quite identify it for a moment; then I knew. I’d seen a Jewish funeral once, and this cloth was like the black-serge pall they used to hide the plain pine coffin! At each end of the altar stood a seven-branched candelabrum made of brass, each with a set of tall black candles in it. These were burning and gave off a pale blue glow. They seemed to be perfumed, too, and the odor which they burned with was pleasant — at first. Then, as I sniffed a second time it seemed to me there was a faint suspicion of a stench about it, something like the fetor that you smell if you’re driving down the road and pass a dog or cat that’s been run over and has lain a while out in the sun — just a momentary whiff, but nauseating, just the same. Between the candelabra, right exactly in the center of the altar, but back against the wall, was a yard-high crucifix of some black wood with an ivory figure on it, upside down. Before the cross there was a silver wine goblet and a box of gilt inlay about the size and shape of a lady’s powder-puff box.

“I heard Atkins catch his breath and give a sort of groan. He’d been brought up an Episcopalian and knew about such things. He turned half round to leave, but I caught him by the sleeve.

“‘Come on, you fool, don’t be a sissy!’ I admonished, and next moment we were all so interested that he had no thought of leaving.

“There was a sort of congregation in the chapel; every seat was occupied by someone masked and robed just as we were, save three vacant places by the altar steps. These, we knew, were kept for us, but when we looked about for Herbules he was nowhere to be seen; so we went forward to our seats alone. We could hear a hum of whispering as we walked up the aisle, and we knew some of the voices were from women; but who was man and who was woman was impossible to tell, for each one looked just like his neighbor in his shrouding robe.

“The whispering suddenly became intense, like the susurrus of a hive of swarming bees. Every neck seemed suddenly to crane, every eye to look in one direction, and as we turned our glances toward the right side of the cellar we saw a woman entering through a curtained doorway. She wore a long, loose scarlet cape which she held together with one hand, her hair was very black, her eyes were large and luminously dark, seeming to have a glance of overbearing sensuousness and sweet humility at once. Her white, set face was an imponderable mask; her full red lips were fixed in an uneven, bitter line. Beneath the hem of her red cloak we saw the small feet in the golden, high-heeled slippers were un-

stockinged. As she neared the altar she sank low in genuflection, then wheeled about and faced us. For a moment she stood there, svelte, graceful, mysteriously beautiful with that thin white face and scarlet lips so like a mask; then with a sudden kicking motion she unshod her feet, opened wide her cloak and let it fall in scarlet billows on the dull-black carpet of the altar steps.

“She was so beautiful it almost hurt the eyes to look at her as she stood there in white silhouette against the ebon background of the black-draped altar, with her narrow, boy-like hips, slim thighs and full, high, pointed breasts. She was a thing of snow and fire, her body palely cool and virginal, her lips like flame, her eyes like embers blazing when a sudden wind stirs them to brightness.

“The modern strip-tease routine was unthought of in those days, and though I was sophisticated far beyond my eighteen years I had never seen a woman in the nude before. The flame of her raced in my blood and crashed against my brain with almost numbing impact. I felt myself go faint and sick with sudden weakness and desire.

“A long-drawn sign came from the audience; then the tableau was abruptly broken as the girl turned from us, mounted nimbly to the black-draped altar and stretched herself full length upon it, crossed her ankles and thrust her arms out right and left, so that her body made a white cross on the sable altar-cloth. Her eyes were closed as though in peaceful sleep, but her bosoms rose and fell with her tumultuous breathing. She had become the altar!

“Silence fell upon the congregation like a shadow, and next instant Herbules came in. He wore a priest’s vestments, a long red cassock, over it the alb and stole, and in his hand he bore a small red book. Behind him came his acolyte, but it was not an altar-boy. It was a girl, slender, copper-haired, *petite*. She wore a short surcoat of scarlet, cut low around the shoulders, sleeveless, reaching just below the hips, like the tabards worn by mediæval heralds. Over it she wore a laced-edged cotta. Otherwise she was unclothed. We could hear the softly-slapping patter of her small bare feet upon the altar-sill as she changed her place from side to side, genuflecting as she passed the reversed crucifix. She swung a brazen censer to and fro before her and the gray smoke curled in spurting puffs from it, filling the entire place with a perfume like that generated by the candles, but stronger, more intense, intoxicating.

“Herbules began the service with a muttered Latin prayer, and though he seemed to follow a set ritual even I could see it was not that prescribed by any church, for when he knelt he did so with his back turned toward the altar; when he crossed himself he did it with the thumb of his left hand, and made the sign beginning at the bottom, rather than the top. But even in this mummers’ parody the service was majestic.

I could feel its power and compulsion as it swept on toward its climax. Herbules took up the silver chalice and held it high above his head, then rested it upon the living altar, placing it between her breasts, and we could see the flesh around her nails grow white as she grasped the black-palled altar table with her fingers. Her body, shining palely on the coffin-pall under the flickering candles’ light, was arched up like a taut bow, she shook as if a sudden chill had seized her, and from her tight-drawn, scarlet lips there issued little whimpering sounds, not cries nor yet quite groans, but something which partook of both, and at the same time made me think of the soft, whining sounds a new-born puppy makes.

“The kneeling acolyte chimed a sacring-bell and the congregation bent and swayed like a wheat-field swept across by sudden wind.

“When all was finished we were bidden to come forward and kneel before the altar steps. Herbules came down and stood above us, and each of us was made to kiss the red book which he held and take a fearful oath, swearing that he would abstain from good and embrace evil, serve Satan faithfully and well, and do his best to bring fresh converts to the worship of the Devil. Should we in any manner break our oath, we all agreed that Satan might at once foreclose upon his mortgage on our souls, and bear us still alive to hell, and the sign that we were come for was to be the odor of the perfume which the candles and the censer gave that night.

“When this ritual was finished we were bidden name our dearest wish, and told it would be granted. I could hear the others mumble something, but could not understand their words. I don’t know what possessed me when it came my turn to ask a boon of Satan — possibly he put the thought into my mind, maybe it was my longing to get out of school and go to France before the war was ended. At any rate, when Herbules bent over me I muttered, ‘I wish the pater would bump off.’

“He leaned toward me with a smile and whispered, ‘You begin your postulancy well, my son,’ then held his hand out to me, signifying that I should return his clasp with both of mine. As I put out my hands to take his I saw by my wrist-watch that it was exactly half-past twelve.

“What followed was the wildest party I had ever seen or dreamt of. The farmhouse windows had been boarded up and curtained, and inside the rooms were literally ablaze with light. Men and women, some draped in their red dominoes, some in evening dress, some naked as the moment that they first drew breath, mingled in a perfect saturnalia of unrestrained salacity. On tables stood ice-buckets with champagne, and beside them tall decanters of cut glass filled with port and sherry, tokay, madeira, muscatel and malaga. Also there was bottled brandy, vodka and whisky, trays of

cigarettes, boxes of cigars, sandwiches, cake and sweetmeats. It was like the carnival at New Orleans, only ten times gayer, madder, more abandoned. I was grasped by naked men and women, whirled furiously around in a wild dance, then let go only to be seized by some new partner and spun around until I almost fell from dizziness. Between times I drank, mixing wine and spirits without thought, stuffed sandwiches and cake and candy in my mouth, then drank fresh drafts of chilled champagne or sharp-toned brandy.

“Staggering drunkenly about the table I was reaching for another glass when I felt a hand upon my shoulder. Turning, I beheld a pair of flashing eyes laughing at me through the peep-holes of a mask. ‘Come with me, my neophyte,’ the masked girl whispered; ‘there is still a chalice you have left untasted.’

“She pulled me through the crowd, led me up the stairs and thrust a door ajar. The little room we entered was entirely oriental. A Persian lamp hung like a blazing ruby from the ceiling, on the floor were thick, soft rugs and piles of down-filled pillows. There was no other furniture.

“With a laugh she turned her back to me, motioning me to slip the knot which held the girdle of her domino; then she bent her head while I withdrew the pins that held her hair. It rippled in a cascade to her waist — below, nearly to her knees — black and glossy as the plumage of a grackle’s throat, and as it cataracted down she swung around, shrugging her shoulders quickly, and let the scarlet domino fall from her. An upswing of her hand displaced the black-faced, purple, grinning mask, and I looked directly in the face of the pale girl who half an hour earlier had lain upon the altar of the Devil. ‘Kiss me!’ she commanded. ‘Kiss me!’ Her arms were tight about my neck, pulling my lips to hers, drawing her slender, unclothed body tight against me. Her lips clung to my mouth as though they were a pair of scarlet leeches; through her half-closed lids I saw the glimmer of her bright black eyes, burning like twin points of quenchless fire....

“It was daylight when we reached the dorm next day, and all of us reported sick at chapel. Sometime about eleven, as I rose to get a drink of water, a knock came at my door. It was a telegram that stated:

Father dropped dead in his study at twelve forty-five.
Come.

MOTHER.

“I hurried back to school as soon as possible. My father’s death had startled — frightened — me, but I put it down to coincidence, He’d been suffering from Bright’s disease for several years, and probably his number’d just turned up, I told myself. Besides, the longing for the celebration of the

sacrilegious Mass with its sensual stimulation, followed by the orgiastic parties, had me in a grip as strong as that which opium exerts upon its addicts.

“Twice a week, each Wednesday and Friday, my three friends and I attended the salacious services held in the old farmhouse cellar, followed by the revels in the upper rooms, and bit by bit we learned about our fellow cultists. Herbules, the head and center of the cult, was a priest stripped of his orders. Pastor of a parish in the suburbs of Vienna, he had dabbled in the Black Art, seduced a number of his congregation from their faith, finally celebrated the Black Mass. The ecclesiastical authorities unfrocked him, the civil government jailed him on a morals charge, but disgrace could not impair his splendid education or his brilliant mind, and as soon as his imprisonment was over he emigrated to America and at once secured a post as teacher. Though his talents were unquestionable, his morals were not, and scandal followed every post he held. He was at the end of his string when he managed to worm his way into the Horton trustees’ confidence and secured the post left vacant by the former headmaster’s entrance in the Army.

“Our companion Devil-worshippers were mostly college and preparatory students looking for a thrill, now tangled in the net of fascination that the cult spun round its devotees, but a few of them were simply vicious, while others turned to demonolatry because they had lost faith in God.

“One of these was Marescha Nurmi, the girl who acted as the living altar. She was my constant partner at the orgies, and bit by bit I learned her history. Only nineteen, she was the victim of a heart affliction and the doctors gave her but a year to live. When they pronounced sentence she was almost prostrated; then in desperation she turned to religion, going every day to church and spending hours on her knees in private prayer. But medical examination showed her illness was progressing, and when she chanced to hear of Herbules’ devil-cult she came to it. ‘I’m too young, too beautiful to die!’ she told me as we lay locked in each others’ arms one night. ‘Why should God take my life? I never injured Him. All right, if He won’t have me, Satan will. He’ll give me life and happiness and power, let me live for years and years; keep me young and beautiful when all these snivelling Christian girls are old and faded. What do I care if I go to Hell to pay for it? I’ll take my heaven here on earth, and when the bill’s presented I won’t welch!’

“There’s an old saying that each time God makes a beautiful woman the Devil opens a new page in his ledger. He must have had to put in a whole set of books when Marescha was converted to our cult. She was attractive as a witch, had no more conscience than a snake, and positively burned with ardor to do evil. Night after night she brought new converts to the cult, sometimes young men, sometimes

girls. ‘Come on, you little fool,’ I heard her urge a girl who shrank from the wild orgy following initiation. ‘Take off your robe; that’s what we’re here for. This is our religion, the oldest in the world; it’s revolt against the goody-goodies, revolt against the narrowness of God; we live for pleasure and unbridled passion instead of abnegation and renunciation — life and love and pleasure in a world of vivid scarlet, instead of fear and dreariness in a world all cold and gray. That’s our creed and faith. We’re set apart, we’re marked for pleasure, we worshippers of Satan.’”

“*Tiens*, the lady was a competent saleswoman,” de Grandin murmured. “Did she realize her dreams?”

The laugh that prefaced Balderson’s reply was like the echo of a chuckle in a vaulted tomb. “I don’t know if she got her money’s worth, but certainly she paid,” he answered. “It was nearing graduation time, and the celebrations were about to stop until the fall, for it would be impossible to keep the farmhouse windows shuttered so they’d show no gleam of light, especially with so many people on the roads in summer. Herbules had just completed invocation, raised the chalice overhead and set it on Marescha’s breast when we saw her twitch convulsively. The little whimpering animal-cries she always made when the climax of the obscene parody was reached gave way to a choked gasping, and we saw the hand that clutched the altar-table suddenly relax. She raised her head and stared around the chapel with a look that sent the chill of horror rippling through me, then cried out in a strangled voice: ‘O Lord, be pitiful!’ Then she fell back on the coffin-pall that draped the altar and her fingers dangled loosely on its edge, her feet uncrossed and lay beside each other.

“Herbules was going on as if nothing had happened, but the woman who sat next to me let out a sudden wail. ‘Look at her,’ she screamed. ‘Look at her face!’

“Marescha’s head had turned a little to one side, and we saw her features in the altar-candles’ light. Her dark hair had come unbound and fell about her face as though it sought to hide it. Her eyes were not quite closed, nor fully open, for a thread of gray eyeball was visible between the long black lashes. Her mouth was partly open, not as though she breathed through it, but lax, slack, as though she were exhausted. Where a line of white defined the lower teeth we saw her tongue had fallen forward, lying level with the full, red lip.

“Somewhere in the rear of the chapel another woman’s voice, shrilly pitched, but controlled, cried out: ‘She’s dead!’

“There was a wave of movement in the worshippers. Chairs were overturned, gowns rustled, whispered questions buzzed like angry bees. Then the woman sitting next me screamed again: ‘This is no natural death, no illness killed

her; she’s been stricken dead for sacrilege, she’s sacrificed for our sins — fly, fly before the wrath of God blasts all of us!’

“Herbules stood at the altar facing us. A mask as of some inner feeling, of strange, forbidden passions, of things that raced on scurrying feet within his brain, seemed to drop across his features. His face seemed old and ancient, yet at the same time ageless; his eyes took on a glaze like polished agate. He raised both hands above his head, the fingers flexed like talons, and laughed as if at some dark jest known only to himself. ‘Whoso leaves the temple of his Lord without partaking of this most unholy sacrament, the same will Satan cast aside, defenseless from the vengeance of an outraged God!’ he cried.

“Then I knew. Karl Erik Herbules, renegade Christian priest, brilliant scholar, poisoner of souls and votary of Satan, was mad as any Tom o’ Bedlam!

“He stood there by the Devil’s altar hurling curses at us, threatening us with Heaven’s vengeance, casting an anathema upon us with such vile insults and filthy language as a fishwife would not dare to use.

“But panic had the congregation by the throat. They pushed and fought and scratched and bit like frenzied cats, clawing and slashing at one another till they gained the exit, then rushing pell-mell down the hill to their parked cars with out a backward look, leaving Herbules alone beside the altar he had raised to Satan, with the dead girl stretched upon it.

“There was no chance that Herbules would help. He kept reciting passages from the Black Mass, genuflecting to the altar, filling and refilling the wine-cup and stuffing his mouth with the wafers meant to parody the Host. So Trivers, Eldridge, Atkins and I took Marescha’s body to the river, weighted it with window-irons and dropped it in the water. But the knots we tied must have been loose, or else the weights were insufficient, for as we turned to leave, her body floated almost to the surface and one white arm raised above the river’s glassy face, as though to wave a mute farewell. It must have been a trick the current played as the tide bore her away, but to us it seemed that her dead hand pointed to us each in turn; certainly there was no doubt it bobbed four times above the river’s surface before the swirling waters sucked it out of sight.

“You’ve probably heard garbled rumors of what happened afterward. The farmhouse burned that night, and because there was no water to be had, there was no salvage. Still, a few things were not utterly destroyed, and people in the neighborhood still wonder how those Persian lamps and brazen candlesticks came to be in that deserted house.

“Herbules committed suicide that night, and when the auditors went over his accounts they found he’d practically wrecked Horton. There was hardly a cent left, for he’d

financed his whole grisly farce of Devil worship with the money he embezzled. The trustees made the losses good and gave up in disgust. Ours was the last class graduated.

“They found Marescha’s body floating in the Shrewsbury two days later, and at first the coroner was sure she’d been the victim of a murder; for while the window-weights had fallen off, the cords that tied them were still knotted round her ankles. When the autopsy disclosed she’d not been drowned, but had been put into the river after death from heart disease, the mystery was deepened, but until tonight only four people knew its answer. Now there are only three.”

“Three, Monsieur?” de Grandin asked.

“That’s right. Trivers, Atkins and Eldridge are dead. I’m still here, and you and Doctor Trowbridge—”

“Your figures are at fault, my friend. You forget we are physicians, and your narrative was given us in confidence.”

“But see here,” I asked as the silence lengthened, “what is there about all this to make you want to kill yourself? If you’d been grown men when you joined these Devil-worshippers it would have been more serious, but college boys are always in some sort of mischief, and this all happened twenty years ago. You say you are sincerely sorry for it, and after all, the leaders in the movement died, so—”

Balderson broke through my moralizing with a short, hard laugh. “Men die more easily than memories, Doctor. Besides—”

“Yes, *Monsieur*, besides?” de Grandin prompted as our guest stared silently into the study fire.

“Do you believe the spirits of the dead — the dead who are in Hell, or at least cut off from Heaven — can come back to plague the living?” he demanded.

De Grandin brushed the ends of his small waxed mustache with that gesture which always reminded me of a tomcat combing his whiskers. “You have experienced such a visitation?”

“I have. So did the others.”

“*Mordieu!* How was it?”

“You may remember reading that Ted Eldridge hanged himself? Three days before it happened, he met me on the street, and I could see that he was almost frantic. ‘I saw Marescha last night!’ he told me in a frightened whisper.

“‘Marescha? You must be off your rocker, man! We put her in the Shrewsbury—’

“‘And she’s come back again. Remember the perfume of the candles and the incense *Herbules* used in celebrating the Black Mass? I’d come home from New York last night, and was getting ready for a drink before I went to bed, when I began to smell it. At first I thought it was some fool trick that my senses played on me, but the scent kept getting stronger. It seemed as if I were back in that dreadful chapel with the

tall black candles burning and the hellish incense smoldering, *Herbules* in his red vestments and Marescha lying naked on the altar — I could almost hear the chanting of inverted prayers and the little whimpering noises that she made. I gulped my drink down in two swallows and turned round. She was standing there, with water on her face and streaming from her hair, and her hands held out to me—’

“‘You’re crazy as a goat!’ I told him. ‘Come have a drink.’

“He looked at me a moment, then turned away, walking quickly down the street and muttering to himself.

“I’d not have thought so much about it if I hadn’t read about his suicide next day, and if Stanley Trivers hadn’t called me on the telephone. ‘Hear about Ted Eldkidge?’ he asked the moment I had said hello. When I told him I’d just read about it he demanded: ‘Did you see him — recently?’

“‘Yes, ran into him in Broad Street yesterday,’ I answered.

“‘Seemed worried, didn’t he? Did he tell you anything about Marescha?’

“‘Say, what is this?’ I asked. ‘Did he say anything to you—’

“‘Yes, he did, and I thought he had a belfry full o’ bats.’

“‘There’s not much doubt the poor old lad was cuckoo—’

“‘That’s where you’re mistaken, Balderson. According to the paper he’d been dead for something like four hours when they found him. That would have made it something like four o’clock when he died.’

“‘So what?’

“‘So this: I waked up at four o’clock this morning and the room was positively stifling with the odor of the incense they used in the Black Chapel—’

“‘Yeah? I suppose you saw Marescha, too?’

“‘I did! She was standing by my bed, with water streaming from her face and body, and tears were in her eyes.’

“‘I tried to talk him out of it, tell him that it was a trick of his imagination stimulated by Ted Eldridge’s wild talk, but he insisted that he’d really seen her. Two days later he committed suicide.

“‘Don Atkins followed. I didn’t talk with him before he shot himself, but I’ll wager that he saw her, too, and smelled that Devil’s incense.’

De Grandin looked at me with upraised brows, then shook his head to caution silence ere he turned to face our guest. “And you, *Monsieur*?” he asked.

“Yes, I too. Don killed himself sometime in early afternoon, and I was home that day. I’d say that it was shortly after two, for I’d lunched at the City Club and come home to pack a bag and take a trip to Nantakee. I had the highboy open and was taking out some shirts when I began

to notice a strange odor in the air. But it wasn't strange for long; as it grew stronger I recognized it as the scent of Herbules' incense. It grew so strong that it was almost overpowering. I stood there by the chest of drawers, smelling the increasing scent, and determined that I'd not turn round. You know how Coleridge puts it:

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread ...

"The odor of the incense grew until I could have sworn somebody swung a censer right behind me. Then, suddenly, I heard the sound of falling water. '*Drip — drip—drip!*' it fell upon the floor, drop by deliberate drop. The suspense was more than I could bear, and I wheeled about.

"Marescha stood behind me, almost close enough to touch. Water trickled from the hair that hung in gleaming strands across her breast and shoulders, it hung in little gleaming globules on her pale, smooth skin, ran in little rivulets across her forehead, down her beautifully shaped legs, made tiny puddles on the polished floor beside each slim bare foot. I went almost sick with horror as I saw the knotted cords we'd used to tie the window-weights on her still bound about her ankles, water oozing from their coils. She did not seem dead. Her lovely slender body seemed as vital as when I had held it in my arms, her full and mobile lips were red with rouge, her eyes were neither set and staring nor expressionless. But they were sad, immeasurably sad. They seemed to probe into my spirit's very depths, asking, beseeching, entreating. And to make their plea more eloquent, she slowly raised her lovely hands and held them out to me, palms upward, fingers slightly curled, as though she besought alms.

"There was a faint resemblance to her bitter, crooked smile upon her lips, but it was so sad, so hopelessly entreating, that it almost made me weep to see it.

"'Mar—' I began, but the name stuck in my throat. This couldn't be the body that I'd held against my heart, those lips were not the lips I'd kissed a thousand times; this was no girl of flesh and blood. Marescha, lay deep in a grave in Shadow Lawns Cemetery; had lain there almost twenty years. Dust had filled those sad, entreating eyes long before the college freshmen of this year were born. The worms ...

"Somewhere I had heard that if you called upon the Trinity a ghost would vanish. 'In the name of the Father—' I began, but it seemed as if a clap of thunder sounded in my ears.

"'What right have you to call upon the Triune God?' a

mighty voice seemed asking. 'You who have mocked at Heaven, taken every sacred name in vain, made a jest of every holy thing — how dare you invoke Deity? Your sacrilegious lips cannot pronounce the sacred name!'

"And it was true. I tried again, but the words clogged in my throat; I tried to force them out, but only strangling inarticulacies sounded.

"Marescha's smile was almost pityingly tender, but still she stood there pleading, entreating, begging me, though what it was she wanted I could not divine. I threw my arm across my eyes to shut the vision out, but when I took it down she was still there, and still the water dripped from her entreating hands, ran in little courses from her dankly-hanging hair, fell drop by drop from the sopping cords that ringed her ankles.

"I stumbled blindly from the house and walked the streets for hours. Presently I bought a paper, and the headlines told me Donald Atkins had been found, a suicide, in his apartment.

"When I reached my house again the incense still hung in the air, but the vision of Marescha was not there. I drank almost a pint of brandy, neat, and fell across my bed. When I recovered from my alcoholic stupor Marescha stood beside me, her great eyes luminous with tears, her hands outstretched in mute entreaty.

"She's been with me almost every waking instant since that night. I drank myself into oblivion, but every time I sobered she was standing by me. I'd walk the streets for hours, but every time I halted she would be there, always silent, always with her hands held out, always with that look of supplication in her tear-filled eyes. I'd rush at her and try to drive her off with blows and kicks. She seemed to float away, staying just outside my reach, however savagely I ran at her, and though I cursed her, using every foul word I knew, she never changed expression, never showed resentment; just stood and looked at me with sad, imploring eyes, always seeming to be begging me for something.

"I can't endure it any longer, gentlemen. Tonight she stood beside me when I halted on North Bridge, and I'd have been at peace by now if you'd not come along—"

"*Non*, there you are mistaken, *mon ami*," de Grandin contradicted. "Had you carried your intention out and leaped into the river you would have sealed your doom irrevocably. Instead of leaving her you would have joined her for eternity."

"All right," Balderson asked raspily, "I suppose you have a better plan?"

"I think I have," the little Frenchman answered. "First, I would suggest you let us give you sedatives. You will not be troubled while you sleep, and while you rest we shall be

active.”

“Shakespeare was right,” I said as we left our patient sleeping from a dose of chloral hydrate. “Conscience does make cowards of us all. The memory of that early indiscretion has haunted that quartet of worthless youngsters twenty years. No wonder they kept seeing that poor girl after they’d thrown her so callously into the Shrewsbury. Of all the heartless, despicable things—”

He emerged from a brown study long enough to interrupt: “And is your conscience clean, my friend?”

“What has my conscience to do with it? I didn’t throw a dead girl in the river; I didn’t—”

“*Précisément*, neither did the good Costello, yet both of you described the odor of that Devil’s incense: Costello when he went to view the bodies of the suicides, you when we halted Monsieur Balderson’s attempt at self-destruction. Were you also haunted by that scent, or were you not?”

“I smelled it,” I responded frigidly, “but I wasn’t haunted by it. Just what is it you’re driving at?”

“That the odor of that incense, or even the perception of the dead Marescha’s *revenant*, is no optical illusion caused by guilty conscience. It is my firm conviction that the apparition which appeared to these unfortunate young men was the earthbound spirit of a girl who begged a boon from them.”

“Then you don’t think that she haunted them because they’d thrown her body in the river?”

“Entirely no. I think she came to ask their help, and in their fear and horror at beholding her they could not understand her plea. First one and then another, lashed with the scorpion-whip of an accusing conscience, destroyed himself because he dared not look into her pleading eyes, thinking they accused him of mistreating her poor body, when all the *pauvre belle créature* asked was that they help her to secure release from her earthbound condition.”

“Why should she have appealed to them?”

“In all that congregation of benighted worshippers of evil, she knew them best. They saw her die, they gave her body sepulture; one of them, at least, had been her lover, and was, presumably, bound to her by ties of mutual passion. She was most strongly in their minds and memories. It was but natural that she should appeal to them for succor. Did not you notice one outstanding fact in all the testimony — the poor Marescha appeared to them in turn, looking not reproachfully, but pleadingly? Her lips were held, she might not put her plea in words. She could but come to them as they had last beheld her, entreat them by dumb show, and hope that they would understand. One by one they failed her; one by one they failed to understand—”

“Well, is there anything that we can do about it?”

“I think there is. Come, let us be upon our way.”

“Where the deuce—”

“To the rectory of St. Chrysostom. I would interview the Reverend Doctor Bentley.”

“At this time of night?”

“*Mais certainement*, clergymen and doctors, they have no privacy, my friend. Surely, you need not be told that.”

The freshly lighted fire burned brightly in the Reverend Peter Bentley’s study, the blue smoke spiraled upward from the tips of our cigars, the gray steam curled in fragrant clouds from the glasses of hot Scots which stood upon the coffee-table. Looking anything but clerical in red-flannel bathrobe, black pajamas and red Turkish slippers, Doctor Bentley listened with surprizing tolerance to de Grandin’s argument.

“But it seems the poor girl died in mortal sin,” he murmured, obviously more in sorrow than in righteous indignation. “According to your statement, her last frantic words called on the Devil to fulfill his bargain: ‘O Lord, be pitiful—’”

“*Précisément, mon père*, but who can say her prayer was made to Satan? True, those so bewildered, misled followers of evil were wont to call the Devil Lord and Master, but is it not entirely possible that she repented and addressed her dying prayer to the real Lord of the heaven and earth? Somewhere an English poet says of the last-minute prayer of a not-wholly-righteous fox-hunter who was unhorsed and broke his sinful neck:

Betwixt the stirrup and the ground
I mercy asked; mercy I found.

“Me, I believe in all sincerity that her repentance was as true as that the thief upon the cross expressed; that in the last dread moment she perceived the grievous error of her ways and made at once confession of sin and prayer for pity with her dying breath.

“But she had bent the knee at Satan’s shrine. With her fair body — that body which was given her to wear as if it were a garment to the greater glory of the Lord — she parodied the sacred faircloth of the altar. By such things she had cut herself adrift, she had put herself beyond communion with the righteous which is the blessed company of all the faithful. There was no priest to shrive her sin-encumbered soul, no one to read words of forgiveness and redemption above her lifeless clay. Until some one of her companions in iniquity will perform the service of contrition for her, until the office for the burial of Christian dead is read above her grave, she lies excommunicate and earthbound. She cannot even expiate her faults in Purgatory till forgiveness of sins has been formally pronounced. Sincerely repentant, Hell is not for her; unshrived, and with no formal statement of conditional forgiveness, she cannot quit the earth, but must wander here among the scenes of her brief and sadly

misspent life. Do we dare withhold our hands to save her from a fate like that?"

Doctor Bentley sipped thoughtfully at his hot Scots. "There may be something in your theory," he admitted. "I'm not especially strong on doctrine, but I can't believe the fathers of the early church were the crude nincompoops some of our modern theologians call them. They preached posthumous absolution, and there are instances recorded where excommunicated persons who had hovered round the scenes they'd known in life were given rest and peace when absolution was pronounced above their graves. Tell me, is this Balderson sincerely sorry for his misdeeds?"

"I could swear it, *mon père*."

"Then bring him to the chapel in the morning. If he will make confession and declare sincere repentance, then submit himself to holy baptism, I'll do what you request. It's rather mediæval, but — I'd hate to think that I'm so modern that I would not take a chance to save two souls."

The penitential service in the Chapel of the Intercession was a brief but most impressive one. Only Balderson, I and de Grandin occupied the pews, with Doctor Bentley in his stole and cassock, but without his surplice, at the little altar:

"... we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against Thy holy laws ... remember not, Lord, our offenses nor the offenses of our forefathers, neither take Thou vengeance of our sins ... we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickednesses; the memory of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable..."

After absolution followed the short service ordered for the baptism of adults; then we set out for Shadow Lawns.

Now Doctor Bentley wore his full canonicals, and his surplice glinted almost whiter than the snow that wrapped the mounded graves as he paused beside an unmarked hillock in the Nurmi family plot.

Slowly he began in that low, full voice with which he fills a great church to its farthest corner; "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live..."

It was one of those still winter days, quieter than an afternoon in August, for no chirp of bird or whir of insect sounded no breath of breeze disturbed the evergreens; yet as he read the opening sentence of the office for the burial of the dead a low wail sounded in the copse of yew and hemlock on the hill, as though a sudden wind moaned in the branches, and I stiffened as a scent was borne across the snow-capped grave mounds. Incense! Yet not exactly incense, either. There was an undertone of feter in it, a faint, distinctly charnel smell. Balderson was trembling, and despite myself I flinched, but Doctor Bentley and de Grandin gave no sign of recognition.

"Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts, shut not Thy merciful ears to our prayer, but spare us, Lord most holy..." intoned the clergyman, and,

"Amen," said Jules de Grandin firmly as the prayer concluded.

The Æolian wailing in the evergreens died to a sobbing, low clamoration as Doctor Bentley traced in sand a cross upon the snow-capped grave, declaring: "Unto Almighty God we commend the soul of our departed sister, and we commit her body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the *sure and certain hope of the Resurrection into eternal life...*"

And now there was no odor of corruption in the ghostly perfume, but the clean, inspiring scent of frankincense, redolent of worship at a thousand consecrated altars.

As the last amen was said and Doctor Bentley turned away I could have sworn I heard a gentle slapping sound and saw the blond hairs of de Grandin's small mustache bend inward, as though a pair of lips invisible to me had kissed him on the mouth.

Doctor Bentley dined with us that night, and over coffee and liqueurs we discussed the case.

"It was a fine thing you did," the cleric told de Grandin. "Six men in seven would have sent him packing and bid him work out his salvation — or damnation — for himself. There's an essential nastiness in Devil-worship which is revolting to the average man, not to mention its abysmal wickedness—"

"*Tiens*, who of us can judge another's wickedness?" the little Frenchman answered. "The young man was repentant, and repentance is the purchase price of heavenly forgiveness. Besides" — a look of strain, like a nostalgic longing, came into his eyes — "before the altar of a convent in *la belle France* kneels one whom I have loved as I can never love another in this life. Ceaselessly, except the little time she sleeps, she makes prayer and intercession for a sinful world. Could I hold fast the memory of our love if I refused to match in works the prayer she makes in faith? *Eh bien, mon père*, my inclination was to give him a smart kick in the posterior; to bid him go and sin no more, but sinfully or otherwise, to go. *Ha*, but I am strong, me. I overcame that inclination."

The earnestness of his expression faded and an impish grin replaced it as he poured a liberal potion of Napoléon 1811 in his brandy-snifter. "Jules de Grandin," he apostrophized himself, "you have acted like a true man. You have overcome your natural desires; you have kept the faith.

"Jules de Grandin, my good and much admired self — be pleased to take a drink!"

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SUICIDE CHAPEL

By SEABURY QUINN

ROBERT BLOCH

GANS T. FIELD

EANDO BINDER

Suicide Chapel

ALTHOUGH the calendar declared it was late May the elements and the thermometer denied it. All day the rain had streamed torrentially and the wind keened like a moaning banshee through the newly budded leaves that furred the maple boughs. Now the raving tempest laid a lacquer-like veneer of driven water on the window-pane and howled a bawdy chanson down the chimney where a four-log fire was blazing on the hearth. Fresh from a steaming shower and smelling most agreeably of Roman Hyacinth, Jules de Grandin sat before the fire and gazed with unconcealed approval at the toe tip of his purple leather slipper. A mauve silk scarf was knotted Ascot fashion round his throat, his hands were drawn up in the sleeves of his deep violet brocade dressing-gown, and on his face was that look of somnolent content which well-fed tomcats wear when they are thoroughly at peace with themselves and the world. “Not for a thousand gold Napoleons would I set foot outside this house again tonight,” he told me as he dipped into the pocket of his robe, fished out a pack of “Marylands” and set one of the evil-smelling things alight. “Three times, three separate, distinct times, have I been soaked to saturation in this *sacré* rain today. Now, if the Empress Joséphine came to me in the flesh and begged that I should go with her, I would refuse the assignation. Regretfully, *mais certainement*, but definitely. Me, I would not stir outside the door for—”

“Sergeant Costello, if ye plaze, sor,” came the rich Irish brogue of Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, who appeared outside the study entrance like a figure materialized in a vaudeville illusion. “He says it’s most important, sor.”

“*Tiens*, bid him enter, *ma petite*, and bring a bottle of the Irish whisky from the cellar,” de Grandin answered with a smile; then:

“*C’est véritablement toi, ami?*” he asked as the big Irishman came in and held cold-reddened fingers to the fire. “What evil wind has blown you out on such a fetid night?”

“Evil is th’ word, sor,” Costello answered as he drained the glass de Grandin proffered. “Have ye been radin’ in th’ papers of th’ Cogswell gur-rl’s disappearin’, I dunno?”

“But yes, of course. Was she not the young woman who evaporated from her dormitory at the Shelton School three months ago? You have found her, *mon vieux?* You are to be congratulated. In my experience—”

“Would yer experience tell ye what to do when a second gur-rl pops outa sight in pracruzely th’ same manner, lavin’ nayther hide nor hair o’ clue?”

De Grandin’s small blue eyes closed quickly, then opened

wide, for all the world like an astonished cat’s. “But surely, there is some little trace of evidence, some hint of hidden romance, some—”

“Some nothin’ at all, sor. Three months ago today th’ Cogswell gur-rl went to ’er room immejiately afther class. Th’ elevator boy who took her up seen her walk down th’ hall, two classmates said hello to her. Then she shut her door, an’ shut herself outa th’ wor-rld entirely, so it seems. Nobody’s seen or heard o’ her since then. This afthernoon, just afther four o’clock, th’ Lefêtre gur-rl comes from th’ lab’ratory, goes straight to ’er room an’” — he paused and raised his massive shoulders in a ponderous shrug — “there’s another missin’-persons case fer me to wrestle wid. I’ve come to ask yer help, sor.”

De Grandin pursed his lips and arched his narrow brows. “I am not interested in criminal investigation, *mon sergent.*”

“Not even to save an old pal in a hot spot, sor?”

“*Hein?* How is it you say?”

“’Tis this way, sor. When th’ Cogswell gur-rl evaporated, as ye say, they gave th’ case to me, though be rights it b’longed to th’ Missin’ Persons Bureau. Well, sor, when a gur-rl fades out that way there may be anny number o’ good reasons fer it, but mostly it’s because she wants to. An’ th’ more ye asks th’ family questions th’ less ye learn. ‘Had she anny, love affairs?’ sez you, an’ ‘No!’ sez they, as if ye’d been set on insultin’ her. ‘Wuz she happy in her home?’ ye asks, an’ ‘Certainly, she wuz!’ they tells ye, an’ they imply ye’ve hinted that they bate her up each night at eight o’clock an’ matinees at two-fifteen. So it goes. Each time ye try to git some reason for her disappearin’ act they gits huffier an’ huffier till finally they sez they’re bein’ persecuted, an’ ye git th’ wor-rks, both from th’ chief an’ newspapers.’

“Perfectly,” de Grandin nodded. “As Monsieur Gilbert says, a policeman’s life is not a happy one.”

“Ye’re tellin’ me! But this time it’s still worse, sor. When I couldn’t break th’ Cogswell case they hinted I wuz slowin’ down, an’ had maybe seen me best days. Now they goes an’ dumps this here new case in me lap an’ tells me if I fail to break it I’ll be back in harness wid a nightstick in me hand before I’ve checked another birthday off. So, sor, if ye could—”

“*Pas possible!* They dare say this to you, the peerless officer, the pride of the *gendarmérie*—”

“They sure did, sor. An’ lots more—”

“Aside, Friend Trowbridge; aside, *mon sergent* — make passageway for me. Await while I put on my outside

clothing. I shall show them, me. We shall see if they can do such things to my tried friend — *les crétins!*”

So incredibly short was the interval elapsing before he rejoined us with his hat pulled down above his eyes, trench coat buttoned tight beneath his chin, that I could not understand until I caught a flash of violet silk pajama leg bloused out above the top of his laced boots.

“Lead on, my *sergent*,” he commanded. “Take us to the place which this so foolish girl selected for her disappearance. We shall find her or otherwise!”

“Would ye be manin’ ‘or else,’ sor, I dunno?”

“*Ah bah*, who cares? Let us be about our task!”

“Sure, we got a full description o’ th’ clothes she wore when she skedaddled,” Costello told us as we drove out toward the fashionable suburb where the Shelton School was located. “She wuz wearin’ orange-colored lounging pajamas an’ pegged orange-colored slippers.”

“Pegged?” de Grandin echoed. “Was she then poor—”

“Divil a bit o’ it, sor. Her folks is rich as creases, but she wuz overdrawn on her allowance, and had to cut th’ corners til her next check came.”

“One comprehends. And then—”

“There ain’t no then, sor. We’ve inventoried all her wardrobe, an’ everything is present but th’ duds she wore when she came in from class. Not even a hat’s missin’. O’ course, that don’t mean nothin’ much. If she’d set her heart or lammin’, she coulda had another outfit waitin’ for her somewheres else, but—”

“Quite but, my friend,” de Grandin nodded. “Until the contrary appears, we must assume she went away *sans trousseau*.”

With characteristic fickleness the shrewish storm had blown itself away while we drove from the city, and a pale half-waning moon tossed like a bit of lucent jetsam in a purling surf of broken clouds as we drew up beneath the porte-cochère of the big red brick dormitory whence Emerline Lefèvre had set forth for her unknown goal six hours earlier.

“Yas, suh,” replied the colored elevator operator, visibly enjoying the distinction of being questioned by the police. “Ah remembers puffickly erbout hit all. Miss Lefèvre come in from lab. She seemed lak she was in a powerful hurry, an’ didn’t say a thing, ‘ceptin’ to thank me for de letters.”

“The letters? Do you by any happy circumstance remember whence they came?”

“Naw, suh. Ah don’ look at de young ladies’ mail, ‘ceptin’ to see who hit’s for. I recollect dese letters mos’ partickler, though, ‘cause one of ‘em wuz smelled up so grand.”

“Perfumed?”

“An’ how, suh. Jus’ lak de scents de conjur doctors sell, on’y more pretty-smellin’. Dat one wuz in a big vanilla envelope. All sealed up, it wuz, but de odor come right through de paper lak hit wuz nothin’ a-tall.”

“*Merci bien*. Now, if you will kindly take us up—”

The little room where Emerline Lefèvre dwelt was neat and colorless as only hospital, barrack or dormitory rooms can be. No trace of dust marred imitation mahogany furniture. Indifferent reproductions of several of the less rowdy Directoire prints were ranged with mathematical precision on the walls. The counterpane was squared with blocks of blue and white so virginally chaste as to seem positively spinsterish. “*Mon Dieu*, it is a dungeon, nothing less,” de Grandin murmured as he scanned the place. “Can anybody blame a girl for seeking sanctuary from such terrible surround — *quel parfum horrible!*” His narrow nostrils quivered as he sniffed the air. “She had atrocious taste in scent, this so mysteriously absent one.”

“Perhaps it’s the elegant perfume the elevator operator mentioned,” I ventured. “He’d have admired something redolent of musk—”

“*Dis donc!* You put your finger on the pulse, my friend! It is the musk. But yes. I did not recognize him instantly, but now I do. The letter she received was steeped in musk. Why, in Satan’s name? one wonders.”

Thoughtfully, he walked slowly to the window, opened it and thrust his head out, looking down upon the cement walk some fifty feet below. Neither ivy, waterspout nor protuberance of the building offered foothold for a mouse upon the flat straight wall.

“I do not think she went that way,” he murmured as he turned to look up at the overhanging roof.

“Nor that way, either, sor,” Costello rejoined, pointing to the overhanging of mansard roof some seven feet above the window-top.

“U’m? One wonders.” Reaching out, de Grandin tapped an iron cleat set in the wall midway of the window’s height. From the spike’s tip branched a flange of a turnbuckle, evidently intended to secure a shutter at some former time. “A very active person might ascend or — *parbleu!*”

Breaking off his words half uttered, he took a jeweler’s loop out of his raincoat pocket, fixed it in his eye, then played the beam of his electric torch upon the window-sill, subjecting it to a methodical inspection.

“What do you make of this, my friends?” he asked as he passed the glass to us in turn, directing his light ray along the gray stone sill and indicating several tiny scratches on the slate. “They may be recent, they may have been here since the building was erected,” he admitted as we handed back the glass, “but in cases such as this there are no such things

as trifles.”

Once more he leant across the window-sill, then mounted it and bent out till his eyes were level with the rusty iron cleat set in the wall.

“*Morbleu*, it is a repetition!” he exclaimed as he rejoined us. “Up, my *sergent*, up, Friend Trowbridge, and see what you can see upon that iron.”

Gingerly, I clambered to the sill and viewed the rusty cleat through the enlarging-glass while Costello played the flashlight’s beam upon it. On the iron’s reddish surface, invisible, or nearly so, to naked eyes, but clearly visible through the loop’s lens, there showed a row of sharp, light scratches, exactly duplicating those upon the window-sill.

“Bedad, I don’t know what it’s all about, sor,” Costello rumbled as he concluded his inspection, “but if it’s a wild-goose chase we’re on I’m thinkin’ that we’ve found a feather in th’ wind to guide us.”

“*Exactement*. One is permitted to indulge that hope. Now let us mount the roof.

“Have the care,” he cautioned as Costello took his ankles in a firm grip and slid him gently down the slanting, still-wet slates. “I have led a somewhat sinful life, and have no wish to be projected into the beyond without sufficient time to make my peace with heaven.”

“No fear, sor,” grinned Costello. “Ye’re a little pip squeak, savin’ yer presence, an’ I can swing ye be th’ heels till mornin’ if this rotten brickwor-rk don’t give way wid me.”

Wriggling eel-like on his stomach, de Grandin searched the roof slates inch by careful inch from the leaded gutter running round the roof bank’s lower edge to the lower brick ridge that marked the incline’s top. His small blue eyes were shining brightly as he rejoined us.

“*Mes amis*, there is the mystery here,” he announced solemnly. “Across the gutter to the slates, and up the slates until the roof’s flat top is reached, there is a trail of well defined, light scratches. Moreover, they are different.”

“Different, sor? How d’ye mean—”

“Like this: Upon the window-sill they are perceptibly more wide and deep at their beginning than their end — like exclamation marks viewed from above. In the gutter and upon the roof they are reversed, with deeper gashes at the lower ends and lighter scratches at their upper terminals.”

“O.K., sor. Spill it. I’m not much good at riddles.”

A momentary frown inscribed twin upright wrinkles between de Grandin’s brows. “One cannot say with surety, but one may guess,” he answered slowly, speaking more to himself than to us. “If the marks were uniform one might infer someone had crawled out of the window mounted to the gutter by the ringbolt set into the wall, then climbed upon the roof. An active person might accomplish it. But the

situation is quite otherwise. The scratches on the slates reverse the scorings on the window-sill.”

“You’ve waded out beyond me depth now, sor,” Costello answered.

“*Tiens*, mine also,” the Frenchman grinned. “But let us hazard a conjecture: Suppose one wearing hobnailed boots — or shoes which had been pegged, as Miss Lefèvre’s were — had crawled out from this window: how would he use his feet?”

“To stand on, I praysume, sor.”

“*Ah bah*. You vex me, you annoy me, you get upon my goat! Standing on the sill and reaching up and out to grasp that iron cleat, he would have used his feet to brace himself and pivot on. His tendency would be to turn upon his toes, thereby tracing arcs or semicircles in the stone with the nails set in his shoes. But that is not the case here. The scorings marked into the stone are deeper at beginning, showing that the hobnailed shoes were scratching in resistance, clawing, if you please, against some force which bore the wearer of those shoes across the windowsill. Digging deeply at beginning, the nail marks taper off, as the shoes slipped from the stone and their wearer’s weight was lifted from the sill.

“When we view the iron cleat we are upon less certain ground. One cannot say just how a person stepping to the iron would move his feet in climbing to the roof; but when we come to read the slates we find another chapter in this so puzzling story. Those marks were left by someone who fought not to mount the roof; but who was struggling backward with the strength of desperation, yet who was steadily forced upward. Consider, if you please: The fact that such resistance, if successful, would have resulted in this person’s being catapulted to the cement path and almost surely killed, shows us conclusively the maker of those marks regarded death as preferable to going up that roof. Why? one asks.”

“Pardon me, sir, are you from headquarters?” Slightly nasal but not at all unmusical, the challenge drawled at us across the corridor. From the doorway of the room set opposite to Emerline’s a girl regarded us with one of the most indolent, provocative “come-hither” looks I’d ever seen a woman wear. She was of medium height, not slender and not stout, but lushly built, with bright hair, blond as a well-beaten egg, worn in a page-boy bob and curled up slightly at the ends. From round throat to high white insteps she was draped in black velvet pajamas which had obviously not been purchased ready-made, but sculptured to her perfect measure, for her high, firm, ample breasts pushed up so strongly underneath the velvet that the dip of the fabric to her flat stomach was entirely without wrinkles. Her trousers were so loose about the legs they simulated a wide skirt, but

at the hips they fitted with a skin-tight snugness as revealing as a rubber bathing-suit. From high-arched, carefully penciled brows to blood-red toenails she was the perfect figure of the siren, and I heard Costello gasp with almost awe-struck admiration as his eyes swept over her.

“We are, indeed, *ma belle*,” de Grandin answered. “You wish to speak with us?”

Her blue eyes widened suddenly, then dropped a veil of carefully mascaraed lashes which like an odalisque’s thin gossamer revealed more than it hid. They were strange eyes to see in such a young face, meaningful and knowing, a little weary, more than a little mocking. “Yes,” she drawled lazily. “You’re on the case of Emerline Lefèvre, aren’t you?”

“Yes, *Mademoiselle*.”

“Well, I’m sure she disappeared at five o’clock.”

“Indeed? How is it that you place the time?”

A shrug which was a slow contortion raised her black-draped shoulders and pressed the pointed breasts more tightly still against her tucked-in jacket. “I was in bed all afternoon with a neuralgic headache. The last lab period today was out at half past four, and I heard the girls come down the hall from class. There’s not much time till dinner when we come in late from lab, and a warning bell rings in the dorm at three minutes before five. When it went off this afternoon it almost split my head apart. The rain had stopped; at least I didn’t hear it beating on my window, but the storm had made it dark as midnight, and at first I thought it was a dream. Then I heard some of the girls go hurrying by, and knew that it was five o’clock, or not more than a minute past. I was lying there, trying to find energy to totter to the bureau for some mentholated cologne, when I heard a funny noise across the hall. I’m sure it came from Emerline’s room.”

“A funny noise, *Mademoiselle*? How do you mean?”

A little wrinkle furrowed down the smooth white skin between the penciled brows. “As nearly as I can describe it, it was like the opening quaver of a screech owl’s cry, but it was shut off almost as it started. Then I heard a sound of stamping, as though there were a scuffle going on in there. I s’pose I should have risen and investigated, but I was too sick and miserable to do more than lie there wondering about it. Presently I fell asleep and forgot about it till I heard you in her room just now.” She paused and patted back a yawn. “Mind if I go in and have a look around?” she asked, walking toward us with a swinging, aphrodisiacally undulating gait. The aura of a heavy, penetrating perfume — musk-based patchouli essence, I determined at a hasty breath — seemed hovering round her like a cumulus of tangible vapor.

As far as Jules de Grandin was concerned her blandishments might have been directed at a granite statue. “It is

utterly forbidden, *Mademoiselle*. We are most grateful for your help, but until we have the opportunity to sweep the place for clues we request that no one enter it.”

“What d’ye mean, sweep th’ place for clues, sor?” asked Costello as we drove toward home.

“Precisely what I said, *mon vieux*. There may be clues among the very dust to make this so mysterious puzzle clear.”

Arrived at the house, he rummaged in the broom cupboard, finally emerging with my newest vacuum sweeper underneath his arm. It was a cleaner I had let myself be argued into buying because, as the young salesman pointed out, instead of a cloth bag it had a sack of oiled paper which when filled could be detached and thrown away. To my mind this had much merit, but Nora McGinnis begged to disagree, and so the old cloth-bellows sweeper was in daily use while the newer, sanitary engine rested in the closet.

“Behold, my friend,” he grinned, “there is a virtue to be found in everything. Madame Nora has refused to use the sweeper, thereby making it impossible for you to get return on your investment, but her stubbornness assists me greatly, for here I have a pack of clean fresh paper bags in which to gather up our evidence. You comprehend?”

“Ye mean ye’re goin’ to vacuum-sweep that room out to th’ Shelton School?” Costello asked incredulously.

“Perfectly, my friend. The floor, the walls, perhaps the ceiling. When Jules de Grandin seeks for clues he does not play. Oh, no.”

The door of Emerline Lefèvre’s room was open on a crack as we marched down the corridor equipped with vacuum sweeper and paper refills, and as de Grandin thrust it open with his foot we caught the heavy, almost overpowering odor of patchouli mixed with musk.

“*Dame!*” de Grandin swore. “She has been here, *cette érotofurieuse*, against my express orders. And she has raised the window, too. How can we say what valuable bit of evidence has been blown out — *morbleu!*”

Positively venomous with rage, he had stamped across the room to slam the window down, but before he lowered it had leant across the sill. Now he rested hands upon the slate and gazed down at the cement pavement fifty feet below, a look of mingled pain and wonder on his face.

“Trowbridge Costello, *mes amis*, come quickly!” he commanded, beckoning us imperiously. “Look down and tell me what it is you see.”

Spotlighted by a patch of moonlight on the dull-gray cement walk a huddled body lay, inert, grotesque, unnatural-looking as a marionette whose wires have been cut. The flash of yellow hair and pale white skin against the somber elegance of sable velvet gave it positive identification.

“How th’ divil did she come to take that tumble?” Costello asked as we dashed down the stairs, disdaining to wait on the slowly moving elevator.

“*Le bon Dieu* and the devil only know,” de Grandin answered as he knelt beside the crumpled remnant of the girl’s bright personality and laid a hand beneath her generously swelling breast.

The impact of her fall must have been devastating. Beneath her crown of gold-blond hair her skull vault had been mashed as though it were an eggshell; through the skin above her left eye showed a staring splinter of white bone where the shattered temporal had pierced the skin; just above the round neck of her velvet jacket thrust a jagged chisel-edge of white, remnant of a broken cervical vertebra. Already purple bruises of extravasated blood were forming on her face; her left leg thrust out awkwardly, almost perpendicularly to her body’s axis, and where the loose-legged trouser had turned back we saw the Z-twist of a compound comminutive fracture.

“Is she—” began Costello, and de Grandin nodded as he rose.

“Indubitably,” he returned. “Dead like a herring.”

“But why should she have jumped?” I wondered. “Some evil influence — a wild desire to emulate—”

He made a gesture of negation. “How far is it from here to the house wall?” he asked.

“Why, some eighteen feet, I judge.”

“*Précisément*. That much, at least. Is it in your mind her fall’s trajectory would have been so wide an arc?”

“What’s that?”

“Simply this, by blue! Had she leaped or fallen from the window she should have struck the earth much nearer to the building’s base. The distance separating ground and window is too small to account for her striking thus far out; besides it is unlikely that she would have dived head first. Men sometimes make such suicidal leaps, women scarcely ever. Yet all the evidence discloses that she struck upon her head; at least she fell face forward. Why?”

“You imply that she was—”

“I am not sure, but from the facts as we observe them I believe that she was thrown, and thrown by one who had uncommon strength. She was a heavy girl; no ordinary person could have lifted her and thrown her through a window, yet someone must have done just that; there is no evidence of struggle in the room.”

“Shall I take charge, sor?” asked Costello.

De Grandin nodded. “It will expedite our work if you will be so kind. When she is taken to the morgue I wish you would prevent the autopsy until I have a chance to make a more minute inspection of the body. Meantime I have important duties elsewhere.”

Methodically, as though he’d been a janitor — but with far more care for detail — he moved the vacuum sweeper back and forth across the floor of the small tragic room, drew out the paper bag and sealed and labeled it. Then with a fresh bag in the bellows he swept the bed, the couch, the draperies. Satisfied that every latent trace of dust had been removed, he shut the current off, and, his precious bags beneath his arm, led the march toward my waiting car.

A sheet of clean white paper spread across the surgery table made background for the miscellany of fine refuse which he emptied from the sweeper’s bags. Microscope to eye, he passed a glass rod vigorously rubbed with silk back and forth across the dust heap. Attracted by the static charge fine bits of rubbish adhered to the rod and were subjected to his scrutiny. As he completed his examination I viewed the salvage through a second microscope, but found it utterly uninteresting. It was the usual hodgepodge to be culled by vacuuming a broom-cleaned room. Tiny bits of paper, too fine to yield to straw brooms’ pressure, little flecks of nondescript black dust, a wisp or two of wool fiber from the cheap rug, the trash was valueless from any viewpoint, as far as I could see.

“*Que diable?*” With eyes intently narrowed he was looking at some object clinging to his glass rod.

“What is it?” I demanded, leaning closer.

“See if you can classify it,” he returned, moving aside to let me look down through the viewhole of the microscope.

It was a strand of hair three-quarters of an inch or so in length, curled slightly like a human body hair, but thicker, coarser in its texture. Reddish rusty brown at tip, it shaded to a dull gray at the center and bleached to white transparency about the base. I saw it was smooth-scaled upon its outer surface and terminated in a point, showing it had never been cut or, if clipped, had sufficient time to grow to its full length again.

“Let us proceed,” I heard him whisper as he moved his polished rod again across the heap of sweepings. “Perhaps we shall discover something else.”

Slowly he moved the rod across the furrowed edges of the dust heap, pausing now and then to view a fresh find. A splinter of straw, a tiny tag of paper, fine powdered dust, these comprised his salvage, till: “Ah?” he murmured, “ah-ha?” Adhering to the rod there was another wisp of hair, almost the counterpart of his first find, except it was more nearly uniform in color, dull lack-luster rust all over, like an aged tomcat’s fur, or the hair of some misguided woman who has sought a simulation of her vanished youth by having her gray tresses dyed with henna.

“What—” I began, but he waved me silent with a nervous gesture as he continued fishing with his rod. At last he laid the rod aside and began to winnow the dust piles through a

fine wire screen. Half an hour's patient work resulted in the salvaging of two or three small chocolate-colored flakes which looked for all the world like grains of bran and when field close to our noses on a sheet of folded paper gave off a sweetly penetrating odor.

"You recognize them?" he asked.

"Not by sight. By their smell I'd say they contained musk."

"Quite yes," he nodded. "They are musk. Crude musk, such as the makers of perfumery use."

"But what should that be doing in a young girl's room—"

"One wonders with the wonder of amazement. One also wonders what those hairs did there. I should say the musk flakes were contained in the brown envelope the elevator boy delivered to Mademoiselle Lefèvre. As for the hairs—"

The tinkle of the telephone broke off his explanation. "Yes, my *sergent*, it is I," I heard him answer. "He is? Restrain him — forcefully, if necessary. I shall make the haste to join you.

"Come, let us hurry," he commanded as he set the 'phone down.

"Where, at this hour o' night, for pity's sake?"

"Why, to the morgue, of course. Parnell, the coroner's physician, insists on making an autopsy on the body of Miss Henrietta Sidlo within the hour. We must look at her first."

"Who the devil was Miss Henrietta Sidlo?" I asked as we commenced our hurried journey to the city morgue.

"The so attractive blond young woman who was killed because she could not mind her business and keep from the room we had forbidden her to enter."

"What makes you so sure she was killed? She might have fallen from the window, or—"

"Or?" he echoed.

"Oh, nothing. I just had a thought."

"I rejoice to hear it. What was it, if you please?"

"Perhaps she thought as you did, that Miss Lefèvre had climbed to the roof, and tried to emulate the feat experimentally."

I had expected him to scout my theory, but he nodded thoughtfully. "It may be so," he answered. "It seems incredible that one should be so foolish, but the Sidlo girl was nothing if not unbelievable, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

Beneath the searing glare that flooded from the clustered arclights set above the concave operating-table in the morgue's autopsy room her body showed almost as pale as the white tiles that floored and walled the place. She had bled freely from the nose and ears when skull and brain were smashed at once, and the dried blood stained her chin and cheeks and throat. De Grandin took spray-nosed hose and played its thread-like stream across her face and neck

sponging off the dried blood with a wad of cotton. At length: "What is it that you see?" he asked.

Where the blood and grime had washed away were five light livid patches, one some three inches in size and roughly square, and extending from it four parallel lines almost completely circling the neck. At the end of each was a deeply pitted scar, as if the talons of some predatory beast had sunk into the flesh.

"Good heavens," I exclaimed; "it's terrible!"

"But naturally. One does not look for beauty in the morgue. I asked you what you saw, not for your *impression esthetique*."

I hesitated for a breath and felt his small blue eyes upon me in a fixed, unwinking stare, quizzical, sardonic; almost, it seemed, a little pleading. Long years ago, when we had known each other but a day, he and I had stood beside another corpse in this same morgue, the corpse of a young girl who had been choked and mauled to death by a gorilla. "Sarah Humphreys—" I began; and:

"*Bravo, bravissimo!*" he whispered, "You have right, my friend. See, here is the bruise left by the heel of his hand; these encircling marks, they are his fingers; these jagged, deep-set marks the wounds left by his broken nails. Yes, it is so. There is no thumb print, for he does not grasp like men, he does not use his thumb for fulcrum."

"Then those hairs you found when you swept up the room—"

"*Précisément*. I recognized them instantly, but could not imagine how they came there. If — one moment, if you please!"

Bending quickly he took the dead girl's pale plump hands in his and with his penknife tip skimmed underneath the rims of her elaborately lacquered nails, dropping the salvage into a fresh envelope. "I think that we shall find corroboration in a microscopic test of these," he stated, but the bustling entrance of the coroner's physician cut him short.

"What's going on here?" Doctor Parnell asked. "No one should touch this body till I've finished my examination—"

"We do but make it ready for you, *cher collègue*," de Grandin answered with fictitious mildness as he turned away. Outside he muttered as we climbed into my car: "There are fools, colossal fools, damned fools, and then there is Parnell. He is superlative among all fools, friend Trowbridge."

Three-quarters of an hour later we put the scrapings from the dead girl's nails beneath a microscope. Most of the matter was sheer waste, but broken and wedged firmly in a tiny drop of nail stain we came upon the thing we sought, a tiny fragment of gorilla hair.

"*Tiens*, she fought for life with nature's weapons, *cette pauvre*," he murmured as he rose from the examination. "It

is a pity she should die so young and beautiful. We must take vengeance for her death, my friend.”

Amber brocade curtains had been drawn against the unseasonably chilly weather and a bright fire crackled on the hearth of the high-manteled fireplace of the lounging-room of the Lefèvre home in Nyack. Harold Lefèvre greeted us restrainedly. Since dinnertime the day before he had been interviewed by a succession of policemen and reporters, and his nerves and patience were stretched almost to the snapping-point.

“There isn’t anything that I can add to what you’ve been already told,” he said like one who speaks a well-learned piece. “Emerline was just past seventeen, she had no love affairs, wasn’t especially interested in boys. Her scholastic standing was quite good, though she seldom got past B grades. She was not particularly studious, so it couldn’t have been a nervous breakdown forced by overstudy. She stood well enough in marks not to have been worried over passing her examinations; she was happy in her home. There is no reason, no earthly reason I can think of, for her to disappear. I’ve told you everything I know. Suppose you try looking for her instead of quizzing me.”

Costello’s face flushed brick-red. He had been against the interview, expecting a rebuke would be forthcoming.

De Grandin seemed oblivious to Lefèvre’s censure. His eyes were traveling round the charming room in a quick, stock-taking gaze. He noted with approval the expensive furniture, the bizarre small tables with their litter of inconsequential trifles, cinnabar and silver cigarette-containers, fashionable magazines, bridge markers, the deep bookshelves right and left of the big fireplace, the blurred blues and mulberries of the antique china in the unglazed cabinets. In a far, unlighted corner of the room his questing glance seemed resting, as though he had attained the object of his search. In apposition to the modern, western, super-civilized sophistication of the other bric-à-brac the group of curios seemed utterly incongruous; a hippopotamus leg with hoof intact, brass-lined to form a cane stand and holding in its tube a sheaf of African assagais. Above the group of relics hung a little drum no bigger than a sectioned coconut, with a slackly tensioned head of dull gray parchment. “*Monsieur*,” the Frenchman suddenly demanded, “you were in Africa with Willis Cogswell in 1922?”

Lefèvre eyed him sharply. “What has that to do—”

“It was Monsieur Cogswell’s daughter who vanished without trace three months ago, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“I still don’t see—”

“There were three members of your African adventure, were there not: yourself, and Messieurs Cogswell and Everton?”

Anger flamed in our host’s face as he turned on Costello. “What has all this got to do with Emerline’s case?” he almost roared. “First you come badgering me with senseless questions about her, now you bring this ‘expert’ here to pry into my private life—”

“You did not part with Monsieur Everton in friendship?” de Grandin broke in imperturbably. Then, as if his question were rhetorical: “But no. Quite otherwise. You and he and Monsieur Cogswell quarreled. He left you vowing vengeance—”

“See here, I’ve had enough of this unwarranted—”

“And ninety days ago he struck at Willis Cogswell through the dearest thing that he possessed. Attend me very carefully, *Monsieur*. You have heard that shock caused Monsieur Cogswell to collapse, that he died of a heart seizure two days following his daughter’s disappearance—”

“Of course, he did. Why shouldn’t he? He’d been suffering from angina for a year, had to give up business and spend half his time in bed. His doctor’d warned him anything exciting might prove fatal—”

“*Précisément*. He fell dead in his library. His butler found him dead upon the floor—”

“That’s true, but what—”

De Grandin drew a slip of folded paper from his pocket. “This was in your friend’s hand when the butler found him,” he answered as he held the missive toward our host. It was a piece of coarse brown paper, torn, apparently from a grocery bag, and penciled on it in black chalk was one word: *Bokoli*.

The anger faded from Lefèvre’s face; fear drained his color, left him gray.

“You recognize the writing?” asked de Grandin.

“No, no, it can’t be,” Lefèvre faltered. “Everton is dead — we — I saw him—”

“And these, *Monsieur*, we found among the sweepings from your daughter’s room,” de Grandin interrupted. “You recognize them, *hein?*” Fixed with adhesive gum to a card of plain white paper, he extended the gorilla hairs we’d found the night before.

Utter panic replaced fear in our host’s face. His eyes were glassy, bright and dilated as if drugged with belladonna. They shifted here and there, as though he sought some channel of escape. His lips began to twist convulsively.

“This — this is a trick!” he mumbled, and we saw the spittle drooling from the corners of his mouth. “This couldn’t be—”

His hands shook in a nervous frenzy, clawing at his collar. Then suddenly his knees seemed softening under him, and every bit of stiffness left his body so that he fell down in a heap before the hearth, the impact of his fall rattling the brass tools by the fireplace.

Involuntarily I shivered. Something evil and soft-footed seemed to shuffle in that quiet room, but there was no seeing it, no hearing it, no way of knowing what it was; only the uncanny, hideous feel of it — clammy, cold, obscenely leering.

“Now — so!” de Grandin soothed as he lowered his flask from the reviving man’s lips. “That is better, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

He helped Lefèvre to a chair, and, “Would it not be well to tell us all about it?” he suggested. “You have had a seething pot inside you many years, *Monsieur*; it has boiled, then simmered down, then boiled again, and it has brought much scum up in the process. Let us skim it off, *comme ça*” — he made a gesture as if with a spoon — “and throw it out. Only so shall we arrive at mental peace.”

Lefèvre set his face like one who contemplates a dive in icy water. “There were four of us on safari through Bokoliland,” he answered; “Cogswell, his wife Lysbeth, a Boer settler’s daughter, Everton and I. We’d found the going pretty rough; no ivory, no trading fit to mention, no gold, and our supplies were running low. When we reached Shamboko’s village the men were all out hunting, but the women and old men were kind to us and fed and lodged us. In normal circumstances we’d have waited there until the chief came back and tried to do some trading, but on the second evening Everton came hurrying to our hut half drunken with excitement.

“I’ve just been to the Ju-Ju house,” he told us. “D’ye know what they’ve got there? Gold! Great heaps and stacks o’ yellow dust, enough to fill our hats and pockets, and a stack o’ yellow diamonds bigger than your head. Let’s go!”

“Now, the Bokoli are a fairly peaceful folk, and they’d take a lot from white men, but if you monkey with their women or their Ju-Ju you’d better have your life insurance premiums all paid. I’d seen the body of a man they’d ‘chopped’ for sacrilege one time, and it had put the fear o’ God in me. They’d flayed the skin off him, not enough to kill him, but the torment must have been almost past standing. Then they’d smeared honey on the raw nerve ends and staked him down spread-eagled in a clearing in the jungle. The ants had found him there — millions of the little red ones — and they’d cleaned the flesh off of his bones as if they had been boiled.

“I wasn’t having any of that, so I turned the proposition down, but the others were all for it. Finally I yielded and we sneaked down to the Ju-Ju house. It was just as Everton had said. The gold was piled in little pyramidal heaps before the idol in a semicircle, with the diamonds stacked up in the center. The offerings must have been accumulating over several centuries, for there’s little gold in the Bokoli country, and no diamonds nearer than five hundred miles. But there

the stuff was, ready for our taking.

“We stuffed our haversacks and pockets and set out for the coast within an hour, anxious to put as many miles as possible between us and the village before the medicine man paid his morning visit to the Ju-Ju and found out what we’d done.

“Everton began to act queer from the start. He’d sneak away from camp at night and be gone hours at a time without an explanation. One night I followed him. He made straight for a clearing by the river and sat down on the grass as if waiting someone. Presently I saw a shadow slipping from the bush and next moment a full-grown gorilla shambled out into the moonlight. Instead of rushing Everton the monster stopped a little distance off and looked at him, and Everton looked back, then — think I’m a liar if you wish — they *talked* to one another. Don’t ask me how they did it; I don’t know. I only know that Everton addressed a series of deep grunts to the great beast and it answered him in kind. Then they parted and I trailed him back to camp.

“Three days later the Bokoli caught us. We’d just completed dinner and were sitting down to smoke when all at once the jungle seemed alive with ’em, great strapping blacks with four-foot throwing spears and bullhide shields and vulture feathers in their hair. They weren’t noisy about it. That was the worst of it. They appeared like shadows out of nowhere and stood there in a ring, just looking at us. Old Chief Shamboko did the honors, and he was as polite about it as the villain in a play. No reproaches for the diamonds and the gold dust we’d made off with, though they must have represented his tribe’s savings for a century or more. Oh, no, he put it squarely to us on the ground of sacrilege. The Ju-Ju was insulted. He’d lost face. Only blood could wash away the memory of the insult, but he’d be satisfied with one of us. Just one. We were to make the choice. Then he walked back to the ring of warriors and stood waiting for us to announce which one of us would go back to be flayed alive and eaten up by ants. Pretty fix to be in, eh?”

“You made no offer to return the loot?” de Grandin asked.

“I’ll say we did. Told him he might have our whole trade stock to boot, but he wasn’t interested. The treasure we had taken from the temple had been tainted by our touch, so couldn’t be put back, and only things dug from the earth were suitable as offerings to the Ju-Ju, so our trade stuff had no value. Besides, they wanted blood, and blood was what they meant to have.”

“One sees. Accordingly—?”

“We tossed for it. Lysbeth, Conroy’s wife, drew out a coin and whispered something to her husband. Then he and Everton and I stood by as she flipped it. Conroy beat us to the call and shouted ‘Heads!’ And heads it came. That left Everton and me to try.

“He shouted ‘Tails!’ almost before the silver left her hand. It came up heads again, and I was safe.”

“And so—”

“Just so. The Bokoli couldn’t understand our words, of course, but they knew that Everton had lost by his demeanor, and they were on him in a second, pinioning his arms against his sides with grass rope before he had a chance to draw his gun and shoot himself.

“Considering what he was headed for, you could hardly blame him, but it seemed degrading, the way he begged for life. We’d seen him in a dozen desperate fixes when his chance of coming through alive seemed absolutely nil, but he seemed like another person, now, pleading with us to shoot him, or die fighting for him, making us the most outlandish offers, promising to be our slave and work for ever without wages if we’d only save him from the savages. Even old Shamboko seemed to feel embarrassed at the sight of such abysmal cowardice in a white man, and he’d ordered his young men to drag their victim off when Everton chanced to kick the silver coin which sent him to his fate. The florin shone and twinkled in the moonlight when he turned it over. Then he and I and all of us realized. It was a trick piece Lysbeth used, an old Dutch florin with two heads. There hadn’t been a chance her man could lose the toss, for she’d told him to call heads, and she’d flipped the coin herself, so none of us could see it was a cheat.

“Everton turned sober in a second. Rage calmed him where his self-respect was powerless to overcome his fear of torture, and he rose with dignity to march away between the Bokoli warriors. But just before he disappeared with them into the bush he turned on us. ‘You’ll never know a moment’s safety, any of you,’ he bellowed. ‘The shadow of the jungle will be on you always, and it’ll take the dearest things you have. Remember, you’ll each lose the thing you love most dearly.’

“That was all. The Bokoli marched him off, and we never saw him again.”

“But, *Monsieur*—”

“But two weeks later, when we were almost at the outskirts of the Boer country, I woke up in the night with the sound of screaming in my ears. Conroy lay face downward by the campfire, and just disappearing in the bush was a great silver-backed gorilla with Lysbeth struggling in his arms.”

“You pursued—”

“Not right away. I was too flabbergasted to do more than gape at what I saw for several seconds, and the big ape and the woman were gone almost before you could say ‘knife.’ Then there was Conroy to look after. He’d had a dreadful beating, though I don’t suppose the beast had more than

merely flung him from his way. They’re incredibly powerful, those great apes. Conroy had a dislocated shoulder and two broken ribs, and for a while I thought he’d not pull through. I pulled his shoulder back in place and bandaged him as best I could, but it was several weeks before he regained strength to travel, and even then we had to take it slowly.

“I kept us alive by hunting, and one day while I was gunning I found Lysbeth. It was a week since she’d been stolen, but apparently she’d never been more than a mile or so away, for her body hung up in a tree-fork less than an hour’s walk from camp, and was still warm when I found it.

“The ape had ripped her clothing off as he might have peeled a fruit, and apparently he’d been none too gentle in the process, for she was overlaid with scratches like a net. Those were just play marks, though. It wasn’t till he tired of her — or till she tried to run away — he really used his strength on her. Down her arms and up her thighs were terrible, great gashes, deep enough to show the bone where skin and flesh had been shorn through in places. Her face was beaten absolutely flat, nose, lips and chin all smashed down to a bloody level. Her neck was broken. Her head hung down as if suspended by a string, and on her throat were bruise marks and the nailprints of the great beast’s hands where he had squeezed her neck until her spinal column snapped. I” — Lefèvre faltered and we saw the shadow of abysmal horror flit across his face — “I don’t like to think what had happened to the poor girl in the week between her kidnapping and killing.”

Costello looked from our host to de Grandin. “‘Tis a highly interestin’ tale, sor,” he assured the Frenchman, “but I can’t say as I sees where it fits in. This here now Everton is dead — ain’t he?” he turned to Lefèvre.

“I’ve always thought — I like to think he is.”

“Ye saw ’im march off wid th’ savages, didn’t ye? They’re willin’ workers wid th’ knife, if what ye say is true.”

De Grandin almost closed his eyes and murmured softly, like one who speaks a poem learned in childhood and more than half forgotten: “It was December 2, 1923, that Lieutenant José Garcia of the Royal Spanish Army went with a file of native troops to inspect the little outpost of Akaar, which lies close by Bokoliland. He found the place in mourning, crazed with sorrow, fear and consternation. Some days before a flock of fierce gorillas had swept down upon the village, murdered several of the men and made away with numerous young women. From what the natives told him, Lieutenant Garcia learned such things had happened almost for a year in the Bokoli country, and that the village of the chief Shamboko had been utterly destroyed by a herd of giant apes—”

“That’s it!” Lefèvre shrieked. “We’ve never known. We heard about the ape raids and that Shamboko’s village had

been wrecked by them, but whether they destroyed it before Everton was put to death or whether they came down on it in vengeance — Conroy and I both thought he had been killed, but we couldn't know. When his daughter disappeared I didn't connect it with Africa, but that paper Conroy clutched when he dropped dead, those hairs you found in Emerline's room—"

"*Exactement*," de Grandin nodded as Lefèvre's voice trailed off. "Perfectly, exactly, quite so, *Monsieur*. It is a very large, impressive 'but.' We do not know, we cannot surely say, but we can damn suspect."

"But for th' love o' mud, sor, how'd, this here felly git so chummy wid th' apes?" Costello asked. "I've seen some monkeys in th' zoo that seemed to have more sense than many a human, but—"

"You don't ask much about companions' former lives in Africa," Lefèvre interrupted, "but from scraps of information he let drop I gathered Everton had been an animal trainer in his younger days and that he'd also been on expeditions to West Africa and Borneo to collect apes for zoos and circuses. It may be he had some affinity for them. I know he seemed to speak to and to understand that great ape in the jungle — d'ye suppose—"

"I do, indeed, *Monsieur*," de Grandin interrupted earnestly. "I am convinced of it."

Sure, it's th' nuttiest business I iver heard of, sor," Costello declared as we drove home. "'Tis wild enough when he stharts tellin' us about a man that talks to a gorilly, but when it's intaymated that a ape clomb up th' buildin' an' sthold th' gur-rl—"

"Such things have happened, *mon ami*," de Grandin answered. "The records of the Spanish army, as well as reports of explorers, vouch for such kidnappings—"

"O.K., sor; O.K. But why should th' gorillies choose th' very gur-rls this felly Everton desired to have sthold? Th' apes ye tell about just snatch a woman — any woman — that chances in their way, but these here now gorillies took th' very—"

"*Restez tranquille*," de Grandin ordered. "I would think, I desire to cogitate. *Nom d'un porc vert*, I would meditate, consider, speculate, if you will let me have a little silence!"

"Sure, sor, I'll be afther givin' ye all ye want. I wuz only—"

"Nature strikes her balance with nicety," de Grandin murmured as though musing aloud. "Every living creature pays for what he has. Man lacks great strength, but reinforces frailty with reason; the bloodhound cannot see great distances, but his sense of smell is very keen; nocturnal creatures like the bat and owl have eyes attuned to semi-darkness. What is the gorilla's balance? He has great

strength, a marvelous agility, keen sight, but — *parbleu*, he lacks the sense of smell the lesser creatures have! You comprehend?"

"No, sor, I do not."

"But it is simple. His nose is little keener than his human cousins', but even his flat snout can recognize the pungent scent of crude musk at considerable distance. We do not know, we cannot surely say the Cogswell girl received an envelope containing musk upon the night she disappeared. We know that Mademoiselle Lefèvre did." Abruptly:

"What sort of day was it Miss Cogswell disappeared?" he asked Costello.

The Irishman considered for a moment; then: "It wuz a wet, warm day in March, much like yesterday," he answered.

"It must have been," de Grandin nodded. "The great apes are susceptible to colds; to risk one in our northern winter out of doors would be to sign his death warrant, and this one was required for a second job of work."

Costello looked at him incredulously. "I s'pose ye know how old th' snatchin' monkey wuz?" he asked ironically.

"Approximately, yes. Like man, gorillas gray with age, but unlike us, their gray hairs show upon their backs and shoulders. A 'silverback' gorilla may be very aged, or he may still be in the vigor of his strength. They mature fully at the age of fourteen; at twenty they are very old. I think the ape we seek is something like fifteen years old; young enough to be in his full prime, old enough to have been caught in early youth and trained consistently to recognize the scent of musk and carry off the woman who exuded it."

"Th' tellyphone's been ringin' for a hour," Nora McGinnis told us as we drew up at my door. "'Tis a Mither Lefèvre, an' he wants ye to call back—"

"*Merci bien*," de Grandin called as he raced down the hall and seized the instrument. In a moment he was back. "Quick, at once, right away, my friends," he cried. "We must go back to Nyack."

"But, glory be, we've just come down from there," Costello started to object, but the look of fierce excitement in the Frenchman's face cut his protest short.

"Monsieur Lefèvre has received a note like that which killed his friend Cogswell," de Grandin announced. "It was thrust beneath his door five minutes after we had gone."

"And this," de Grandin tapped the scrap of ragged paper, "this shall be the means of trapping him who persecutes young girls."

"Arrah, sor, how ye're goin' to find 'im through that thing is more than I can see," Costello wondered. "Even if it has his fingerprints upon it, where do we go first?"

"To the office of the sheriff."

“Excuse me, sor, did ye say th’ sheriff?”

“Your hearing is impeccable, my friend. Does not *Monsieur le Shérif* keep those sad-faced, thoughtful-looking dogs, the bloodhounds?”

“Be gob, sor, sure he does, but how’ll ye know which way to lead ’em to take up th’ scent?”

De Grandin flashed his quick, infectious grin at him. “Let us consider local geography. Our assumption is the miscreant we seek maintains an ape to do his bidding. Twice in three months a young girl has been kidnapped from the Shelton School — by this gorilla, we assume. America is a wondrous land. Things which would be marvels elsewhere pass unnoticed here, but a gorilla in the country is still sufficiently a novelty to excite comment. Therefore, the one we seek desires privacy. He lives obscurely, shielded from his neighbors’ prying gaze. Gorillas are equipped to walk, but not for long. The aerial pathways of the trees are nature’s high roads for them. *Alors*, this one lives in wooded country. Furthermore, he must live fairly near the Shelton School, since his ape must be able to go there without exciting comment, and bring his quarry to his lair unseen. You see? It is quite simple. Somewhere within a mile or so of Shelton is a patch of densely wooded land. When we have found that place we set our hounds upon the track of him whose scent is on this *sacré* piece of paper, and — *voilà!*”

“Be gorry, sor, ye’ll have no trohble findin’ land to fit yer bill,” Costello assured him. “Th’ pine woods grow right to th’ Shelton campus on three sides, an’ th’ bay is on th’ other.”

The gentle bloodhounds wagged their tails and rubbed their velvet muzzles on de Grandin’s faultlessly creased trousers. “Down, noble ones,” he bade, dropping a morsel of raw liver to them. “Down, canine noblemen, peerless scenters-out of evil doers. We have a task to do tonight, thou and I.”

He held the crudely lettered scrap of paper out to them and bade them sniff it, then began to lead them in an ever-widening circle through the thick-grown pine trees. Now and then they whimpered hopefully, their sadly thoughtful eyes upon him, then put their noses to the ground again. Suddenly one of them threw back his head and gave utterance to a short, sharp, joyous bark, followed by a deep-toned, belling bay.

“*Tallis au!*” de Grandin cried. “The chase is on, my friends. See to your weapons. That we seek is fiercer than a lion or a bear, and more stealthy than a panther.”

Through bramble-bristling thicket, creeping under low-swung boughs and climbing over fallen trees, we trailed the dogs, deeper, deeper, ever deeper into the pine forest growing in its virgin vigor on the curving bay shore. It seemed to me we were an hour on the way, but probably we

had not followed our four-footed guides for more than twenty minutes when the leprous white of weather-blasted clapboards loomed before us through the wind-bent boughs. “Good Lord,” I murmured as I recognized the place. “It’s Suicide Chapel!”

“Eh? How is it you say?” de Grandin shot back.

“That’s what the youngsters used to call it. Years ago it was the meeting-place of an obscure cult, a sort of combination of the Holy Rollers and the Whitests. They believed the dead are in a conscious state, and to prove their tenets their pastors and several members of the flock committed suicide *en masse*, offering themselves as voluntary sacrifices. The police dispersed the congregation, and as far as I know the place has not been tenanted for forty years. It has an evil reputation, haunted, and all that, you know.”

“*Tenez*, I damn think it is haunted now by something worse than any of the old ones’ spooks,” he whispered.

The ruined church was grim in aspect as a Doré etching. In the uncertain light of an ascending moon its clapboard sides, almost nude of paint, seemed glowing with unearthly phosphorescence. Patches of blue shadow lay like spilled ink on the weed-grown clearing round the edifice; the night wind keened a mournful threnody in the pine boughs. As we scrambled from the thicket of scrub evergreen and paused a moment in reconnaissance the ghostly hoot of an owl echoed weirdly, through the gloom.

De Grandin cradled his short-barreled rifle in the crook of his left arm and pointed to the tottering, broken-sided steeple. “He is there if he is here,” he announced.

“I don’t think that I follow ye,” Costello whispered back. “D’ye mane he’s here or there?”

“Both. The wounded snake or rodent seeks the nearest burrow. The cat things seek the shelter of the thickets. The monkey folk take to the heights when they are hunted. If he has heard the hounds bay he has undoubtedly — *mordieu!*”

Something heavy, monstrous, smotheringly bulky, dropped on me with devastating force. Hot, noisome breath was in my face and on my neck, great, steelstrong hands were clutching at my legs, thick, club-like fingers closed around my arms, gripping them until I thought my biceps would be torn loose from my bones. My useless gun fell clattering from my hands, the monster’s bristling hair thrust in my eyes, my nose, my mouth, choking and sickening me as I fought futilely against his overpowering strength. Half fainting with revulsion I struggled in the great ape’s grasp and fell sprawling to the ground, trying ineffectually to brace myself against the certainty of being torn to pieces. I felt my head seized in a giant paw, raised till I thought my neck would snap, then bumped against the ground with thunderous force. A lurid burst of light blazed in my eyes, followed by a deafening roar. Twice more the thunderous

detonations sounded, and as the third report reverberated I felt the heavy weight on top of me go static. Though the hairy chest still bore me down, there was no movement in the great encircling arms, and the vise-like hands and feet had ceased their torturing pressure on my arms and legs. A sudden sticky warmth flooded over me, wetting through my jacket and trickling down my face.

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux, mon brave, mon véritable ami*, are you alive, do you survive?” de Grandin called as he and Costello hauled the massive simian corpse off me. “I should have shot him still more quickly, but my trigger finger would not mind my brain’s command.”

“I’m quite alive,” I answered as I got unsteadily upon my feet and stretched my arms and legs tentatively. “Pretty well mauled and shaken, but—”

“*S-s-sh*,” warned de Grandin. “There is another we must deal with. *Holà l’haut!*” he called. “Will you come forth, *Monsieur*, or do we deal with you as we dealt with your pet?”

Stark desolation reigned within the ruined church. Floors sagged uncertainly and groaned protestingly beneath our feet; the cheap pine pews were cracked and broken, fallen in upon themselves; throughout the place the musty, faintly acrid smell of rotting wood hung dank and heavy, like miasmatic vapors of a marsh in autumn. Another smell was noticeable, too; the ammonia-laden scent of pent-up animals, such as hovers in the air of prisons, lazarets and primate houses at the zoo.

Guided by the odor and the searching beam shot by de Grandin’s flashlight, we crossed the sagging floor with cautious steps until we reached the little eminence where in the former days the pulpit stood. There, like the obscene parody of a tabernacle, stood a great chest, some eight feet square, constructed of stout rough-sawn planks and barred across the front with iron uprights. A small dishpan half filled with water and the litter of melon rinds told us this had been the prison of the dead gorilla.

De Grandin stooped and looked inside the cage. “*Le pauvre sauvage*,” he murmured. “It was in this pen he dwelt. It was inhuman — *pardieu!*” Bending quickly he retrieved a shred of orange satin. He raised it to his nose, then passed it to us. It was redolent of musk.

“So, then, Jules de Grandin is the fool, the *imbécile*, the simpleton, the ninny, the chaser-after-shadows, *hein?*” he demanded. “Come, let us follow through our quest.”

“Th’ place seems empty, sor,” Costello said as, following the wall, we worked our way toward the building’s front. “If there wuz anny body here — Howly Mither!”

Across our path, like a doll cast aside by a peevish child there lay a grotesque object. The breath stopped in my throat,

for the thing was gruesomely suggestive of a human body, but as de Grandin played his flashlight on it we saw it was a life-sized dummy of a woman. It was some five feet tall, the head was decorated by a blond bobbed wig, and it was clothed in well-made sports clothes — knit pull-over, a kilted skirt of rough tweed, Shetland socks, tan heelless shoes — the sort of costume worn by eight in ten high school and college girls. As we bent to look at it the cloyingly sweet scent of musk assailed our nostrils.

“Is not all plain? — does it not leap to meet the eye?” de Grandin asked. “This was the implement of training. That hairy one out yonder had been trained for years to seek and bring back this musk-scented dummy. When he was letter-perfect in discovering and bringing back this lifeless simulacrum, his master sent him to the harder task of seeking out and stealing living girls who had the scent of musk upon them. *Ha*, one can see it plainly — the great ape leaping through the shadowed trees, scaling the school roof as easily as you or I could walk the streets, sniffing, searching, playing at this game of hide-and-seek he had been taught. Then from the open window comes the perfume which shall tell him that his quest is finished; there in the lighted room he sees the animated version of the dummy he has learned to seize and carry to this *sacré* place. He enters. There is a scream of terror from his victim. His great hand closes on her throat and her cry dies out before it is half uttered; then through the treetops he comes to the chapel of the suicides, and underneath his arm there is — *morbleu*, and what in Satan’s name is that?”

As he lectured us he swung his flashlight in an arc, and as it pointed toward the ladder-hole that led up to the ruined belfry its darting ray picked up another form which lay half bathed in shadows, like a drowned body at the water’s edge.

It was — or had been — a man, but it lay across our path as awkwardly as the first dummy. Its arms and legs protruded at unnatural angles from its trunk, and though it lay breast down the head was turned, completely round so that the face looked up, and I went sick with disgust as I looked on what had once been human features, but were now so battered, flattened and blood-smeared that only staring, bulging eyes and broken teeth protruding through smashed lips told life had once pulsed underneath the hideous, shattered mask. Close beside one of the open, flaccid hands a heavy whip-stock lay, the sort of whip that animal trainers use to cow their savage pupils. A foot or so of plaited rawhide lash frayed from the weighted stock, for the long, cruel whip of braided leather had been ripped and pulled apart as though it had been made of thread.

“God rest ’is sinful soul!” Costello groaned. “Th’ gorilly musta turned on ’im an’ smashed ’im to a pulp. Looks like he’d tried to make a getaway, an’ got pulled down from them

sheps, sor, don't it?"

"By blue, it does; it most indubitably does," de Grandin agreed. "He was a cruel one, this, but the whip he used to beat his ape into submission was powerless at the last. One can find it in his heart to understand the monster's anger and desire for revenge. But pity for this one? *Non!* He was deserving of his fate, I damn think."

"All th' same, sor — Howly Saint Patrick, what's that?" Almost overhead, so faint and weak as to be scarcely audible, there sounded a weak, whimpering moan.

"Up, up, my friends, it may be that we are in time to save her!" the little Frenchman cried, leaping up the palsied ladder like a seaman swarming up the ratlines.

We followed him as best we could and halted at the nest of crossbeams marking the old belfry. For a moment we stood silent, then simultaneously flashed our torches. The little spears of light stabbed through the shrouding darkness for a moment, and picked up a splash of brilliant orange in the opening where the bell had hung. Lashed to the bell-wheel was a girl's slim form, arms and feet drawn back and tied with cruel knots to the spokes, her body bowed back in an arc against the wheel's periphery. Her weight had drawn the wooden cycle down so that she hung dead-center at its bottom, but the fresh, strong rope spliced to the wheel-crank bore testimony to the torment she had been subjected to, the whirling-swinging torture of the mediæval bullwheel.

"Oh, please — please kill me!" she besought as the converging light beams played upon her pain-racked face. "Don't swing me any more — I can't — stand—" her plea trailed off in a thin whimpering mewl and her head fell forward.

"Courage, *Mademoiselle*," the small Frenchman comforted. "We are come to take you home."

"But no, *mon sergent*," Jules de Grandin shook his head in deprecation as he watched the ice cube slowly melting in his highball glass, "I have a great appreciation of myself, and am not at all averse to advertising, but in this case I must be anonymous. You it was who did it all, who figured out the African connection, and who found the hideaway to which the so unfortunate Miss Lefèvre was conveyed. Friend Trowbridge and I did but go along to give you help; the credit must be yours. We shall show those fools down at headquarters if you are past your prime. We shall show them

if you are unfit for crime detection. This case will make your reputation firm, and that you also found what happened to the Cogswell girl will add materially to your fame. Is it not so?"

"I only wish to God I did know what happened to poor Margaret Cogswell," the big detective answered.

De Grandin's smiling face went serious. "I have the fear that her fate was the same as that of Monsieur Cogswell's first wife. You recall how she was mauled to death by a gorilla? I should not be surprized if that ten-times-cursed Everton gave the poor girl to his great ape for sport when he had tired of torturing her. Tomorrow you would be advised to take a squad of diggers to that chapel of the suicides and have them search for her remains. I doubt not you will find them."

"An' would ye tell me one thing more, sor?"

"A hundred, if you wish."

"Why did th' gorilly kill th' Sidlo gur-rl instead o' carryin' her away?"

"The human mind is difficult enough to plumb; I fear I cannot look into an ape's mentality and see the thoughts he thinks, *mon vieux*. When he had stolen Mademoiselle Lefèvre and borne her to the ruined chapel of the suicides the ape turned rebel. He did not go back to his cage as he was wont to do, but set out on another expedition. His small mind worked in circles. Twice he had taken women from the Shelton School, he seems to have enjoyed the pastime, so went back for more. He paused upon the roof-ledge, wondering where he should seek next for victims, and to him through the damp night air the pungent scent the Sidlo girl affected came. *Voilà*, down into the room he dropped, intent on seizing her. She was well built and strongly muscled. Also she was very frightened. She did not swoon, nor struggle in his grasp, but fought him valiantly. Perhaps she hurt him with her pointed fingernails. *En tout cas*, she angered him, and so he broke her neck in peevish anger, as a child might break its doll, and, again child-like, he flung the broken toy away.

"It was a pity, too. She was so young, so beautiful, so vital. That she should die before she knew the joys of love — *morbleu*, it saddens me. Trowbridge, my friend, can you sit there thus and see me suffer so? Refill my glass, I beg you!"

The Venomed Breath of Vengeance

I SHOOK my head reprovingly as Jules de Grandin decanted half an ounce of cream into his breakfast coffee and dropped two sugar lumps into the mucilaginous concoction.

“You’re sending out an invitation to gastritis,” I said warningly. “Don’t you realize that mixing two such active ferments as cream and sugar in your coffee—”

He leveled an unwinking stare at me. “Am I to have no pleasure?” he demanded truculently. “May I not have the doubtful joy of getting sick without your interference? How do you amuse yourself while you preach of creamless sugar, I ask to know?”

“All right, how do I?” I responded as he paused for comment.

“By reading the obituary columns of *le journal*, to see how many of the poor misguided ones who follow your advice have gone to their long rest, where doctors prate no more of cream and sugar—”

“These don’t happen to have been my patients,” I cut in laughing, “but there’s something queer about the way they died. Listen:

“Third Shervers Dies Mysteriously

“Truman Shervers, 25, son of the late Robert Shervers, well known importer, and brother of the late Jepson Shervers, yachtsman, of Larchmont, N.Y., was found dead in bed at the family residence in Tuscarora Avenue yesterday morning by Mazie O’Brien, a maid in the household, when she went to his room to ascertain why he had not come down to breakfast with the family, as was his usual custom. Doctors MacLeod and William Lucas, hastily summoned, pronounced him dead of heart failure. The deceased had never been heard to complain of illness of that character, and seemed in perfect health when he went to bed the night before.

“An air of gruesome mystery is lent to the occurrence by the fact that Mr. Shervers is the third member of his family to suffer sudden death within a month. His father, the late Robert Shervers, noted as an authority on Oriental art, was found dead in the library of the family home about a month ago, while his brother Jepson was discovered in a dying condition when a New York state trooper found his car crashed against a tree beside Pelham Park Boulevard, Mount Vernon, N.Y., two weeks later. He died without regaining consciousness. Members of the family when interviewed by *Journal* reporters declared all three deaths were ascribed to heart failure.

“What do you make of it?” I asked as I laid the paper by and helped myself to salted mackerel.

“*Tiens*, what does one ever make of death? The gentlemen appear to have been afflicted with a cardiac condition which they did not know about, and down they went, like dominoes in line, when it attacked them.”

“Humph,” I nodded, unconvinced. “I knew Jepson Shervers rather well, and saw him only three days before he died. He was feeling tiptop at the time and jubilant because he’d just received reports from his insurance broker that his application for fifty thousand increase in his policies had been approved. Insurance doctors don’t usually overlook such things as cardiac conditions, especially where fifty thousand dollars is involved. Truman’s death is even harder to explain. I saw him at the Racquet Club last Monday, and he’d just completed half an hour’s work-out on the squash courts. That’s pretty strenuous exercise for a cardiac.”

“No autopsy was held?”

“Apparently not. The doctors all seemed satisfied.”

“Then who are we to find fault with their diagnoses?” He drained a fresh cup of unsweetened coffee and rose. “Lunch-eon at half-past one, as usual? Good. I shall be here. Meantime, I have some matters to attend to at the library.”

“This way, gentlemen,” the frock-coated young man with smooth brushed hair, perfectly arranged cravat and mild, sympathetic manners met us at the door and ushered us to the back parlor of the Shervers house, where folding chairs had been set out in concentric semicircles with the casket as their focal point.

Nothing in the way of mortuary service had been omitted by the Martin Funeral Home. Behind a bank of palms a music reproducing device played the Largo from the *New World Symphony* so softly that its notes were scarcely audible:

“Going home, going home,
I’m just going home ...”

A linen runner spanned the scatter rugs that strewed the polished floors, making it impossible for anyone to trip or stumble as he passed from door to sitting-room. When folding chairs were broken out for late arrivals they opened with the softest clicks instead of sharp reports. We followed soundlessly in our conductor’s wake, but as he paused beside the archway to permit us to precede him, I halted

involuntarily. “*Comment?*” demanded Jules de Grandin in a whisper.

“That youngster,” I returned, nodding toward the young mortician; “he’s enough like Truman Shervers to have been his twin.”

“I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ...” Doctor Bentley began the office for the burial of the dead. A subdued flutter of fans, the soft swish-swish of unaccustomed black silk garments being adjusted by their wearers in the semi-hysteria women always show at funerals, the faint, muted murmurings of late arrivals at the front door, occasional low, distance-softened noises from the street outside accompanied the words.

“... We brought nothing into the world and it is certain we can carry nothing out ... the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away ...” the solemn words of the liturgy proceeded. De Grandin raised his hand and thrust his forefinger between his neck and collar. It was hot as only August in a rainy spell can be, and with Gallic worship of convention he had donned his cutaway and stiff-starched linen, disdainfully refusing to put on a mohair jacket and soft shirt as I did. The air was almost unsupportable in the close-packed room. The heavy, cloyingly sweet perfume of tuberose fell upon our senses like a sickening drug. Next to us a woman swayed upon her chair and turned imploring eyes upon the tight-shut window. Why hadn’t they availed themselves of Mr. Martin’s chapel? I wondered. His rooms were large and air-conditioned; people need not sit and stifle in them, but ... The lady on my left moaned softly. In a moment, I knew, she’d be sick or fainting.

Softly, treading noiselessly on feet accustomed to step without sound, the young mortician who had ushered us into the parlor tiptoed to the window, raised the lace-bordered blind and took the sash knobs in his hands. Watching idly, I saw him straighten with the effort of forcing up a sash warped in its casings by the spell of humid weather, and heard the faint squeak as the sash gave way and slid slowly upward. Something like this always happened when they had a funeral in the home, I ruminated. If only they had used the Martin chapel ...

Like a flash de Grandin left his seat and dashed across the room, clasping arms about the young man’s shoulders. In the act of opening the window the youngster had swayed back, almost as from a blow in the chest, and was sagging to the floor, sinking with a look of almost comical surprise upon his small, well modeled features.

“*Courage, mon brave,*” de Grandin whispered, closing ready arms about the fainting man. “Lean on me, it is the heat.”

I rose and joined them hurriedly, for despite his reassuring words I knew that it was neither the humidity nor

temperature which had stricken the young undertaker. His face was pale with a blue tinge, his lips were almost purple, as though he stood beneath the neon light in a quick-picture photographer’s. “Easy, son,” I comforted as we helped him down the hall; “we can’t afford to have folks getting all excited at a time like this.”

We reached the passage leading to the kitchen and eased our charge down to the floor while de Grandin bent to loose the black and white cravat which bound his stiffly starched wing collar.

“Ah — so. Is not that better?” he asked as he bent above the gasping youth. “You will be all well in just one little minute—”

“My God, sir, he popped up right in my face!” the boy cut in, his words mouthed difficultly, as though something soft and hot lay upon his tongue. “It was as if he waited there for me, and when I put the window up—” Thicker and thicker, softer and more soft his utterance came; finally it died away in a soft, choking gurgle. His head fell back against my arm, and I saw his jaw relax.

“Lord, let me know my end, and the number of my days; that I may be certified how long I have to live....” Doctor Bentley’s voice came smoothly, sonorously, from the room beyond. “O spare me a little that I may recover my strength before I go hence....”

Despite the almost suffocating heat I shuddered. There was something horrifyingly appropriate in the service being read beyond that archway.

The young funeral director lay dead at our feet.

De Grandin drummed a tattoo on the silver head of his black walking-stick as we drove homeward from the funeral. “My friend,” he announced, suddenly, “I do not like that house.”

“Eh?” I responded. “You don’t like—”

“By blue, I do not. It is an evil place. It has the smell of death and tragedy upon it. I noticed it the moment that I entered, and—”

“Oh, come, now,” I derided. “Don’t tell me you had a psychic spell and foresaw tragedy—”

“Indeed, I did. Not that poor young man’s deplorable decease, but—”

“I understand,” I interrupted, “but I don’t believe there’s anything partaking of the super-physical about it. Just one of those coincidences that make life seem so curiously unreal at times. The average person finds something faintly grotesque in an undertaker’s death — just as there’s something faintly comic in a doctor’s being ill — and the fact that he happened to die so tragically during the funeral service, when so much emotional energy was focussed on the thought of death—”

He squeezed my elbow with a quick grip of affection. "My good friend!" he exclaimed. "I understand you. You will not scoff at me, and so you rationalize the entirely illogical death of that poor young man to let me down without hurt feelings. I wish I could agree with you, but I cannot. When I declare there is an aura of misfortune, tragedy and death about that house I speak no more than simple truth. Some things there are we see without beholding, or hear without sound. Attend me carefully: As a spider lurks in secret at the center of her web, so death waited in that place. And just as many flies pass by the spider's snare unharmed, yet some eventually are caught, just so I knew the moment that I crossed the threshold that death would strike again, and soon, inside those portals. I think that we are lucky to have come away with whole skins."

"Perhaps you're right," I murmured. "It was certainly a most uncanny—"

"You saw him die," he interrupted. "Would you certify the cause of death?"

"It looked like some sort of heart seizure, there was marked cyanosis, labored breathing, difficulty in enunciation—"

"Agreed," he broke in, "but what was it that he said as we assisted him?"

"Oh, something about someone's waiting for him; you know what strangely garbled statements dying people make. The boy was agonizing, dying. His entire system of coordination was deranged, the nerves connecting thought and speech were short-circuited—"

He prodded me with a stiff forefinger. "Three persons, three members of a single family, have met death within a month. In every case the cause assigned was heart failure, an almost meaningless term, medically speaking. In no instance was there any history of cardiac disturbance; in one case the deceased was certified as being in sound health within a day or so of dying. No autopsies were had, nothing but objective symptoms led the doctors to ascribe the deaths to heart conditions. Now a young and healthy man succumbs in the same way. Tell me, if you were asked to give his cause of death, would you say it was heart failure?"

"Yes," I answered. "If it were impossible to have an autopsy and I could not have his medical history, I'd say, with no other evidence than that we have at present, that his death was due to heart failure."

His noncommittal exclamation was half a swallow, half a grunt.

"Now then," he faced me at the dinner table the next evening, "we are somewhat farther in our quest."

"Are we? I didn't know we had one."

"Indubitably. The so strange deaths among the *famille* Shervers, the equally inexplicable dispatch of the young mortuarian, the insistence on heart failure as the cause of each — *ah bah*, they did not make the sense. They outraged my ideas of propriety, they intrigued me. Yes. Assuredly."

"And so—"

"And so I got permission to attend the autopsy on the young man's body at the morgue today."

"And the finding was—"

"A failure of the heart, by blue!"

"I take it you do not agree?"

"Name of a piebald porcupine, my friend, you take it right! I begged, I pleaded, I entreated them to analyze the poor one's blood, for it was of a chocolate color, and I thought I smelled a characteristic odor. But would they do it? *Non!* Parnell, the coroner's physician, he laughed at me. At Jules de Grandin! 'See,' he said while grinning like a dog, 'here are the heart. It have ceased to function. Therefore it was a failure of the heart which killed him.'

"There was nothing one could do. One was present as a guest, and entirely without official status. And so I made him a most courteous bow. '*Monsieur*,' I said, 'permit me to congratulate you on your sublime ignorance.' Thereupon I came home to my dinner."

For upward of an hour he was busy in the surgery, and I had begun to wonder if he planned to spend the evening there when he emerged in shirt sleeves, his cuffs rolled back and a look of exultation on his face.

"Behold, observe, give attention," he commanded as he waved a test-tube like a banner shaken out in triumph. "When Parnell *l'idiot de naissance* refused to test the poor young undertaker's blood I held my lips — as much as could have been expected — but though my tongue was circumspect my hands were not. Oh, no; I was a thief, a pilferer, a criminal. I filled a little so small vial with blood wrung from a sponge and hid it in my pocket. I have subjected it to an analysis, that blood, and these things I have found: The blood are chocolate brown, not red as blood should be; on distillation I found tiny yellow globules which smelled of crushed peach kernels; when ether had been added and permitted to evaporate I found an aniline apparent by its odor, and the isonitrille test confirmed its presence. What do you say to that, *hein?*"

"Why, it sounds like poisoning by nitrobenzol, but—"

"*Précisément*, that but, he puts an obstacle before us, *n'est-ce-pas?* That nitrobenzol, he kills quickly; one cannot take him in his mouth, then walk around while he awaits his action. No. He acts by making it impossible for blood to take up oxygen, therefore his victims have the blue face — cyanosis. Yes?"

"Yes, of course, but—"

“Very well, then. If this odor of the kernel of the peach has not been smelled, and we see his victim fall, we might be led to think he suffered failure of the heart, *n'est-ce-pas?*”

“That’s so, but—”

“*Bien oui.* Here in this mortuarian we have a case which might be heart failure. It misleads my good Friend Trowbridge, who is nobody’s fool, it misleads that *sale chameau* Parnell who is everybody’s fool, but it does not mislead me. Oh, no. I am a very clever fellow, and follow where my nose directs. Now, if the young man dies of nitrobenzol poisoning, and everyone but Jules de Grandin thinks he dies of a weak heart, are it not entirely possible those members of the Shervers family succumbed to the same subtle poison? Are it not even probable?”

“Possible, of course,” I nodded, “but not highly probable. In the first place, there’s no earthly reason for any of them to have committed suicide, yet nitrobenzol’s not the kind of drug one can administer murderously. Its characteristic odor and sharp bitterness of taste would warn intended victims. Besides, we were right beside him when that poor boy died. One moment he was well, next instant he was falling in profound narcosis, and within two minutes he was dead. No one could have given him the poison; he could not have taken it himself and walked across the room to attempt to open the window. No, I’m afraid your theory isn’t tenable, de Grandin.”

He regarded me a moment, round-eyed as a puzzled tomcat. At length: “You said the young mortician bore resemblance to the Monsieur Shervers in whose funeral he participated? We may have something there. Is it not possible some evilly-intentioned person mistook him for a member of the Shervers family, and struck him down—

“By administering $C_6H_5NO_2$ in broad daylight, without anybody’s seeing him?” I asked sarcastically.

“*Précisément.* Exactly as you say.”

“But that is utterly fantastic—”

“I quite agree with you. It is. But fantasy may be fact, too. If a thing exists we must accept it, whether it is capable of proof or otherwise. Meantime”—methodically he turned his cuffs down and snapped the fastenings of his smoked pearl links — “let us go and tender our condolences to survivors of the Shervers family. It would be a gracious gesture — and we may find out something which we do not know at present.”

Old Eustace Shervers cowered in the tufted Turkish armchair set before the fireless fireplace of the stiffly formal parlor of the house where he had brought his bride some six and sixty years before when, a young lieutenant fresh from service under Farragut, he had come home from war to take his place in the importing business founded by his Anglo--

Indian father. He was a pitiable figure, vulture-bald and crippled with arthritis, half blind with presbyopia, bent with the weight of eighty-seven years. Almost destitute of blood-kin, too, for all his family had preceded him except his great-grandson Elwood, Jepson’s son, back from school in England to attend his father’s funeral, and still at home when tragedy deprived him of his uncle. Now the old man fumbled with his blackthorn cane and stared at us with blue, almost blind eyes.

“Yes, gentlemen,” he said in the cracked voice old age imposes on its victims, “it almost seems a curse is on our family. First came Robert’s death, from heart failure, they said, though he seemed as vigorous as anyone could be, then Jepson, and now Truman. Jepson wanted more insurance, you know, and when the doctors said it was his father’s heart that killed him he went down at once for examination. The doctors looked him over carefully, and certified his health as perfect. His application for \$50,000 more insurance was approved, although the policies had not been issued when they found him dead in his car on the Pelham Road.

“Now Truman’s gone the same way. He’d been designated for examination for the Marine Corps, and the naval surgeons gave him perfect ratings. Although he’d studied hard to pass his written tests, he’d kept in perfect trim, and apparently he was in the best of health. Why, on the day before the night he died he played six games of squash and won them all. Could anyone about to die of heart failure have done that?”

“It seems unlikely, *Monsieur,*” de Grandin answered as he gazed with more curiosity than courtesy at the family portraits hanging on the walls. Abruptly: “Who is that one, if you please?” he asked, nodding to an oval picture done indifferently in oils and representing a young man in scarlet tunic piped with blue, a small mustache and rudimentary goatee.

His sudden change of subject shocked me hardly more than his unconcealed curiosity, and I saw old Shervers draw his bloodless lips across his false dentition at the exhibition as he answered rather stiffly, “That is my father, sir, Captain Hardon Jennings Shervers of the artillery corps of the British India Company, who fought with marked distinction through the Mutiny and helped to execute the white man’s justice on the bloody dogs who massacred the women in the Cawnpore dungeons. He emigrated to America shortly afterward and engaged in Oriental trade—”

“*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur,* is one to understand your father was commander of a battery which blew the Mutiny ringleaders from the cannon’s mouth?”

“That is correct, sir. I was a lad at the time, but I well remember how the terror of those executions spread throughout all India, how the Hindoos cringed away in fear

whenever a *sahib* passed” — his purblind eyes turned backward on the savage memory and his rheumatism-knotted fingers tightened on the silver knob of his thorn stick — “I tell you, gentlemen, not for a century will those heathen forget what we did to them that day!”

“*Tiens*, I damn think you have right, *mon ancien*,” de Grandin murmured; then, irrelevantly: “Tell me, if you please, how did your most respected father die?”

Once more the old man’s withered lips were puckered back against his false teeth as though a drawstring tightened them. “He died of heart disease.”

“And had he suffered long with the complaint?”

“He had not; no, sir. Like my son and grandsons, he was in what seemed to be good health up to the time he died. He passed away while sleeping.”

“One sees.” For a moment he was silent, studying the bent old man as an Egyptologist might took upon some relic of a vanished time and race. At length he rose and bowed with Continental courtesy. “Thank you for your information, and again we ask you to accept our sympathy,” he said.

“*Nom d’un nom d’un nom d’un nom*,” he muttered as we drove home, “it is a puzzle with two tails we have here, good Friend Trowbridge! I have grasped one of them, but the other still eludes me.”

“What the deuce?” I queried.

“Precisely, exactly, quite so. I ask the same. Consider: We have here a family descended from a British officer who officiated at the blowing from the guns of Sepoy Mutineers. We heard the old one boast about the white man’s vengeance and say that never in a hundred years would Indians forget. *Tenez*, I think he spoke more truly than he knew when he said that, for the corollary of the white man’s vengeance is the vengeance of the Indian. If they hold the memory of those executions for a hundred years who shall say they do not hold the thought of retribution for an equal time?”

“But holding grudges and satisfying them aren’t necessarily the same thing.”

“*Mais non*, but think: Old Monsieur Shervers’ father died of heart disease. He was in good health, there were no warning symptoms, but he died. So did his grandsons. In every case it was the same. All were apparently in good health, all were stricken dead by heart disease. Even the young mortician who had the sad misfortune to resemble one of them was smitten by the same malady, apparently. *Mordieu*, coincidence’s arm is long, but these happenings pull it out of joint. It does not make the sense. Death is not obliged to give us notice of our dispossession from our bodies, but usually he does so. Not so with these ones. First they are strong and vigorous; then *pouf!* they are not even sick. They die. What is the answer?”

“But your blood tests seem to indicate the undertaker died of nitrobenzol poisoning.”

“They do, indeed, and I should like to wager that if we could perform similar tests upon the others’ blood we’d find that they too died of just that sort of ‘heart disease.’ I am convinced these so-called natural deaths are most unnatural. That dying lad was not delirious when he declared one was waiting for him by the window.”

“Who was it, have you any idea?”

“Not the slightest, or, to be more accurate, only the slightest. I think that I can guess what he was, but who? *Hélas, non*. I grope, I feel about with searching fingers like the blind man who has lost his dog and stick, but darkness shuts me in on every side. I am at fault. It is as well that it grows late. Let us go to bed and sleep upon the problem. Tomorrow I may see more clearly.”

“It is unfortunate we could not see young Monsieur Elwood last night,” de Grandin told me at the breakfast table next morning. “He might have added something to the old one’s statement which would help us understand the case. Old people have their eyes set on the past; the modern viewpoint might be helpful—”

“I’ll call and ask him to drop over,” I volunteered. “We’d better not go over there, it might excite the old man.”

Picking up the breakfast room telephone I dialed the Shervers’ number, heard the smooth purr of the dial tone give way to the rhythmic buzzing of the automatic signal; then, “Hello?” I called as a woman’s muffled voice came to me on the wire. Queer, I thought, it seemed almost as if her words were choked with crying, but:

“Good Lord!” I dropped the monophone back in its cradle and stared at Jules de Grandin in incredulous dismay.

“*Comment?*” he looked up from his plate of sausages and cakes.

“Eustace Shervers died last night. They say that it was—”

“*Non!* Do not tell me; let me guess; it was the heart disease, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“That makes the fourth death in a month—”

“And unless we act with speed a fifth will follow quickly, I damn think!”

Dashing to the telephone he called the Martin Funeral Home, found that the old man’s body had not yet been taken from his house, and with a muttered farewell ran full-tilt toward the front door and out into the street as though he were pursued by all the fiends of Pandemonium.

In half an hour he was back and shut himself up in the surgery. Occasionally I could hear the clink of glass on glass mingled with the low hum of his voice as he sang his private and entirely indecent version of a French translation of *Saint James’ Infirmary Blues*. When he emerged there was a look

of triumph on his face as he thrust a test-tube forward for inspection. “*C’est tout de même,*” he declared. “The old one’s blood test shows the same reaction as the poor young mortuarian’s. He too was poisoned by administration of nitrobenzol, and died of ‘heart disease’.”

“How’d you get a specimen—” I began, but he waved my question airily aside.

“One does not serve for years as agent of *le sûreté* and not learn tricks, my friend. I met the body of Monsieur Eustace as it came to the embalming-room. I requested that I be allowed to look at it, and while no one was looking I filled a syringe with his blood. *Voilà.* I brought it back with me; I tested it, and here it is, with every evidence of poison in it.”

“But why, how—” I began.

“Why? *C’est tout simple.* The father’s sins were visited upon the son — and on the sons’ sons and their sons. The white man’s vengeance which old Eustace boasted of last night begot the vengeance of the Hindoos. Did he not say they never would forget? *Parbleu,* it seems that they have not!

“As to the how, the *modus operandi* of the poisonings, that is for us to find, but find it out we must, unless we wish to see the funeral of the last one of the Shervers family.”

“Surely, you’re not serious, Doctor?” Young Elwood Shervers looked curiously at the small Frenchman. “Why, it’s utterly preposterous! Who would want to wipe the Shervers family out? We’ve never injured anyone that I can think of, and as for a family curse, or Nemesis, as you have termed it, it’s too absurd to talk about. Of course, I’m grateful for your interest, and all that sort o’ thing, but — well, we’re English stock, you know. If we were French or Irish we might have family *Dames Blanches* or banshees, but” — the slightest trace of patronage showed in his voice — “we’re not, and we haven’t. And that’s definitely that.”

De Grandin took a quick puff at his cigarette and narrowed his eyes against the smoke, looking hard at Elwood. “*Monsieur,* this is no laughing matter, I assure you. Inspect the record, as your so magnificent Al Smith advises: Your first American ancestor fell victim to a heart attack, yet no one suspected he was menaced by the ailment. Your father and your uncles died, all in the prime of health, two of them with fresh certificates of health from doctors trained and paid to find the slightest defect. ‘Heart, disease — heart failure,’ the cause of death is given as monotonously as the chanting of an auctioneer who invites bids—”

“Oh, yes, we’ve been all over that,” young Shervers interrupted. “But it’s not a bit of use, sir. There must have been a strain of cardiac weakness somewhere, although no one suspected it. When Truman died, the strain and shock were just too much for poor old Grandpa Eustace. The

wonder is the poor old chap hung on so long. Now, I’m a different temperament, I’m—”

“You are most woefully mistaken, *Monsieur.* Granting sorrow joined with shock to bring death to your relatives, what of the other one, the young mortuarian who died in this house during your uncle’s funeral?”

Elwood fumbled at the red and blue necktie which marked him as a public school man. “Coincidence?” he muttered.

“Coincidence, my friend, is what the fool calls fate,” de Grandin shot back. “The coincidence which caused the young man’s death was that he happened to resemble Truman Shervers. We saw him cross the room to raise a window; we saw him stagger back as though he had been struck; we heard him say that someone waited for him at the window; we saw him die within two minutes. And did he also die of heart disease? By blue, he did not! Listen carefully:

“Human sight is fallible. A skilled physician looking at the blue-hued face of one who dies from nitrobenzol poisoning might be misled to think that he had died of heart failure. But chemistry makes no mistakes. When this and that is mixed with that and this, reactions are invariable. There is no room for argument. So when I tell you that I made a test of the young undertaker’s blood and found that he was dead of nitrobenzol poisoning I do not make a statement which can be debated.” He paused, then, earnestly: “The same tests prove your *gran’père* died of nitrobenzol poisoning, *Monsieur.*”

“What?” Elwood looked to me for confirmation or denial.

I nodded. “We can’t explain it, Elwood, but undoubtedly the tests were positive. It was poison and not heart disease that killed them both.”

Elwood Shervers’ patronizing manner vanished like a morning mist before the rising sun. “Good Lord!” he almost wailed. “If that’s so, what’s to hinder them from killing me?”

“Only Jules de Grandin, my young friend.”

“Then what do you advise, sir? I’ll do anything in reason—”

“Ha, the fear of death, like fear of God, is the beginning of wisdom, it appears. Your behavior is a matter of concern, *Monsieur.* Walk, ride, play golf, do exactly as you please, but always in the company of others. Meanwhile, at home, be careful not to stand by any opened door or window, and permit no one to interview you while you are alone. You comprehend? It is not a rigorous routine.”

“Oh, I say, you must be spoofing, aren’t you? If someone’s out to do me in, as you seem sure he is, why should I give ’em opportunity to slip the old stiletto in my back by walking in the street, yet keep away from open doors and windows in the house? Are they like the influenza, coming in on drafts?”

“*Mais oui*, they are as subtle as *la grippe*, but infinitely more deadly, I assure you. This evening we shall call upon you. If they run true to form your periods of greatest danger will be between sunset and daybreak.”

“Right-ho, I’ll follow through with your prescription, Doctor, and we’ll gather round the festive board for dinner about seven.”

Dinner was not what might be called a jovial meal. Shervers forked vaguely at the food upon his plate and I did little more than play with mine. De Grandin, as always appreciative of good food, did full justice to the soup and fish and roast and kept Ordway, Shervers’ butler, occupied with the chablis bottle and the claret cruet. But time and time again I caught his keen glance straying to the long windows at the north end of the room. As for me, my eyes were hardly turned away from them, for the observation he had made as we drove over ran insistently against my inner ears: “We do not know in what guise death will come but we are certain it will try to enter through the windows.”

At last we had completed the ordeal by food and moved into the little drawing-room where Ordway brought us coffee, chartreuse and cigars. The room was rather small, not more than twenty long by eighteen feet in width, and in its furnishings one read the Shervers family’s traits and history. A few examples of Georgian mahogany were almost lost among an assemblage of more exotic pieces, a Dutch-Chinese highboy, a teakwood table set with tortoise-shell, Chinese panels, Japanese prints, old Russian and Greek ikons, carved Italian candlesticks, books bound in Persian covers, Bokhara rugs upon the floor. In the bow window was a tabouret of Chinese red and on it a tall vase of Peking blue held a bouquet of summer roses. Above a fireplace fashioned in Damascus tiles was crossed a pair of swords, that worn by Eustace Shervers when he fought with Farragut at Mobile Bay and the one his father wore when he served the guns that blasted back the Sepoy Mutineers at Lucknow.

Shervers filled his chartreuse glass and his hand shook so the green liqueur slopped over and dripped down on the silver tray. “Damn!” he muttered, then, half peevishly, half challengingly to de Grandin: “You’re certain that my ancestor’s connection with the execution of the mutineers is what’s behind all this?”

“I am convinced of it, *Monsieur*.”

“Well, I’m convinced you’re off your rocker. Of course, I don’t know much about these Hindoo Johnnies, but they can’t be quite as fierce as you make out. There were some of ’em at school with me in England, and they seemed as mild as milk-and-water. Suppose my great-great-grandfather did officiate at antemortem exercises for some of ’em, that was a hundred years ago, almost, and you’d hardly think these

crumpets would retain a grudge that long. Why, they always seemed a cross between white rabbits and black guinea-pigs to me. Nothing vindictive about ’em.”

There was something almost pitying in the look de Grandin gave him. “Mild-mannered, did you say, *Monsieur*? *Bien oui*, so is the serpent when he lies at ease and suns himself upon a rock; so is the tiger, in repose. Have you never stood before a tiger’s den at the menagerie and wondered how the lovely, sleepy-seeming creature lying there like an enlarged edition of the fireside tabby-cat could he considered fierce and dangerous?”

“My friend, if you had said these so demure ones were bred from cobras crossed with tigers you would have come much nearer to the truth than when you said they seemed like cross-breeds of the rabbit and the guinea-pig. Your father’s grandsire’s father knew the breed much better, I assure you. He had been born and reared in India, he knew of Nana Sahib and the things he did at Cawnpore.”

“Nana?” echoed Elwood. “I always thought that was a woman’s name. Didn’t Zola write a novel—?”

“*Morbleu* — and you have been to school! Attend me, if you please, while I amend your education: Nana Sahib was the leader of the mutineers at Cawnpore. After he had put the British garrison to death with most revolting tortures, he forced two hundred Englishwomen and their children into a small cellar, then sent professional butchers in to kill them. *Parbleu*, for upward of two hours their cries and screams and prayers for mercy filled that dismal cellar while the ruthless killers slaughtered them as if they had been sheep, sparing neither infirm beldame, tender toddling babe nor young and lovely maiden. There we have a sample of the so mild manners of the crossbred guinea-pigs and rabbits which you spoke of. It was an act of useless cruelty this Nana Sahib did; he knew the British under Havelock were almost within striking distance of his trenches. He ordered these assassinations only that his innate lust for cruelty and blood might be appeased. Now hear me, if you please” — he thrust a finger rigid as a bayonet at our host — “these ones we have to deal with, I believe, are lineal descendants of the men who carried out the bloody Nana’s orders, or others very like them. India sleeps, you think? *Mais certainement*, but while she sleeps she dreams a dream of vengeance. The recollection of the crushing defeat fifty thousand Englishmen administered to almost as many million Indians rankles in her racial consciousness like a splinter in a festered sore. They owe a debt of deep humiliation to the English, and every Briton killed is so much interest on the long-delayed account. You comprehend? It is more than merely probable that you and yours have been marked for assassination since the day the guns your grandsire served blew captured mutineers to bits in vengeance for the Massacre at

Cawnpore. Yes, certainly. Of course.”

The look upon young Shervers’ face reminded me of that a half-grown child might wear while listening to an adult tell a tale of Santa Claus. He drained his *pousse-café* glass at a gulp. “I think you’re talking rot,” he growled. “Furthermore, I’d just as lief be killed by those assassins whom you talk about as smother here with all the windows down.” He glared defiantly at de Grandin, then rose and crossed to the bow-window. “I’m goin’ to let some air in here.”

“Don’t!” I cried, and:

“*Insensé, imbécile, nigaud!*” de Grandin shouted. “*Nom d’un sacré nom*, you will destroy yourself completely!”

With an impatient gesture Elwood threw the curtains back, ran up the lace-edged blind and raised the sash.

Something like a long-drawn, venomous hiss — yet strangely like a cough — came to us from the outside darkness. There was a flash of white eyes in a swarthy face, the gleam of white teeth in a smile of gloating triumph, and the window-shade cord swayed as though a light breeze blew it.

Shervers staggered backward, both hands raised to clutch his throat, then stumbled crazily as though a cord had stretched across the floor to snare his feet, and dropped full length, face-upward, on the Mosul carpet.

Crash — tinkle! The shattering of splintered glass accompanied the roar de Grandin’s pistol made as he snatched the weapon from his dinner jacket pocket and fired point-blank at the momentary silhouette of the dark face and evil smile that showed outside the window. A mocking laugh responded and the tap of fleeing feet came back to us from the brick walk that circled round the house and let into the alley.

“See to him — artificial respiration!” de Grandin cried as he vaulted through the window in pursuit of the dark visitant.

I turned the fainting man face-downward, rolled my dinner coat into a wad and thrust it underneath his chest, then began applying Schaefer’s method, pressing firmly down upon the costal margins, swinging back, then bearing down again, counting twenty rapidly between each alternating pressure. “Ordway!” I shouted. “Ordway, bring some brandy and water!”

“Yes, sir?” The butler tiptoed through the doorway, his disapproval of my rowdy manners written plainly on his smoothly shaven face. “Did something happen?”

“Nothing much,” I answered tartly. “Only someone nearly murdered Mr. Elwood. Get some water and brandy, and be quick about it!”

It might have been five minutes, though it seemed much longer, before the boy began to breathe in shuddering sighs instead of stifled gasps. I bent my arm behind his shoulders,

raised him and poured brandy mixed with water down his throat. “Easier now?” I asked.

He shuddered as though he were chilled. “He — he seemed waiting out there for me — popped right up in my face! It” — he coughed and retched — “it was like fire — like smoke — like something that exploded in my face!”

A grisly feeling of malaise came over me. “He seemed waiting out there for me” — the words the dying funeral director gasped when we helped him from the window where he had been stricken! I had the eerily uncomfortable feeling that small red ants were running up my spine and neck and through my hair. “Ordway,” I called again, “see to Mr. Elwood. Give him a sip of brandy every few minutes, and fan him steadily with something. I’ll be back directly.”

Climbing through the window I looked around for Jules de Grandin. There was no sign of him. “Hi, de Grandin!” I called. “Where are you?”

“*Ohé, mon vieux — à moi!*” the hail came from the rear of the garden. “Come and see the fish that we have caught!”

The gleam of his white shirt-front guided me to where he sat upon the grass, a cigarette between his lips, a smile of utter satisfaction with himself upon his face. Thirty feet or so away something writhed upon the shadowed lawn and cursed venomously in a whining voice with thick-tongued words. “Good heavens, what is it?” I asked.

For answer he drew out his pocket flashlight and shot its beam upon his quarry. In the diffused circle of pale orange light I saw an undersized dark man, emaciated as a mummy, sparsely bearded, turbaned. There was something horribly reminiscent of a June-bug on a string about the way he clawed a little distance on the grass, then stopped abruptly with a cry or curse of pain and slipped back, as if he had been pinioned by a tether of elastic. Then I saw. Biting cruelly on his left leg were the saw-toothed jaws of a steel trap, and anchoring the trap was a strong chain made fast to a stout peg.

“Good Lord, man! What—” Involuntarily, I stepped forward to release the tortured prisoner.

“Keep back, my friend!” de Grandin warned. “*Retirez vous!*”

The warning came a thought too late. As I leant forward the trapped man roused upon an elbow, pursed his lips and blew his breath into my face. I stepped backward, choking. Overwhelmingly powerful, the fumes of some gas, hot and scalding-bitter, stung my throat and nostrils, strangling me. The world seemed whirling like a carousel gone crazy, blindness fell upon me, but it was a blindness shot with bursting lights. My head seemed swelling to the bursting-point. Dully, I felt, yet scarcely felt, the impact of my fall. Half senseless, I realized I lay upon my back, weak, limp and sick as though anesthetized with ether, yet with slowly rising

consciousness returning.

“Wha—what?” I gasped, then choked and coughed and gasped again.

“*C’est un empoisonneur vicieux!*” I felt my wrists seized in a firm grip as Jules de Grandin pumped my arms up and down vigorously. Gradually the breath refilled my lungs, the dizziness subsided, and I sat up, staring round me in bewilderment. “You said it was a vicious poisoner—”

“*Mais oui.* I did, indeed, my friend. He is just that, the naughty fellow. Everything is all clear now, but there remain some things to be attended to.” Methodically he cut a long switch from a lilac bush and stripped its leaves off. “Behold how I apply the antidote,” he ordered as he advanced upon the prisoner and struck him a cruel cut with the peeled wither.

I watched in a paralysis of fascination. Oddly, repulsively, the pantomime was more like the torture of a snake than the torment of a man. The wretched creature on the ground writhed and wriggled like a serpent, clawed the grass, whined and hissed. Time and time again he tried to reach de Grandin, rearing up upon his elbows, thrusting forth his head and blowing at him with a hissing sibilation.

“*Sa-ha!*” The little Frenchman leaped back nimbly, as from a physical attack, and struck and struck the prisoner again, now on his skull-thin face, now across the writhing shoulders or the twisting back, now on the legs.

The poor wretch slowly weakened in his efforts to defend himself. Between the pain of merciless beating and the torture of the steel trap clamped about his ankle, he was tiring rapidly, but de Grandin was relentless. “Blow, breathe at me, exhale, *diablotin!*” and the swish and clapping impact of his lash gave punctuation to his orders.

“Stop it, man!” I cried, almost sickened at the spectacle.

The look he turned on me made me shrink back, a hand involuntarily raised in defense. Once as a lad I’d tried to take a baby chick from my pet cat, and the recollection of the transformation of my gentle playmate to a snarling small edition of a tiger had never quite been banished from my mind. It was such a transformation that I witnessed now. His lips curled back in a snarl that bared his small, sharp teeth, his little blond mustache reared upward like the whiskers of a furious tomcat, de Grandin seemed an incarnation of the god of vengeance.

“Keep clear!” he ordered savagely. “This affair is mine, to handle as my judgment dictates.”

I retreated. It would have taken one far bolder than I was to try to take his prey away from him.

Cut — lash! His whip descended on the groveling man until it seemed that he desisted more from weariness than mercy. At last he threw the switch aside and stood looking at the trembling, sobbing wretch stretched on the grass before him. “I think that is enough,” he told me matter-of-

factly. “His venom-sac should be exhausted now.”

“Whatever are you talking about?”

“*Tout à l’heure,*” he cut me short. “At present we have duties to perform, my friend.” Twisting his handkerchief into a cord he bound the prisoner’s wrists securely at his back; then: “Put your foot down here, if you will be so good,” he ordered, pointing to an arm of the steel trap, and rested his foot on the other prong, heaving downward at the saw-toothed jaws and releasing the man’s ankle from their grip.

“Go, march, *en avant!*” he commanded, digging the muzzle of his pistol in the captive’s back and pushing him toward the house. To me:

“Will you be kind enough to telephone the police and inform them that we have a tenant ready for the *bastille?*”

All spirit seemed to have been whipped out of our prisoner. The demoniacal gleam had faded from his eyes, his shoulders sagged, once or twice he shuddered and shook as if with overmastering sobs. “*Jo hoegha so hoegha* — what is written must come to pass!” he muttered.

“Beard of a green goat, never have you said a truer word, my wicked one!” de Grandin agreed as he thrust his pistol deeper in the small of the man’s back.

“But no, my friends,” he told us as, highball glass in hand, he faced us in the Shervers’ little drawing-room, “it was all most beautifully simple, or, more exactly, beautifully complex.”

Resting his glass on the mantelpiece he spread his finger fanwise and ticked the first point off upon his thumb.

“To commence at the beginning: It seemed strange to me when Doctor Trowbridge first related how the Shervers family was being stricken by heart disease in series. Such things do occur, of course, but they are of sufficient unusualness to excite our wonder. However, I was but mildly interested until that day we came here to the funeral and saw young Monsieur Oldham, the mortician, die. His death seemed due to heart disease, but there were certain things about it which rang warning bells inside my brain. His face was cyanotic — blue-hued — which is evidence of heart failure, but not the sort of evidence which excludes all other diagnoses. Also, about him, on his linen, in his breath, there was a subtle, faint perfume. Not of *l’eau de Cologne*, not *parfum social*, but of bitter almonds — crushed peach kernels. Why?

“That odor is found in a number of strong poisons, in prussic acid, in its deadly volatile derivative, hydrocyanic gas. But these kill very quickly. The young man had seemed well and strong — then he was dead. He could not have committed suicide by such means, and it seemed impossible anyone had killed him; yet he was very dead, and my experiments were later to convince me that he died from breathing fumes of nitrobenzol. However, we anticipate.

“When we called upon your venerable ancestor and saw his father’s portrait on the wall, I found a basis for these deaths, but still I did not see the way the murders were committed.

“It is a matter of historic record that some of those who helped to execute the Sepoy Mutineers — and their children and their children’s children — died in circumstances so unusual as to point to vengeance killings, and in some instances these were of a nature which precluded anything but magic having been involved.” Elwood Shervers gave vent to a snort of incredulity; de Grandin stared him down as a master might stare down a noisy pupil in the class room, and proceeded:

“But if a ghost pursued the Shervers family, working out an ancient blood feud, he would be discriminating. He would not kill the poor young mortuarian because he was unfortunate enough to bear a close resemblance to the Shervers. Human beings make such errors in the flesh, they do not make them when they are translated into spirit form. Furthermore, a ghost would not employ the simple way of poison. They have other ways of doing violence, those ones. Accordingly, I was obliged to seek a human agency in this.

“The young Monsieur Oldham had gasped out something of a man — or thing — which waited for him at the window just before he had his fatal seizure. Well then, we were to seek for one who lurked at windows. Your uncles died in bed or sitting in the house. A murderer could enter at the window and administer the poison to them while they slept. Your father died upon the highway, presumably of a heart failure. But he was in a closed coupé. Had someone asked a ride of him and been taken in his car, conditions would have been ideal for that one to have gassed him as they rode. Your grandsire died in bed, but he was old and weak. A burglar might have entered through the window, released the deadly gas upon him, then left all quietly. The gas of nitrobenzol is highly volatile. In half an hour there would remain no telltale odor to arouse suspicion. Only an autopsy would disclose the true nature of his death, and the mistaken diagnosis of heart failure precluded the necessity of a post-mortem.

“There seemed a ritual in these killings. One of the oldest Eastern curses is: ‘May you see your children and your children’s children blotted out, and live to die alone in bleak despair, without the hope of progeny.’ Such a course, it seemed, these killings took. Sons and grandsons perished, called to death from perfect health, while your grandsire lingered on. You alone were spared, perhaps because the killer thought he had dispatched you when he killed young Monsieur Oldham.

“This we could not have. We must act with speed if you were to be saved. The killer might go home, believing his work done, then months or years afterward find he was

mistaken, and come back to complete the extirpation of your family. We had to force his hand immediately. Therefore I asked you to display yourself in public, but to have a care of open doors and windows.

“Our strategy succeeded. The miscreant who sought your life became aware of his mistake; he would come back, I knew; but how or where he’d strike I did not know. Accordingly, I made the preparation for his coming. I visited your house this afternoon and saw the way a man would take if he desired to hasten from a ground-floor window to the alley, whence he could make his get-away unseen. Then in his way I placed a steel trap, trusting he would step into it as he ran. I desired you should be seen through the window, but I did not wish to have you open it. But you disobeyed my orders, and almost forfeited your life in doing so. Into your face he blew the poison fumes; then off he ran pell-mell and — stepped in Jules de Grandin’s trap.

“The fact that Doctor Trowbridge was at hand to give first aid enabled you to live where others died. Had we known the nature of his illness we could have saved the poor young Monsieur Oldham, too, but” — he raised his shoulders in a shrug — “ignorance has cost more lives than one.

“Now I had thought the poisoner was armed with some sort of a tank in which he kept his gas in concentrated form; therefore I followed him with caution until I saw him stumble in the trap and saw his hands were empty. Then I almost made the fatal error. I advanced on him; he roused upon his hands and blew his breath on me. *Parbleu*, I thought that instant was my last! But we were in the open air, and he struck too quickly, before I had come near enough. I revived, and Doctor Trowbridge came and suffered as I had.

“‘Jules de Grandin, what sort of man is it who breathes out sudden death?’ I asked myself.

“‘Think, Jules de Grandin, you great stupid-head,’ I reply to me, ‘are he not an Indian, a Hindoo, and in India do they not have persons who are bred from infancy to ply the trade of poisoner?’

“‘It is exactly as you say, my clever Jules de Grandin,’ I reply. ‘Some of these poisoners are so venomous the mere touch of their hand will kill an ordinary man; others can blow poison breath, exactly like the fabled dragons of the olden days—’”

“‘You mean to say that man could kill a person merely by breathing on him?’ I interrupted. ‘I’ve heard about those Indian poisoners, but I’d always thought the stories old wives’ tales.’”

“‘The beldame’s talc is often just a garbled version of a scientific truth,’ he answered. ‘Consider, if you please:

“‘You know how quickly human bodies set up tolerance to medicine. The man who suffers pain and takes an opiate

today will take a dose three times as large next year, a dose which would be fatal to an ordinary man, yet which will hardly register upon a system which has been habituated to the drug. The pretty ladies who take arsenic for the sake of their complexions become habituated to the poison till they can take an ounce or more a day, yet not be inconvenienced by it. It is like that with these ones, only more so. Habituated to the deadliest of poisons from their early infancy, these naughty men can ingest doses large enough to kill a dozen ordinary persons, yet feel no evil consequences.

“How did this one work? It was as simple — and as subtle — as a juggler’s trick. Nitrobenzol, known commercially as oil of mirbane or artificial oil of almonds, is highly deadly. Fifteen drops compose a lethal dose, and its fumes are almost deadly as its substance. Upon inhaling them one becomes unconscious quickly — remember the young mortuarian — and death comes in a few minutes. The victim’s face is cyanotic, having a blue tinge, as though heart failure were responsible. That is because the poison works by making it impossible for blood to take up oxygen. One cannot greatly blame the doctors who were misled. External symptoms all said ‘heart disease,’ and there was no reason why foul play should be suspected.

“Very well. Before going on a foray this one drank a quantity of nitrobenzol. It is highly volatile, and his stomach’s warmth rendered it still more so. He approached

a victim all unarmed. Could anyone suspect him? *Non*. Ah, but when he came within a breathing-distance, by a sudden torsion of the muscles of his thorax and abdomen, he induced an artificial eructation — the poison gas was belched forth from his mouth, his victim fell and — *voilà tout!*”

“I see,” I exclaimed, “that’s why you beat him so unmercifully! You wanted him to discharge all the poison gas his stomach contained.... I’m very glad, de Grandin; I’d thought that you were merely taking vengeance on him—”

He flashed his quick, infectious grin at me. “You are very good and very kind — too much so, sometimes, good Friend Trowbridge — but there are times when I have serious reason to believe you are not as well equipped with brains as you might be. Of course, I beat the miscreant. Was it his life against ours? While he still retained the power to spew the poison gases out we dared not go near him, nor could the police take him, for he needed but to breathe to free himself. I am not a cruel man, but I am logical. I do the needful when the need for doing it arises. Yes.”

“But this poison—” began Shervers.

“Poison assumes many guises,” interrupted Jules de Grandin. “At present, if you please, I should like some from that lovely bottle standing at your elbow.” He drained his highball glass and held it out to be replenished.

Black Moon

THE AUGUST sun had reigned all day as mercilessly as a tsar whose ukase is a sword and whose sword is sudden death. Now in the evening cool we were dining in the garden, and dinner was unusually good, even for such a virtuoso of cuisine as Nora McGinnis. Tiny clams chilled almost crisp and served with champagne *brut* were followed by green turtle soup and pale dry sherry, then roast young guinea-hen and ginger ice with white Burgundy. Now the spicy sweetness of Chartreuse and the bitterness of Java coffee put a period to a meal which might have brought a flush of envy to Lucullus' face. "*Tiens*, my friend, I am in a pious mood, me," announced Jules de Grandin, his little round blue eyes bright in the candlelight. "But certainly, of course—"

"Are you repenting of past sins, or sins to be committed?" I replied.

He grinned at me. "Observe," he ordered. "In Tarragona, where the good Carthusian brethren work so hard to make this precious stuff, they say that drinking one small glass of it is equal to attending three low masses. *Parbleu*, I make amends for laxness in devotions—" He poised the cruet of green liqueur to decant a second drink, but the *wisp-wisp* of swift feet on close-cropped grass broke in upon his solemn rite.

"If yez plaze, sors, there's a gintleman to see yez," announced Nora.

Nora resents callers after office hours. More than once she has turned my patients off with sharp-tongued rebuke when they rang the door-bell around dinnertime, but now her eyes were shining with suppressed elation, and she seemed to labor with some weighty secret as she bore the message of the interruption to our after-dinner confab.

"A visitor — *grand Dieu des porcs!* — are we to be eternally annoyed by them?" de Grandin answered tartly. "Bid him depart, *ma chère*, tell him we are indisposed, that we died this afternoon and now await the coming of the undertaker—"

"And if she did he'd not believe a word of it; he's too familiar with your shameless lies, you little blighter!" a deep voice challenged as a big form vaulted from the side porch and came striding toward us through the deepening twilight.

"*Comment? Mais non!* It cannot be, and yet it is, by blue!" de Grandin cried. "Hiji, *mon brave, mon cher camarade, mon beau copain* — is it truly thou, or has some spirit put your form upon him?" In a moment he had grasped the big intruder by the shoulders, drawn him to him in a bear-hug

and stood on tiptoe to impress a kiss on both his cheeks.

"Give over, you small devil, d'ye want the neighbors talkin'?" exclaimed the new arrival, thrusting back the little Frenchman, but retaining a tight hold upon his shoulders. "Trowbridge, old top, how are you?" With his free hand he grasped mine and almost paralyzed it in a vise-tight grip.

"Ingraham!" I gasped, amazed. "My boy, I'm glad to see you!"

"Glad enough to offer me a whisky-soda?" he asked as he drew a chair up to the table.

Nora had the bottle and siphon at his side almost before he could finish speaking, and as he poured about four ounces of the liquor in his glass and diluted it with rather less than that much soda I observed him carefully. Sir Haddingway Ingraham Jamison Ingraham, known to all his intimates as Hiji, late of the Sierra Leone Frontier Police, member of the British Army Intelligence, detective extraordinary and adventurer-at-large, was taller by almost two feet than Jules de Grandin, and lean with the leanness of the practiced athlete. Although his small mustache was black, his hair was iron-gray, and his long, thin, high-cheeked face was burned almost the hue of old mahogany. With de Grandin and Costello and Inspector Renouard of the French Cambodian *gendarmerie* he had smashed a bold conspiracy to spread devil worship throughout Asia, and more than once we'd talked of him and mourned his absence when we'd found ourselves in places where a man with a strong arm and ability to shoot straight would have come in handy. Now, dropped from the summer evening sky, apparently, he sat beside us, drinking whisky-soda as composedly as though we'd seen each other at the breakfast table.

"What is it brings you here, my friend?" de Grandin asked. "Is it that you offer us a chance to go with you on some adventure? One hopes so most devoutly. Life grows stale and tiresome in New Jersey—"

The big Englishman grinned at him. "Still on the go, eh, Frenchy? Too bad I have to let you down, but I'm a married man these days, with a wife and kids and everything that goes with it. Also, I'm no longer in the Army. I'm a member of his Majesty's Consular Service, quiet and respectable as a retired parson."

The Frenchman's eager little face went long, and Hiji grinned at him almost maliciously as he reached into his dinner coat and drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "Glance these over," he commanded as he spread the documents upon the tablecloth. "Just a little routine stuff

about commercial matters.” He raised his glass and took a long sip, gazing at de Grandin over the tall tumbler’s rim.

With a grimace of distaste the Frenchman spread the papers out before him. They seemed to be newspaper clippings pasted on stiff sheets of foolscap and numbered in rotation. What possible interest Jules de Grandin could have in production and consumption, imports and exports, I could not conceive, but I saw his narrow brows draw down in concentration as he read, and when he looked up there was a lightning-glint in his small, deep-set blue eyes. “Me, I am greatly interested in this species of commercialism,” he declared. “Is it that you invite us to assist in your investigations?”

“Just what I dropped in for,” answered Hiji. “Can you come?”

The little Frenchman spread his hands in a wide gesture. “Can the pussycat devour liver, or the duck perform aquatic feats?” he asked. “When do we depart?”

“What’s it all about?” I cut in. “I never knew you cared two pins for commerce, de Grandin, yet—”

“Observe them, if you please,” he broke in as he thrust the papers toward me. “They do not make sense, I agree, but they promise something interesting, I damn think.”

As far as I could see, the cuttings were without relation to each other. The first, dated a year back, bore the head:

Students’ Prank Seen in Police Find
Parts of Bodies Found in Bay Believed
Dissecting-Room Relics—Murder Mystery Blows Up

The item related the finding of a gunny-sack in the Chesapeake not far from Reedville, Virginia, which when opened proved to contain several human arm and leg bones from which the flesh had been almost completely cut away. Local police had at first believed them evidence of murder, but when physicians declared the grisly relics were from several bodies the theory that medical students had tossed the sack into the bay near Norfolk was accepted as the most likely explanation.

Less than an inch in length, and without relation to the first, the second cutting bore the head: “Farm and Domestic Help Scarce,” and related that domestic and field helpers were at a premium in Westmoreland, Richmond and Northumberland Counties, though there had been no great migration to the North.

“Camp Meetings Lose Appeal” the third clipping was headlined, and told of the almost total failure of attendance at recent camp and bush meetings among the colored population of the Norfolk section, something without precedent in the memory of the oldest inhabitants.

Entirely unrelated to the first three items, as far as I could

see, was the clipping from a New York Negro daily telling of the gory murder of the proprietor of a Harlem café. The body had been found almost denuded of clothing, scored and slashed as if a savage beast had clawed it. Robbery had not been the motive, for the dead man’s well-filled wallet was intact, and a diamond scarf-pin was still in his tie. He had no enemies, as far as the authorities could learn. Indeed, he had been very popular, especially with the Southern Negroes of the district.

The final story dealt with the unexplained murder of a Captain Ronald Sterling, apparently a gentleman of some importance in Westmoreland County. He had, according to the clipping, been found dead on his front lawn, his face, neck and breast so horribly mutilated that identification was possible only by his clothes. While every circumstance pointed to death being due to some ferocious beast, a careful check-up of the death scene disclosed no animal tracks, though numerous human footprints were discovered on the sandy driveway. No one had been approached, for the police had been unable to formulate a tenable theory in the case.

“H’m, perhaps there’s some connection in these stories, but I can’t find it if there is,” I said as I passed back the papers.

Ingraham produced a small black pipe and a tin of Three Nuns and began tamping the tobacco in the briar as he looked quizzically at us. “There doesn’t seem to be any common denominator, I’ll admit,” he answered, “but I think there is. So do my bosses. You see, there have been quite a number of Jamaican and Barbadian Negroes coming to this country lately, and some of your G-gentlemen seem to think they’re mixed up in this business. His Majesty’s Government thinks otherwise; I’ve been deputed to prove we’re right.”

“But what is ‘this business,’ as you call it?” I demanded. “I don’t see any possible connection between medical students’ pranks and failing attendance at camp meetings with murders in Virginia and Harlem—”

“No” — Hiji took a few quick puffs to get his pipe alight — “I don’t suppose you do, but there are data not shown in the clippings. For instance, those bones washed up by the Chesapeake were charred by fire. Exposure to the water rendered positive opinion difficult, but the little flesh remaining on them appeared to have been acted on by heat. Bluntly, they’d been cooked.

“Second, there have been a number of strange Negroes seen in that section of Virginia and southeastern Maryland. They’re West Indians, not from Jamaica or Barbados, but from Martinique and Haiti, men and women speaking English with a strong French patois accent. That’s where we come in. Your people don’t seem able to distinguish between our Negroes and those from the non-British islands.

“Now, as to connection between these murders: Jim

Collins, the proprietor of that Harlem hot spot, wasn't a West Indian. He went north from Virginia something like a year ago, and he went from Captain Sterling's place. It's known that he corresponded with Sterling after coming north, and a letter was received from him two days before Sterling's death."

"D'ye know what it said?"

He nodded. "Just five words: 'Some of them are here.' I think it was 'some of them,' whoever they were or are, who killed both him and Captain Sterling. The same technique was followed in each case. Furthermore, there have been three more deaths like those of Collins and the captain, though I haven't clippings on them. One was in Maryland, almost across the bay from Sterling's place; one was in South Carolina, one in Louisiana. Add the fact that Negro churches in those localities have been steadily losing in attendance to these murders occurring hundreds of miles apart, and I think you have something. Sterling's death might have been laid to some freak of criminology, or to some wild beast escaped from a circus, but you can't advance that theory to account for the other killings. Collins writes a letter saying, 'Some of them are here,' and dies next day. Sterling receives it and dies exactly the same way two days later. A circus beast might have killed Collins or Sterling, but it couldn't have traveled from New York to Virginia in that short time. Or, say it was a criminal pervert. Those Johnnies aren't usually so choicy. Like our Jack the Ripper or your own sadistic murderers, they take their victims where they find 'em. Why should one of 'em kill the Negro Collins in New York, then hop a train to travel to Virginia just to kill the white man Sterling? And even if he did do that, would he be likely then to cross the bay to Maryland, kill a Johnny there, then travel down to Carolina and cross the country into Louisiana just to kill two more?"

"You think it was a gang?"

"I'm sure of it, and—"

"One moment, if you please!" de Grandin broke in. "Await me here; I must know something." Jumping up, he ran into the house, where a moment later we saw a glow of light shine through the study windows. In a minute he returned, announcing: "I have looked in last year's almanac. One week before that sack of bones was found in Chesapeake Bay there was a total lunar eclipse, visible from that portion of Maryland and Virginia."

"Well, what of it?" I demanded. "What's a lunar eclipse to do with—"

The little Frenchman looked at the big Englishman, and each saw confirmation of a thought in the other's glance.

"The Black Moon!" Hiji said as he let his breath out softly through his teeth.

"Precisely," nodded Jules de Grandin. "Also, according to

the almanac, another eclipse will occur there in three days."

"I think we'd better do a move," replied the Englishman. "Can you put me up tonight, Trowbridge?"

At our backs the sun rose from the Chesapeake; underfoot the shaky little pier swayed with each rising wave; ahead of us the bay showed as clear of any sign of craft as the ocean around Juan Fernandez when Crusoe was cast on its beach. An hour earlier the steamboat which had brought us up from Norfolk had deposited us and a tall, handsome, dark young woman on the dock from which the motor ferry was supposed to operate, and since that time we had seen nothing more than sea-gulls on the water.

"Lost," Ingraham muttered as he knocked the dottle from his pipe against his heel. "We've been marooned, men, and if we can't reach Sterling's Landing by tomorrow—"

"Pardon me, sir, did I understand you all are goin' to Sterling's Landing?" the tall young woman who was our fellow castaway broke in. "May I inquire your business there? I'm Captain Sterling's daughter," she added, softening the apparent sharpness of her question. "You see, I'm his sole survivor, and—"

"Of course, one understands, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin answered with a bow. "I am Doctor Jules de Grandin and these are Doctor Samuel Trowbridge and Sir Haddingway Ingraham of the British Consular Service. We have come to make investigation of the disaffection of your local Negro population—"

The young woman — she was no girl, but five or six and twenty — shuddered slightly, despite the rising August heat.

"I'd like to know about that, too," she answered. "Papa wrote me of it just before he died. It seems the colored people all refused to work, and some of them were insolent. A parcel of strange darkies came and squatted on our land, and when he warned them off they defied him—"

"Do" — the little Frenchman spoke deliberately as he eyed her narrowly — "do you connect your father's death with this, *Mademoiselle*?"

"I really couldn't say, sir. You see, I'm on the stage, and was playin' in St. Louis when word came of my father's death. I came as quickly as I could, but" — she paused and bit her lip, then: "I had to wait until I had the money to come home."

Again the little Frenchman nodded. Following his quick glance I read the sign upon her wardrobe trunk: "Coralea Sterling, Moonlight Maidens, Theatre." Some months before, the Moonlight Maidens burlesque troupe had played in Harrisonville, and from theatrical reports I'd gathered they were not very successful.

"May we count upon your help, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin asked.

“Of course. I’ll be very glad to put you all up at the house, and if there’s any way that I can help you find out—”

The hooting of the little ferry’s air-whistle broke in, and in a moment we were headed down the bay for Sterling’s Landing.

The Sterling mansion proved a disappointment. Far from being the Southern manor house of tradition, it was a fairly comfortable old farmhouse, badly in need of repair, set back from the sand by-road in a plot of rather unkempt lawn with an avenue of honey-locust leading from its gate. A kitchen garden mostly weeds was at its back door, and behind that was a farm of thirty-five or forty acres in a state of almost utter fallowness. Mortgages, I guessed, had been the chief crop of that land for many years. Inside, the house was fairly clean, with some pieces of good furniture of the Victorian era, some family portraits dating to the days before the Civil War, and several chambers with large, comfortable beds. No one met us at the landing, and we took turns carrying the luggage to the house, then at Miss Sterling’s request went down to the village store, where we laid in a supply of canned goods, supplemented by a ham and some fresh eggs and vegetables. By noon we had fire going in the kitchen range and made a comfortable meal.

The interval that followed was a pleasant one. We all turned in to wash and put away the dishes, and as I looked at Coralea enveloped in her big apron I had a hard time visualizing her shuffling and strutting back and forth across a darkened stage while she felt for concealed fasteners in her gown and discarded piece on piece of costume till she stood revealed in pristine nudity beneath the spotlight’s purple glare. With uncanny understanding de Grandin read my-thought. “One often wonders at the lure the theatre has,” he whispered. “I have known mothers to desert their children and wives desert their comfortable homes to dance and sing in third-rate music halls, enduring poverty and social ostracism cheerfully. One cannot explain it, one only knows that it is so.”

I nodded, but before I could reply our hostess spoke: “Can I trouble you gentlemen to make one more trip to the Land-in’? There are some more things we’ll be needin’ from the sto’e, and while you’re gone I’d like to visit ’round the neighborhood a little. I can borrow a horse next door at Hopkins’.”

Half an hour later we set out for the small general store, while Coralea waved to us as she walked in the opposite direction, her slim, tall form almost boyish in khaki jodhpurs and checked riding-coat.

While I made the purchases, Hiji and de Grandin engaged some store-porch loafers in confab, and though our actual business occupied a scant half-hour it was mid-afternoon

before we started on our homeward walk.

“It all fits in,” said Hiji. “We see a disaffection among the local blacks who refuse work, no matter what the wages are. Negroes are naturally religious, yet there’s a steady fallin’ off in church attendance. Next we have four terrifyin’ murders, identical in technique, but widely separated. Each victim has no known enemies, each was popular among the colored folks. Collins, the Harlem Negro, was something of a leader of his race and highly thought of by both whites and blacks. Sterling enjoyed the confidence of local colored residents, the Carolina victim was a social worker deeply loved by all the colored folks, and the fourth was a young Baptist missionary from the North who by his eloquence and kindness had won a host of friends, both white and black, and was more than holding his own against the ebb-tide in church membership. Then crack-o! someone murders him, and his congregation falls to pieces. Why should these people, so widely separated by distance, race, vocation and background, have been killed in the same manner?”

“Then, here’s another puzzle: The bones they found down here appear to have been relics of a cannibal feast. There’s never been a case of cannibalism heard of in this country; yet — there it is.

“If these murders had been done in Africa I’d say they were the work of Leopard Men. Furthermore, the Human Leopards make a practice of eating their victims, and their big cannibal parties are held during an eclipse — at the time of the ‘Black Moon.’ It looks almost as if this devilry had been imported from West Africa.”

“But only indirectly,” said de Grandin. “Me, I have another theory. The islands of the Caribbean reek with voodoo, the black sorcery imported with the slaves from Africa. It began in Haiti before Dessalines threw off French government; it grew upon the ruins of the church the black imperialists tore down. It is said Ulestine, daughter of President Antoine-Simone, was high priestess of the cult. Its blasphemies and obscenities run through the island’s culture as tropic breezes rustle through the jungle trees. There at the time of the Black Moon the ‘Goat Without Horns’ has been sacrificed on voodoo altars; there the drums have bidden worshippers to the shrine of the White Queen; there a priesthood more terrible than that of Baal has ruled supreme since 1791. *Ha*, but with the coming of American marines the scene was changed. Precisely as you ran down the Leopard Men, my Hiji, the Americans hunted down the sorcerers of voodoo until their power was broken utterly. Now, I damn think, they have decided on a bold stroke. Here” — he swung his arm in a wide arc — “right here, it seems, they have decided to set up their bloody altars and force the native blacks to join with them in a worship which blends jungle bestiality with the depravity of decadent

European superstition. Unless I miss my guess, my friends, we are at grips with *obeah*, voodoo — call it what you will, it makes no difference—”

The furious drumming of a horse’s hoofs broke through his words, and round the turning of the sandy road a maddened beast came rushing, bearing down upon us like a miniature cavalry charge. Clinging to the pommel of the saddle, with no effort to control the frenzied steed, was Coralea Sterling, hat gone, her long black hair whipped out behind her like a fluttering signal of distress. Her eyes were round with horror, her cheeks gray with the waxen hue that comes from but one cause. One glance at her blanched, terrified, drawn face told all. Sheer, ghastly fear had seized her by the throat, strangling back the scream her grayed lips were parted to utter.

“Runaway!” cried Hiji, and poised to launch himself at the maddened horse’s bridle, but the girl waved him frantically aside. Then we noticed that the unspurred heels of her tan riding-boots were beating an hysterical tattoo against the horse’s sides. She was urging it to greater speed.

Like an express train flashing past a way-station, horse and rider thundered past us, while we gaped in wonder. Then:

“*Grand Dieu des chats!*” de Grandin cried, and sprang into the dusty road, dragging at the handle of his sword-stick. Something eery whipped along the highway, weaving in and out between the tracks left by the fleeing horse, something I could not see, but which left a little zig-zag trail of kicked-up dust like a puff of wind gone crazy. De Grandin brought the slim blade of his sword-cane down upon the dancing dust with a cutting, lash-like motion, and something brown and gray, with a flash of yellowish-white underside, squirmed up from the baked roadway and writhed about his blade like the serpent on Mercury’s caduceus. A strumming like a chorus of a hundred summer locusts in unison sounded as he struck and whipped his sword-blade back, then struck again.

“Nice work, old son — good Lord!” Hiji thrust his hand into his jacket pocket and snatched his blue steel Browning out, firing point-blank into the road six feet or so behind de Grandin. A little spurt of dust kicked up where the steel-capped bullet struck, and with it rose a writhing thing as thick as a man’s arm and half again as long.

“*Merci beaucoup, mon ami,*” de Grandin grinned. “I had not noticed him, and had you not been quick I fear I should not long have noticed anything. It seems our bag is full, now; let us count the game.”

Dizzy with bewilderment, I stepped out into the road. At de Grandin’s feet, still quivering, but stone-dead beneath the lashing of his sword-cane, lay a diamond-headed rattlesnake, its tail adorned with ten bone buttons. Beyond the little

Frenchman, where Hiji’s bullet had almost shot its head away, another snake lay squirming in death agony, thrashing up the road dust into tiny, inch-high sand dunes.

I looked at both the loathsome things with a shudder of repulsion, but Hiji and de Grandin had eyes only for the second snake. “By George!” the Englishman turned the thing over with his foot.

“*Mais oui, précisément,*” the Frenchman nodded. “You recognize him?”

“Quite. I’ve been to Martinique and Haiti.”

I stared from one to the other, puzzled as a child whose elders spell out words. De Grandin pointed first to one dead reptile, then the other. “This,” he told me, “is a rattlesnake, native of this section, and this,” he touched the other with his sword-tip, “is a fer-de-lance, found in both Martinique and Haiti, but never in this country, except in zoos. You comprehend?”

“Can’t say I do.”

“*Non.* I am not sure that I do, either; but I should guess those naughty people we suspect have brought in snakes as well as most deplorably bad manners with them. What say you, *mon Hiji?*”

But the big Englishman was intent on a fresh find. “What d’ye make o’ this, Frenchy?” he asked, poking a knot of gum like substance lying in the road.

De Grandin bent and looked at it intently, lowered his head until his nostrils almost touched it, and sniffed daintily. “I recognize him,” he replied, “but I cannot call his name.”

“Me, too,” the Englishman agreed. “A cove who used to live in Haiti showed me some of it once. Those black blighters down there make a mixture by some secret formula and put it where it will be stepped in by someone they don’t love so awfully much. Maybe they smear it on his motor tires or on his horse’s hooves. It’s all one, as far as results go. No sooner does the poor bloke go out than all the bally snakes in seven counties pick his spoor up and go after him. In a little while he gets rid of the stuff or dies by snakebite, for the stuff’s attractive to the little scaly devils as valerian is to a cat.”

“I think that you have right, my friend.”

“You think? You know dam’ well I’m right! Didn’t you see how the gal was kickin’ her cob to more speed when the poor brute was already giving all it had? That was no runaway; that was panic flight. And the snakes — did you ever see a snake, ’specially a lazy rotter like a rattler, pursue a human bein’ for all he was worth? Watch this!” He tossed the knot of gum into the roadside grass and motioned us to stand back.

We waited silently ten, fifteen, twenty minutes; then: “Look sharp!” commanded Hiji. A rustling sounded in the short, dry grass, a little spurt of sun-baked dust showed in the

center of the road. Converging on the spot where he had thrown the gum were several snakes: two full-grown rattlers, a small, slim copperhead; finally, sliding like the flickering shadow of a whiplash drawn across a horse's flank, a six-foot black snake.

"Convinced?" asked Hiji as he turned away.

"No," said Coralea, "I can't remember when I first saw them. I'd been the rounds, callin' on the neighbors and tryin' to find out something about Papa's death. The last place I stopped at was Judge Scatterhorn's, but I don't remember anything suspicious. A colored lad was out in front when I came out and led my horse up to the carriage block, but — oh!" She stopped abruptly, one hand raised to her mouth.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*?" de Grandin prompted.

I tossed a dime to him as I rode off, for he'd held my stirrup very nicely, but instead of takin' it he let it fall into the road and muttered something—

"He held your stirrup, did you say?" de Grandin interrupted.

"Yes he did, and—"

"*Mademoiselle*, where are your ridin'-boots?"

"My — my ridin'-boots?"

"*Précisément*."

"Why, in the cupboard of my room—"

Without a word the Frenchman rose and hurried up the stairs. In a moment we heard the sharp double crack of his small pocket pistol, and a minute later he came down the stairs with two dead snakes looped across the stick he'd taken from her bedroom window. "They were in your closet, *Mademoiselle*. When you went to get a change of clothing you would have found them waiting for you. I dislike to say so, but it would be safer if you burned those boots. One can replace burned boots, but it is not often one recovers from a fatal snakebite."

Dinner was a gayer meal than I had looked for. Somewhere Coralea had found a store of wine, and with this, tinned soup, fried ham and eggs and a liberal portion of fresh melon, we did very well. But though we chatted cheerfully as we did the dinner dishes there was an air of gathering restraint which seemed to seep into the lamplit kitchen as though it were a chilling fog no door could quite shut out. Shadows flickering in the corners took on strange shapes of menace, and more than once I drew my hand back quickly, thinking I had seen the looping convolutions of a coiled snake as I reached to place a piece of china in the cupboard. By the time the last dish had been wiped and stored away our nerves were at the snapping-point. I jumped as if I had been stung when a hail came from the front door.

"Miss Sterling; oh, Miss Coralea, is your 'phone in

workin' order? Judge Scatterhorn's been killed."

"You and Doctor Trowbridge go and take a look — medical chaps are better qualified for that sort o' work — I'll stay here and keep the jolly home fires burnin'," Hiji said as we gave over efforts to get service from the telephone. "Sing out when you come to the door, though; I'm liable to have a nery finger on the trigger."

A little knot of white men grouped round something on the ground before the Scatterhorn veranda, a railroad lantern shedding its uncertain light upon their dusty boots. Two or three Negroes, eyes rolling in abysmal terror till they seemed all whites, hung on the outskirts of the crowd, studiously avoiding a glance at the blanket-covered object round which the white men gathered.

"Pardon, gentlemen, we are physicians," apologized de Grandin as we pushed our way among the crowd, knelt and turned the blanket back.

Judge Scatterhorn lay as he had died, his arms outstretched, fingers clutching at the yielding sand of the driveway. His throat and chest were horribly lacerated, as though he had been clawed and bitten by some savage beast; across his cheeks and brow ran several hideous gashes; as de Grandin turned him gently over we saw six deep cuts upon his back, running parallel from shoulder-blade to waist, and so deeply incised that the bone had been laid bare in several places.

"When did this atrocity occur?" de Grandin asked as we completed our examination.

"'Bout half an hour back," a member of the crowd replied. "We just got word of it. Mis' Semmes 'phoned us."

"Ah? And who is *Madame Semmes*?"

"She's th' Judge's sister. Wanna see her?"

"I regret to intrude, but it would be well if I might question her." The little Frenchman put the blanket back upon the dead man's face and rose, brushing the sand from his knees.

"*Madame*, we do not waste your time in idle curiosity," he told the trembling woman when she met us in her parlor, "but much depends upon our having first-hand information now. Will you tell us all you can?"

"We've had no servants for the last two weeks," the bereaved lady answered, "and George and I made out the best we could. He'd been out this evenin', and I heard him drive into the yard about three-quarters of an hour ago. Presently I caught his step as he walked round to the front door — we've kept the back door barred since all the servants left — then I heard a frightful scream, and the sound of someone strugglin' on the porch. George called, 'Don't come out, Sally!' then there was the sound of more thrashin' around, and — and when I finally lit a lamp and ventured out, I found him there — like that."

“Was it your brother who screamed, *Madame*?”

“No. Oh, no. It sounded more like the scream of a wildcat.”

“And did you hear anything else?”

“I — I think — but I’m not quite sure — I heard somebody laughin’, a terrible, high-pitched laugh; then I heard someone or something runnin’ off among the laurels.”

The little Frenchman looked at her intently for a moment. “You say that you have been without domestic servants for some time, *Madame*. Why is that?”

The woman shuddered. “My brother was a justice of the peace. For some time, now, there have been strange Negroes in the district. None of them has been disorderly, but they’re a sullen lot, and we considered them a bad influence on the local colored people. So when one of them was picked up by the constable last month my brother sentenced him to road work as a vagrant. The fellow grinned at him before they took him off and told George, ‘You’ll regret this, you infernal *blanc*’ — I don’t know what he meant by that, but he spoke English with so strong an accent that perhaps it was an insult in some foreign language. At any rate, our servants left us the next mornin’, without explanation and without even waitin’ for their wages, and we’ve had no help of any sort since then.”

De Grandin took his chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. “Mademoiselle Sterling called on you this afternoon?”

“Yes, she did.”

“And was it one of your servants who held her stirrup?”

A slight flush mounted to our hostess’ face. “Perhaps you didn’t understand,” she answered. “I told you that we’d been without help for two weeks.”

“Forgive my seeming rudeness, *Madame*, but Mademoiselle Coralea told us that a strange young colored lad was waiting at the front door when she left, and helped her set her foot into the stirrup.”

We left the bereaved lady with her grief, and at the doorway de Grandin gave a snort of impatience. “Me, I am the stupid-head!” he confided. “I have left my pocket lens. Will you be good enough to go and fetch it from our room, Friend Trowbridge? I fear the crowd has destroyed most of the evidence, but I may be able to find something helpful to us. I shall wait you here.”

I was none too pleased with the assignment, but there was no way of getting out of it; so I started up the road toward Sterling’s home, grasping my heavy stick and walking faster with each step. The moon rode high and round in a clear sky, and the wind that blew up from the bay, moaned and sighed among the roadside cedars like the ghosts of lovers parted in the days when North and South contended bloodily for this

Virginia land. Nearer and nearer I approached the Sterling homestead, faster and faster I walked. By the time I reached the driveway I was almost running.

The house lights shone between the trees with beckoning cheerfulness; I had not more than fifty yards to go until I reached the door, but the memory of Judge Scatterhorn’s disfigured face was with me like the image of a walking nightmare. I pursed my lips to whistle a signal to Hiji, but it was no use. Walking required all my breath, and the muscles of my face were stiff as if a winter chill had gripped them.

A heavy growth of vines screened the porch from the front lawn, and the rustling of their leaves in the light breeze was like the clapping of dry, long-dead hands applauding some obscene comedy. I launched myself at the short flight of steps that led to the veranda like a winded runner entering the home stretch, then rolled floundering to the sandy driveway beneath a sudden devastating impact from above.

Something long and black, twisting, clutching, grappling, dropped upon me from the string-piece of the porch roof, hurtling through the air like a panther pouncing on its prey, clawing, grasping, tearing at my throat, gnashing teeth in berserk rage, screaming like all the fiends of hell in chorus. I felt myself borne to the earth beneath its loathsome weight, felt the cruel, cutting claws shear through the padding of my jacket shoulders, felt the gush of warm blood as they sank into my flesh.

I tried to draw the pistol which de Grandin had insisted that I carry. My right arm was pinioned to my side between my body and the ground. I tried to strike at the thing with my fist. A talon hand, strong as a steel vise, gripped my wrist until I thought the bones would surely break. “This is how Judge Scatterhorn was killed!” I thought as I bridged my body, rising on a shoulder as I sought desperately to free myself.

A blaze of sudden light seared my eyes, a report like a field gun’s sounded in my ear. There was a light impact, like a stone flung into moist sand, and the thing above me stiffened, then went limp. Something warm and sticky-feeling, something which I felt instinctively was red, began to soak the clothes above my breast.

“Bull’s-eye, by Jove!” Hiji called delightedly, rushing forward from the shadow, his Browning gleaming in the lamplight filtering through the porch vinery. “Potted the beggar neat as neat. Couldn’t ‘a’ done it better if I’d practised on him for an hour!”

“Up you come, Trowbridge.” He rolled the body off me and thrust forth a helping hand. “Cheerio. You’re all right, old thing!”

I wasn’t quite as certain of my all-rightness as he seemed to be as I sat up slowly and stared around. Close behind him, her face pale and set, but without a trace of fear, stood

Coralea, a dark cloak masking her light dress.

“We were sittin’ in the parlor after you all’d gone,” she explained, “when suddenly Sir Haddingway said, ‘*S-s-sh!* There’s something prowling round outside.’ I thought maybe it was you all coming back, but he insisted on investigatin’, so I came along, too. We slipped out a side window and circled round the house, keepin’ down behind the bushes till we came to the front lawn. Just as we got there we saw someone or something climb one of the porch posts and crawl along the string-piece up above the steps. Sir Haddingway couldn’t shoot it from there, for the beam was between it and us, so we waited.

“Directly we heard you comin’ up the drive and knew that it would jump on you, so Sir Haddingway had his pistol ready to shoot it before it could do much harm.”

“H’m, I’m glad he didn’t wait much longer,” I replied. “His idea of harm and mine don’t seem to coincide.”

“Trowbridge, old fellow, you’re not much hurt, are you?” cried Hiji penitently. “I’d ’a’ shot him sooner, but I was afraid of hittin’ you—”

“Oh, I don’t think there’s any damage sticking-plaster and some antiseptic can’t take care of,” I responded as I got unsteadily upon my feet.

“Right-o,” Hiji answered with enthusiasm. “Here comes the blighted little Frenchman. Wait till we show him our bag. First blood for us, eh, what?”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, is it thou?” de Grandin called as he strode up the drive. “I decided that it was too dark to make out anything tonight, so — *mon Dieu*, what have we here?”

Hiji struck an attitude. “This w’y, gents an’ lydies, yer ludships an’ yer ’ighnesses!” he called in whining singsong. “Come see the gryte he-normous wild man, shot in ’is nytive ’abitat by Hiji, the gryte ’unter. Come one, come hall, and see the gryte, he-normous marvel—”

“*Que diable?*” de Grandin cut in testily, glancing from my torn and bloodstained clothing to the dark bulk of the thing Hiji had shot. “Be silent, you great zany, and tell me what goes on here!”

Coralea, supplied the information, repeating substantially what she had told me, but making it appear Hiji’s shot was almost supererogation, since, according to her version, I had already worsted my antagonist and Hiji shot him merely to relieve him of his suffering.

The little Frenchman viewed my tattered clothing skeptically. “Hiji, my friend, I am indebted to you,” he declared. “Me, I have often thought Friend Trowbridge might be better for a slight amount of murdering, but always I have wished to do it with my own two hands. You have preserved him for my vengeance.” But there was no

affectation in the tears that glinted on his lashes as he threw both arms around me and kissed me on each cheek, murmuring, “*Mon vieux, mon cher, mon brave camarade!*”

He drew a hand across his eyes and turned away, playing his flashlight upon the sprawling body. It was a man, very tall, very thin, with cord-like muscles standing out on arms and legs. Save for a breech-clout of gunny-sacking he was naked, but his black skin was smeared with patches of dun-colored pigment in each of which was a rosette of five small dark-brown dots, the design bearing a striking resemblance to a leopard’s spots.

Fastened to his hands by thongs were metal appliances like brass knuckles, only instead of bearing knobs, their rings were supplied with long, sharp blades which curved above the fingers, making each hand a clawed talon. About his head was bound a band of skin which proved to be the scaly hide of a full-grown fer-de-lance such a snake as we had seen pursuing Coralea that afternoon.

“By George,” said Hiji as de Grandin shut his light off, “he’s got the full regalia on. I’ve seen his kind in the Reserved Forest Area more than once — hanged a few dozen of ’em, too.”

The Frenchman smiled, a thought unpleasantly. “Unless I’m more mistaken than I think, some necks will test the strength of ropes before we finish with this present business of the monkey,” he declared.

The big clock in the hall ticked slowly. All of us were tired, but sleep was farthest from our thoughts. My shoulder hurt abominably, and every whisper of a breeze-blown leaf against the window-panes seemed charged with menace. Once or twice I started up, sure that I saw a grinning, painted face beyond the window, but each time search showed that imagination had been playing tricks on me. “If we could only find the blighters’ lair we’d clean ’em out in jig-time,” muttered Hiji. “In most ways they’ve run true to form, murderin’ people with their ‘leopard claws’ and terrifyin’ all the local blacks so they don’t dare squeak on ’em, but there’s one thing puzzles me. In Africa these human leopards gather for their pow-wows several days before the Black Moon, and send their signals to the party out by means of drums. They should be usin’ something of the kind round here—”

“That’s hardly likely,” I objected. “So far they’ve managed to conduct their raids in secrecy. If they beat drums at their meetings they’d give away their gathering-place, and—”

Across the sultry summer night there came a low, slow-swelling sound. Something like the rumble of a giant kettle-drum, but also like the low, sustained note of a bass viol it was, beginning on a low, deep note and slowly rising in intensity, if not in pitch: “*Ro-o-om, ro-o-om, rum-rum-rum;*

ro-o-om, ro-o-om, rum-rum-rum,” its rhythm swelled and sank with a monotonous, menacing insistence.

Hiji leaped across the room, dashed the window up and thrust his head out, listening intently. “That’s it!” he told us as he wheeled around. “The jungle telegraph, the night-drum of the Leopard People! What’re we waitin’ for? Let’s go! Yoicks away, lads; the chase is on!”

We started for the door, but. “Wait a moment, wait for me!” cried Coralea. “You all aren’t goin’ out to hunt those savages and leave me here alone; I’m goin’ with you. Give me a half a minute to put on some other clothes!”

She was somewhat longer than the stipulated thirty seconds, but it was little later when she reappeared in boyish riding-togs, twisting her long hair in a knot and stuffing it into a cap as she ran down the stairs. Bound to her slender waist by a wide leather belt was a powder-and-ball revolver of Civil War model, its eight-inch barrel knocking trim, straight knees each step she took.

“Let’s go!” she cried as she rejoined us, and before we realized her intent she was through the door, across the veranda and speeding down the driveway beneath the honey-locust trees, heading for the open road.

We followed, catching up with her just as she reached the gate, and paused a moment, seeking bearings.

“*Ro-o-om, ro-o-om, rum-rum-rum; ro-o-om, ro-o-om, rum-rum-rum!*” the drums’ deep monotone rolled across the darkened landscape, surging forward and receding like the sound of distant surf.

“It’s over there,” said Hiji, nodding toward a low, tree-crested line of hills that raised their bulk beyond the intervening fallow fields.

“It can’t be there,” objected Coralea. “There’s an abandoned Negro cemetery in the hollow of those hills; a pair of murderers are buried there, and you couldn’t get a darky within half a mile of it in daylight, much less at midnight.”

Hiji’s teeth flashed white beneath the black of his mustache. “You may know the superstition of your local blacks, but you don’t know voodoo. Graveyards and haunted places are their favorite gathering-spots. Earth from graves of executed felons is a favorite ingredient of their charms. I vote we try the jolly old burying-ground.”

“I, too,” de Grandin concurred. “But let us step with caution. We may be seen by members of the cult who come in answer to those devils’ church bells.”

Cautiously we made our way across the fields, dropping to all-fours occasionally where the visibility was high, crawling, running half bent over, gradually approaching the thick-wooded knoll behind which growled the drums’ low monody. By the time we reached the hill crest we were crawling on our stomachs like a scout patrol of soldiers

reconnoitering an enemy’s position.

Light gleamed in the little valley shut in by the hills. A bonfire of fat pine sent its orange-yellow flames mounting ten feet, painting the whitewashed headboards and occasional stone markers of the graves with startling highlights, casting purple shadows on surrounding trees and bramble bushes.

Where light and shadow met, a circle of dark forms was huddled in a wide, loose ring, the gleam of a once-white shirt or a soiled Mother Hubbard giving clue to the spectator’s sex. A low, slow-moaning chant, like that heard when the mourners are about to ‘get religion’ at a Negro gospel meeting, sounded from the group. Now and then there was a movement, a flash of fire-lit clothing or the gleam of bared teeth or of rolling eyeballs, which told that a fresh member of the congregation had arrived in response to the summons of the drums.

More and more they came, creeping stealthily up to the firelight’s margin. From fifty to a hundred the group grew; now there were two hundred votaries about the fire, at last at least five hundred. And still the drums tolled their insistent “*ro-o-om, ro-o-om; rum-rum-rum*” through the night.

I heard Coralea’s small smothered “Oh!” and Hiji’s sigh of excitement coupled with de Grandin’s almost frenzied flow of bubbling French profanity as a figure glided from behind a tombstone. It was a woman, so old and thin and wrinkled there was something almost obscene in the picture she presented, as if a mummy had come from the tomb or the corpse of one dead of senility had risen from its grave to mock and gibber at the living. Her skinny arms and legs, bare in the mounting firelight, seemed smeared with mingled filth and ashes. Her lich-like form was nude save for a length of dirty calico which hung across her back, loose ends split and tied about her waist and hips to form a sort of apron. The upper end of the cloth had been bound about her gray-wooled head to make a turban, and round and round this weird head-dress had been wound strings of gleaming beads. “Teeth!” muttered Hiji. “Human teeth! They knock ’em out and string ’em to make amulets.”

“*Ouranga!*” came a greeting from the crone as she danced round the firelit circle. “*Ouranga!*” In one emaciated hand she held a black snake whip; in the other was a dried gourd-shell which she waved to and fro, making its seeds rattle furiously against the sun-dried rind. Back and forth before the fire she tripped and stumbled, leaping, sometimes, sometimes shuffling in a sort of buck-and-wing; then pirouetting on her toes like a ghastly caricature of Columbine. “*Ouranga!*”

From the trembling congregation sounded echoes of her hail, not deep-voiced, but high and thread-thin, frightened,

more than half hysterical: “*Ouranga, ouranga; ouranga!*” Then, in a high-swelling chorus, “*Voodoo!*”

With a mincing, shuffling step the old hag circled round the fire, clattering her rattle, flourishing her whip, pausing now and then, and each time she halted the men and women groveling before her shrank back in the shadows as though she menaced them with a live snake.

“*Ouranga!*” shrieked the crone again, and half a dozen men came struggling from the shadows, pushing three cowering wretches, two men and a woman. The luckless trio were flung face-downward on the ground, where they lay quaking, too terrified to utter pleas for mercy.

“*Ouranga!*” the witch cried furiously, leaping forward to bring down her whip on the prostrate victims’ backs. Repeatedly she cried the mystic word, accompanying each repetition with a cut of her cruel lash until dull scarlet stains showed through the groveling wretches’ scanty clothing.

“Back-sliders from the cult,” said Hiji in a whisper. “Not much inducement for ’em to leave the fold, eh what?”

The hag had ceased her flogging, more from weariness than mercy, and the chastened apostates crawled like beaten dogs to the ranks that hovered in the shadows. We saw the others draw away from them as from contagion as they found seats on the ground.

A long black shadow cut between the fire and us, and a tall, thin man came dancing out between the tombstones, pausing for a moment with uplifted hands, then falling prostrate on the sand before the voodoo priestess. In every detail he was like the man who had attacked me; painted like a leopard, hands armed with sharp, cruel iron claws, he might have been the same man raised from the dead by some unholy miracle.

The *obi* witch addressed him in a flood of cackling gibberish, and he responded in the same jargon. Finally, rising to his knees, he circled round the fire, half crawling, half dancing, waving clawed hands in the air as if he tore the life from an unseen victim. Graphically, in pantomime, we saw him re-enact the murder of Judge Scatterhorn. We saw him creep up to the quiet house, secrete himself among the shrubbery, lie in waiting for his victim. His eyes glared horribly, his teeth gleamed like the fangs of some wild thing as he arched his back and sprang. A leap, a scream like that of a demented fiend, and he swept in an arc through the air, striking with his iron-taloned hands straight at his quarry’s throat, then rolling thrashing on the ground, as if locked in a death-grip with some phantom adversary. At last he lay stretched out upon the dried grass, breathing hard from his exertions, then rolled upon his face before the hag, reaching out his gaffed hands till they almost touched her feet.

“*Bon — bon!*” The *obi* witch commended, and the leopard man leaped up and joined the circle. His work had won

approval from the voodoo cult’s high priestess.

The bonfire had begun to burn itself to embers, and a moaning, low, almost a whimpering singsong, passed from lip to lip about the ring of squatting men and women. “*Dhan ghi — dhan ghi!*” we heard them cry. Two men staggered forward with a large pine packing-case between them. The box was reminiscent of the outside cases used to enclose caskets at cheap funerals, but was fitted with a hinged lid secured by heavy hasps and padlocks. With a sudden shock I realized that what I’d thought were painted spots were really holes bored through the planks. “De Grandin,” I whispered, “there’s something *live* inside there!”

“*Mais oui, mais certainement,*” he answered imperturbably. “These naughty followers of *vaudois* are worshippers of a great snake they call the ‘White Queen.’ Observe them, if you please.”

One of the bearers set his end of the case down and ran back to the shadows, returning in an instant with a squawking cockerel. The voodoo priestess snatched the fowl from him, drew a knife from her turban and slit its throat with a quick slash.

Now her dance was like the antics of a maniac. Laughing insanely, fiendishly, muttering unintelligible charms, shrieking and crying, she whirled and turned in the fast-waning firelight, waving the stiffening body of the slaughtered cock about her head till the spurting blood from its cut neck sprayed on the worshippers, who crouched together in an ecstasy of shuddering fear. Twice she leaped upon the box with the hinged top, and each time the congregation shrieked in wild, ecstatic glee. Once she clawed at its locked lid until I thought that she would open it, but apparently she reconsidered, and the lid remained closed on the dread god of the *obi* people.

“I think the convocation will be ending soon,” de Grandin whispered. “Let us depart before they break their meeting up. We cannot hope to fight them single-handed, and if they should discover us—” It was not necessary for him to proceed; imagination more than supplied details missing from his statement.

Creeping flat to earth, we wriggled down the hill, reached an unplowed field and rose to run across it. “Hiji!” exclaimed de Grandin. “Where is he?”

Apparently he had dematerialized. A moment earlier he had lain beside us in our ambushade; none of us had seen him leave, but — he was gone.

“We must go back,” the Frenchman announced firmly. “We cannot leave him in their hands, they would — *mon Dieu!* Down, down for your lives, my friends!”

Coming toward us through the gloom there bulked a monstrous form. It was like some giant spider walking on its

two hind legs, but larger than a cow. We dropped down to the turf, not daring to draw breath lest our respirations betray us; then: “I say, de Grandin, is that you?” Low, but distinctly cheerful, Hiji’s voice came to us.

“*Bien oui*, it is I, and not another, but who in heaven’s name are you?” the Frenchman answered.

“Why, Frenchy, don’t you recognize your little playmate?” Hiji answered plaintively. “And I’ve brought our other little friend along, too. The cove who mauled Trowbridge this evenin’, don’t you know? While we were lyin’ there and watchin’ all the voodoo doin’s, I thought I could find work for him, so I hustled back and got him.”

I breathed more easily. What we had mistaken for a monster was the Englishman, walking upright with the dead leopard man across his shoulders.

“Just wait for me a mo’,” Hiji bade. “I’ll be comin’ back this way, and when I come you’d best be on your toes and ready to make distance.”

He trudged off in the darkness with his grisly burden. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, half an hour; then as if in response to a signal there rose such a pandemonium of shouts and screams and yells from the abandoned cemetery as might have waked the dead who slept there.

A moment later Hiji came abreast of us, running like an antelope. “Run, you blighters; cut and run for it, or you’ll not see tomorrow’s sunrise!” he cried pantingly. “Don’t let ’em sight you!”

We ran. My heart was pounding like a battering-ram against my ribs long before we reached the Sterling house, but, amazingly, there was no pursuit.

We faced each other in the lamplit parlor. “Tell me, *mon beau sauvage*, what was it that you did to them?” de Grandin ordered.

“Oh, just gave a demonstration of my kind of magic. The beggars were waitin’ a report from the feller who jumped Trowbridge, so I took care they jolly well got it. When I got back to their council fire I was put to it for a means of deliverin’ him, and a young tree gave me the idea. They were raisin’ such a bally row I could a sung *God Save the King* at top voice and never have been heard; so I had no trouble loppin’ off the sapling’s limbs, then climbin’ it and draggin’ my deceased friend after me. I lodged him in the tree-fork, then swung down, bringin’ the tree down with me, and let go. It straightened up, of course, when I released my weight, and shot him like a stone out of a catapult, right plump into the middle of their pow-wow, neat as wax. You should have heard ’em bellow when he landed at their hospitable fire-side.”

“*Parbleu*, my friend, we did,” de Grandin answered. “We did, indeed, and — *mordieu*, why can we not?”

“Eh?” answered Hiji.

“You have given me the idea, the hunch, the inspiration. But certainly. These devil-doings we beheld tonight were but the dress rehearsal to the ceremonies they will hold tomorrow when the moon is in eclipse. Why should we not prepare more magic for tomorrow night? Why should we not frighten them until they call upon the hills to fall upon them and hide them from the vengeance of our medicine?”

“All right, why should we not?” demanded Hiji. “If you’ve any ideas for a charade, spill ’em. Depend on me to rally round, old son.”

“By blue, my friend, I think that you can be of service. Tell me, can you recall the chants these Leopard People sang in Africa?”

“Er—yes, I think I can. They went something like this.” From half-closed lips he hummed a syncopated, wordless tune, an eery, eldritch thing resembling our swing music as the bitter scent of hydrocyanic acid gas resembles the perfume of crushed peach leaves, a wicked tune that made the listener think of pitchblack midnights and rifled graves and evil deeds done in the darkness of the moon. As he hummed he beat time with his finger on the table top, a sharp, staccato beat of broken rhythm.

De Grandin bent his gaze on Coralea as Hiji hummed. “What does the music make you think of, *Mademoiselle*?” he asked.

“Oh” — she shook her shoulders in disgust — “it stirs me all up. It makes me want to rend and tear and scratch, as if I were a savage cat. It rouses all the elemental brute in me.”

“Fine, excellent, superb!” he applauded. “I had hoped you would say something of the sort. Tomorrow night we do it. Yes, by blue, and you shall help us, for you are a psychic, *Mademoiselle*!”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, I have a task for you,” he told me as we rose next morning. “Be good enough to take a launch and go to Monsieur Townsend at Elizabeth City. Among other things he keeps a stock of fireworks, and I should greatly like to have one hundred rockets of the largest size available. You will kindly bring them back to me as soon as possible—”

“Rockets?” I echoed stupidly. “You mean skyrockets?”

“Nothing less, my wise one. Large, fine rockets, filled with balls of colored fire and powder which goes *swis-s-s-sh!* You comprehend?”

“No, can’t say that I do, but I’ll get ’em for you,” I replied as I finished shaving. “Anything else you’d like?”

“No, unless you wish to get some Roman candies, also.”

The afternoon was far spent when I returned with the fireworks, and my companions seemed on edge with excitement. We made a hurried, almost silent meal, and just before dusk Hiji and Coralea set out for some mysterious

rendezvous. Looking grim as the governor of a prison on a hanging-day, the Englishman was back within an hour, and I decided that he must have taken her to some safe place while we faced the voodoo worshippers. A little later, he came into the parlor with a pair of odd contraptions. One was an ordinary rubber comb with an envelope of tissue paper pasted over it, the other a small copper kettle the flat lid of which had been clamped down and fastened with a rim of sealing-wax.

“You have tested them?” de Grandin asked.

“Absolutely. Everything’s as right as rain.”

“*Très bon*. Be ready when the signal comes.”

We waited nervously. Neither Hiji nor de Grandin seemed inclined to talk, and both seemed listening for some signal. The daylight faded slowly, and night came on with faltering, indecisive steps. Jays and sparrows put themselves to bed with noisy good-night chirpings. Every now and then de Grandin or the Englishman went out upon the porch and looked up at the sky as though they sought some portent there. At last: “It comes, my, friends, it comes!” de Grandin cried excitedly. “Behold him, if you please!”

Following his pointing finger we looked up to the zenith. The moon, as full and round and yellow as a disk of gold alloyed with silver, swam in a cloudless sky, but nicking the smooth margin of its circle there appeared a tiny sliver of black shadow. Slowly, slower than the minute hand of a run-down old clock, the shadow moved, spreading gradually across the glowing lunar disk.

“The time has come, *mes amis*,” de Grandin announced. “You know the part you are to play, my Hiji. May good fortune wait upon your work. *À bientôt*.”

“Carry on, old feller,” the Englishman tucked his paper-covered comb and kettle underneath his arm and gave us each a handclasp. “Keep your heads down, and if things go wrong and I get there first, I’ll tell the Devil that you’re on the way, and have him burn a sulfur-candle in the window for you. Cheerio.” He turned and stalked off in the darkness.

“We also have our work, my friend,” de Grandin told me as he bent and took a bundle of skyrocketers in his arms, motioning me to take the sheaf which he had made of the remainder.

Quietly we walked across the fields while the shadow of the eclipse grew larger with each step we took. We bent double as we reached the hill range and step by cautious step began the ascent toward the wooded knoll that overlooked the voodoo meeting-place. Half-way up I paused for breath, and as I looked around I caught a flash of fluttering drapery in the gathering shadows of the road.

“Wha — what’s that?” I asked. Upon a night like this the age-old fears came crowding back, and the thing I saw was like a brooding, sheeted ghost that watched us as we

mounted to our doom.

“Look farther, if you please, my friend,” he answered with a laugh, “and tell me what it is you see.”

I looked. Far down the road, as motionless as something carved of stone, there stood another sheeted figure, gigantic, menacing, immobile. And a little farther down the road another, and another — and another. Silent, sheeted sentinels of the night, grim specters from the olden times when dead men walked on moonless nights ... my scalp began to prickle and my breath came faster. “What in heaven’s name are they?” I gasped.

“Night riders,” he replied. “A hundred of them, all in ghost-clothes, all with rifles, all ready for the signal we shall give, my friend.”

“Whatever do you mean—”

He eased his burden to the turf and bent toward me. “Today we have been busy while you were away, my friend. The local colored folk are good and honest men and women, but they are firmly bound by racial fears. When these *sacré* villains from the Caribbean came here they seduced them from their simple, peaceful ways, telling them that they would bring a government like that of Haiti in the days of Henri Christophe here. Every man should be a marquis or a duke or count, every woman have a title, too, and the white oppressor should be driven from the land. Moreover, those who doubted or refused to help them were intimidated, some were even killed. Such was the fate of James Collins, whom they tracked to Harlem and murdered. You saw the sway these voodooists have on the local blacks last night. It is a kind of superstitious awe they hold them in, and only by a greater magic can that hold be broken. The authorities could harry them and hunt them, perhaps they could convict them of the murders which they have committed, but I doubt it. For where could they find a colored man or woman who would dare to testify against them? *Ha*, but if we can put on a show which seems to overmatch the voodoo magic, if we can swoop down on them with all the dreaded panoply of the sheeted riders of the night, and take their voodoo priests and priestesses before their very eyes and hang them to convenient limbs — what then?”

“But that’s sheer terrorism—”

“And what is it these villains practice here? Philanthropy? I tell you, good Friend Trowbridge, only by a show of extra-legal might can we put this horror down. When we have done our part the sheeted riders will close in. They know the local blacks, and those they know will be allowed to escape. As for the voodoo men — such men as those who killed Judge Scatterhorn and Captain Sterling, and almost did the same to you — I damn think that the ropes are now all ready for their necks. Yes, certainly. Of course.”

I was about to protest, but the midnight calm was

shattered by the sudden rumble of a drum: “*Ro-o-om, ro-o-om; rum-rum-rum!*” As on the night before, the devilish sound seemed welling from the very center of the earth, swelling and expanding till it filled the highest heavens with its maddening discord.

“Up, up, my friend, our work is waiting for us!”

With our rockets bundled in our arms we scrambled up the grassy slope and halted in the woods which fringed the hilltop. Quickly de Grandin set his rocket-sticks into the earth, sighting each one carefully, as though he were a battery commander about to launch a charge of grapeshot at advancing cavalry.

The voodoo fire was burning in the hollow of the hills, the dusky worshippers were crouched in fascinated terror at the shadows’ edge, the voodoo priestess danced and postured in the space between the tombstones. “*Ouranga, ouranga; voodoo!*” came the litany of the black rite as the priestess and her congregation worked themselves into a frenzy.

“*Dhan ghi, dhan ghi!*” the cry rose from the swaying audience. “The White Queen, show the White Queen to us. Let her testify!”

“*Ouranga, ouranga!*” shrieked the withered hag in red as she danced and leaped among the graves, twisting and writhing in an ecstasy of self-induced hypnosis. “*Dhan ghi, dhan ghi!*” She shook her claw-like hands up at the moon, which now was almost hidden in eclipse.

Now four men came shuffling forward, and between them they were bundling two more creatures, half-grown Negresses, poor, terrified, impotent things so utterly unnerved by fear that they could scarcely struggle in their captor’s hands. “*Grand Dieu, les boucs; les boucs sans bois* — the human sacrifices, goats without horns!” de Grandin whispered. “Have we made a mistake, will they reverse the ceremony, and have the feast before the White Queen testifies?”

The sacrifices were flung down before the fire and the voodoo witch bent over them, touching each with her gourd rattle, then dancing off again.

“*Dhan ghi, dhan ghi!*” the chant rose louder, more insistently, and another group of men came staggering out into the firelight; between them bumped the long, hole-decorated box we’d seen the night before.

“Ah?” murmured Jules de Grandin. “It seems that I was not mistaken, after all.”

The bearers dropped the box unceremoniously and scuttled off, racing back to join their fellows in the circle, for plainly their fear of the goddess in the box was greater than their faith in the high priestess’ magic to protect them when the great snake issued forth.

“*Dhan ghi, dhan ghi!*” The bag was stepping in a constantly accelerated pace about the box, her knees raised

level with her waist, her scrawny, splay-boned feet extended straight in a continuation of her spindling shanks. “*Dhan ghi, dhan ghi, dhan ghi!*”

Now from between her tightly compressed lips there came a whining sing-song chant, a rising, quavering cry like that snake-charmers make before the serpents issue from their baskets. For a moment she paused by the box, then snatched the lid up in her claws, springing back two yards or so to avoid the great snake’s head in case it started out of the case suddenly.

De Grandin’s teeth were fairly chattering, and a flow of weirdly garbled French profanity came sprawling from his lips like sparks that sputter from a dampened fuse.

We waited breathless. A pall of silence fell upon the worshippers. We could hear a sudden hissing sizzle in the fire as a fresh stick fell into the flames.

“*A-a-ah!*” de Grandin let his breath out slowly. “She comes. Behold her, good Friend Trowbridge!”

No wicked, wedge-shaped, scale-mailed head arose from the voodoo tabernacle. No forked tongue darted menace at the posturing priestess and cowering congregation. Nothing at all came from the box.

Instead, high overhead, seemingly dropping from the zenith where the moon’s pale countenance was masked, there came the whiffing notes of a slow, syncopated, wordless chant, an eery thing that made the listener think of pitch-black midnights and graves from which the dead were torn, and evil deeds done in the darkness of the moon. And with the rasping, scobbing music came the sound of a tomtom which beat in sharp staccato, its broken measures reaching to the very marrow of our spines.

The *obi* woman looked up to the sky from which the eldritch music seemed to drip like venom from a manchinee tree. Nothing met her gaze. Only the insistent, buzzing, susurrating notes swooped downward as from some discarnate unclean spirit perched among the swaying pine-trees’ boughs.

The witch’s hideous old face took on a look of wonder, then of worry, finally of blind, unreasoning panic. But her terror was no more than the prelude to that which followed, for something slowly rose from the long box beyond the dying fire.

A tall, lean thing it was, brown-skinned, ash-smeared, a mop of matted white hair stringing round its skull-like face. Wisps of age-rotted cloth were loosely bound around it, like grave-clothes falling from a putrefying corpse, and where the rags left chocolate-colored body bare great patches of a leprous gray showed in a ghastly contrast.

Faster and faster dripped the ghost-tune from the treetops; louder and more menacing the phantom drum-beats came. The hideous thing leaped from its box, vaulted the fire and

stood face to face with the old voodoo witch. The hag drew back her arm as if to strike the specter with her lash; the visitant reached suddenly into the fire, seized a blazing pine branch from the flames and felled the priestess with a single blow.

Before the *obi* woman could retain her feet the thing turned to the fire, striking it repeatedly with a green branch, flailing out the sinking blaze until it flickered lower, lower — finally died to a dull-glowing heap of coals.

And now a thing too terrible to credit happened. The spirit of the beaten fire seemed transferred to the body of the hideous creature from the box, for its limbs and face began to glow with horrifying, smoky luminance, a glow such as dead things give off in marshes in the darkness of the night.

Higher, shriller, rising to a keening wail that sent horripilations rippling through my skin, the ghostly music lifted, while the tom-tom's tempo quickened till each plangent beat seemed driving deep into our vertebræ, and like a sulfurous silhouette against the background of the night the fiery thing danced and shuffled back and forth between the sunken-mounded graves, its glowing feet in measure with the skirl of spectral music, its smoldering body seeming hung midway between the earth and sky as it whirled and turned and leaped and bounded where the voodoo witch-fire had been burning. Now, rag by filthy, rotting rag it tore its moldering grave-clothes off, and as each fetid fragment fell upon the earth fresh horrors met our fascinated gaze. Ribs, pelvic bones and sternum seemed made of living fire which shone through the integument of chocolate-colored skin as marsh-fire might shine through the drifting brume of foul miasmal vapors.

A moaning, low but pregnant with unutterable dread, broke from the congregation as they saw their witch-priestess felled by this awful apparition which glowed with smoldering inward fire and summoned ghost-tunes from the moonless midnight sky.

"Men and women of the race," a voice sang from the specter's burning throat, "I bring you testimony. Daughter am I to *Iblis*, Chief of Devils; even of the *bori* of the jungle am I daughter.

"Voodoo is unclean; voodoo is forbidden those who would not feel the vengeance of the *bori*. Get ye to your homes, ye foolish ones; to your work go ye, for to labor is to praise the jungle people of your fathers.

"Where is your witch-woman now? Where is her magic? Could she stand before the power of the spirits of the jungle? Could her fire burn one who carries fumes of hell within her body, or can her magic save ye from my wrath?

"Back to your homes, before I call on you the curse of *Mai-Aska*, who brings scars and rashes. To your cabins,

followers of false gods, or on you will I bring the wrath of *Kuri-Yandu*, who swells the joints with misery. See, ye fools who trust in voodoo, even now I call the stars down from the sky to crush you with their weight. On you I call the curse of *Mai-Ja-Chikki*, who will blind you for your sins. Behold!"

She reached her fire-gloved hands up toward the moonless sky and a swishing like the roar of flooding water when the rivers overflow their banks came from the pine trees, while curve on lambent curve of fire swept through the darkness as though a storm of meteors had been blown from hell by Satan's all-destroying breath.

"*Morbleu*, but it is perfect, it is excellent, it is *magnifique!*" de Grandin whispered in delight as he raced along the line of rockets, setting fire to them and, as they soared roaring through the air, setting fresh ones in their places.

The rockets reached their apogees and hissed down to the earth, bursting into fiery constellations. It seemed as if the heavens were alive with falling, bursting stars; the wrath of fire and brimstone that burned Sodom and Gomorrah, the promised day of awful fate when earth should be consumed by fire seemed on us as the blazing, shattering missiles crashed down from the zenith.

Screams of terror, frenzied, hopeless pleas for mercy, sounded on all sides. "Oh, Lawd, Ah's got it! Ah's gone blind, mah eyes is out!" cried one man, clawing at his dazzled eyes. Another and another took the wail up, and in a moment rustlings in the bushes told where congregation members crawled away for sanctuary, deserting the outlanders who had held them captive in a thrall of superstition.

But now the clatter of shod hoofs came from the highway, and fresh shouts of dismay rose from the frightened fugitives as the sheeted riders of the night closed in upon the voodoo rendezvous. They were a fearsome sight — steeds and riders masked in fluttering white with fiery eyes aglare through peepholes in their draperies, torches blazing in their hands, guns or whips upraised in menace.

The ghostly riders opened ranks to let the fleeing voodoo worshippers scuttle off to safety, but with the voodoo leaders it was different. Within a moment six outlandishly dressed men and the old *obi* priestess had been corralled and bound with ropes. "I think our bag is full," de Grandin murmured; "they have them all."

"Wha—what will you do with them?" I faltered, wild stories of the condign justice meted out by night riders recurring to me.

"Do? *Parbleu*, what should they do with such ones? Have we not seen them taken as they gloated over the commission of a foul crime? Can we not testify against them from our own knowledge? *Mais certainement*, my friend. Within the hour they will lie all safe in *la bastille*. Tomorrow, at the

latest, the *juge d'instruction* hears our evidence. After that — *morbleu*, one wishes one could be as sure of reaching heaven as one is that they will be convicted by the county court and suffer condemnation for their crimes! Come, let us go. This evening's work is finished, I damn think."

An hour later we gathered in the Sterling parlor. Lamp-light shone upon the tall, mint-garlanded tumblers, ice clinked pleasantly. The juleps were delicious.

"No," Hiji laughed, "I didn't have a bit of trouble. They were all so bally intent on the doin's in the cemetery that I shinned up the tree without a single blighter spottin' me. After that" — he took another long drink — "how do you Yankees say? It was in the bag."

"Whatever—" I began, but de Grandin hastened to explain before I had a chance to frame my question.

"*Mais; c'est tout simplement, mon vieux*. One only needs to think things through, and *voilà*." He turned as footsteps echoed in the hall and Coralea came in, her face and hands and arms aglow from recent vigorous scrubbing. "*Messieurs*, permit me to present *la grande prêtresse de vomdois*, the superwitch." Coralea blushed rosily beneath her soap-and-water glow.

"The superwitch?" I echoed. "You mean—"

"*Précisément*. I had been wondering how we might turn the tables on those naughty people from the Caribbean, and when Hiji flung the body of their executed comrade into camp the idea came to me like that — *pouff!* 'These so evil fellows have laid hold upon the superstition of the local colored folk by force of fear; they have worked on their imagination, they have convinced them that they, are all-powerful,' I say to me.

"'Exactly so, you have it right, my perspicacious self,' I answer me. 'Jules de Grandin, you and I must convince them that we have the greater power. We must induce them to go back to their homes and resume their simple, peaceful mode of life.'

"'You have summed the situation up exactly, Jules de Grandin,' I tell me, 'But how are we to do these things?'"

"Then I engage myself in deep conference. We have *matériel* at hand, it only waits our use. Hiji knows the demon music of the Africans, those bad, fierce Leopard Men of the West Coast beside whom these voodooists are but inept amateurs; he can reproduce it, but we must find a way to carry it to them and make them think it comes from superhuman agencies. Also, it is for us to make the magic of these voodoo people seem a weak and ineffective thing. We must put shame on them, as Moses shamed the magic-makers of the Pharaoh. How to do it? Then I recall Mademoiselle Coralea is a *danseuse*. She is clever, she is talented, she knows these people, and she has said the music of the

Leopard Men arouses all her evil instincts. 'Mademoiselle Coralea,' I apostrophize her, 'you shall be our superwitch. You shall dance before the voodoo council of fire. You shall put shame on their *mamaloï*.'

"So I approach her with my proposition. At first she is afraid, but she is the *artiste*, the rôle appeals to her dramatic nature, and so at last she gives consent. Thereupon we get our properties together. Hiji makes a tom-tom of an old kettle, and a pipe out of a piece of paper wrapped around a comb. Together in the barn we make the music, very softly, and Mademoiselle Coralea perfects her dance. We make a costume for her out of cheesecloth which we drag around the barnyard till it looks as old as sin's own self. We smear her with a chocolate paste. We buy up all the matches at the village store and boil them; then with the sulfurous paste we paint a skeleton upon her so that her bones will seem to shine clear through her skin when it is dark.

"Then Hiji and I set forth to find the 'White Queen.' We find her lying in her box out in the cemetery, and — it took but two shots to dispatch her. Afterward we clean her box with disinfectant, and into it goes Mademoiselle Coralea. *Parbleu*, I think it took more courage to lie curled up in that snake's ex-den than it took to face the voodoo people in the open!

"In a tree above the graveyard we hung a telephone transmitter with an amplifier attached to it. These we connected to a wire and a telephone receiver which were hidden in a near-by tree, and into this our Hiji sang his tune and beat upon his kettle-drum. *Tiens*, the effect was most realistic, *n'est-ce-pas?* When the music seemed to come from nowhere, when the voodoo priestess was struck down by the fiery visitant which leaped out of the snake box, when the stars began to fall from heaven as our rockets took their flight — *parbleu*, it was so good a piece of stagecraft that even I who knew the plot was half afraid, myself!"

Coralea's pink cheeks were dimpled with a smile, "Doctor de Grandin, I think I owe you something for tonight," she told him.

"How is that, *Mademoiselle?*"

"That dance I did tonight; if it was good enough to make those people think I was a demon from the jungle it ought to be successful in the theatre. I'll get Sir Haddingway to play the Leopard People's music on a record for me; then as soon as Papa's estate has been settled I'll go to New York. That dance should be good for a month's engagement at the Irving Place Opera House. After that — well, other burlesque actresses have gone to Hollywood. Why shouldn't I?"

"Why not, indeed, *ma plus belle héroïne?*" replied de Grandin. "*À votre triomphe!*"

We clinked our glasses on the toast.

The Poltergeist of Swan Upping

Dear Trowbridge [read the letter from Scott Thorowgood]: As you know, I bought the old house at Swan Upping on the Mullica last July and at once set out to renovate it. Restoration was completed in October and we moved in the middle of that month. Almost immediately things began to happen — unpleasant things. Servants swore they met with spectral persecutions in halls and on the stairs, bed-clothes were jerked of at night. Crockery and kitchenware fell from shelves and hooks without apparent reason, and last Wednesday morning a maid was set on as she went upstairs and thrown so violently that she sustained a broken collarbone. Neither my daughters nor I have seen anything nor been troubled in any way, and if it were not for the girl's injury I should say the whole thing is attributable to some malicious gossip; but her hurts are real enough — as I who pay her hospital bills can testify — and she persists in saying she was the victim of assault and not of accident.

Thus far it's been more annoying than frightening, but if things keep up this way we shall have to close the house for want of help, as we find it practically impossible to keep servants in the place. Do you think you can persuade Doctor de Grandin, of whose success with occult pests I've heard considerable, to come and "fumigate" Swan Upping for us? I shall, of course, be willing to pay whatever fee he asks.

WELL, CAN I persuade you?" I asked, passing the letter to de Grandin. "I know you're not much interested in the fee, but—"

"Who says so?" he demanded as he laid the letter down. "Why should I not be?"

"Why, I know you've turned down cases time and time again when the fees offered were almost fantastic—"

"*Précisément*. You have right, my friend. I reserve the right to take such cases as appeal to me, and to decline others. But in such cases as I take the laborer is worthy of his hire, and I think that your friend Thorowgood is one who has respect for money, whether in himself or others. This letter has a tone of command in it. One assumes *Monsieur* Thorowgood is used to having what he pays for and paying well for what he gets. *Bien*. I shall serve him well, and he shall pay accordingly. I shall be interested in both the fee and this so snobbish ghost who gives attention only to the servants and leaves the master of the house alone. When do

we leave?"

"He says to take the train to Upsam's Station, then wait for him to pick us up. There's only one train down a day in wintertime. We'll have to pack immediately."

Jules de Grandin thrust his small pointed chin another inch into the collar of his fur coat, drove his hand into his pockets till his elbows all but disappeared, and eyed me with a stare as icy as the fading winter afternoon "Me," he announced bitterly, "I am a fool of the first magnitude!"

"Indeed?" I replied. "I'm glad to hear you confess it. I've suspected something of the sort at times, but—"

"I am," he insisted, "the prize zany of the winter's crop. Five little hours ago we were warm and comfortable in Harrisonville. Now, if you please, observe us — marooned here in a trackless wilderness, retreat cut off, progress impossible. *Mon Dieu*, I perish miserably!"

"Oh, it's not that bad," I comforted. "Thorowgood will surely be here in a little while. If he can't come himself he'll send somebody—"

"*Mais oui*, and they will find our stiffening dead corpses on the station platform—"

"Maybe that's our man, now," I interrupted as an ancient car of the model which made Detroit famous in the days before the war drew up beside the waiting-platform and an aged Negro wrapped almost to the eyes in a sheep-coat descended and ambled toward the stack of freight piled at the station's farther end.

"At any rate, it is a sign of rescue," de Grandin nodded and hurried toward the dusky motorist. "*Holà, mon brave*," he greeted. "How much ill it cost us to be conveyed to Swan Upping? You know the place, of course."

"Yassuh, Ah knows hit," the other answered with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

"Very well, my priceless Jehu. What is your price for transportation thither?"

The colored man spoke with a rich Virginia accent. Obviously, he was not indigenous to southern Jersey. Just as obviously, he was much impressed by the fur coat de Grandin wore. "Cap'n, suh," he answered as he touched his battered hat, "mah bizness ain't been good dese las' two months."

"Indeed? One grieves to hear it. But we shall pay you royally, reward you with a princeling's ransom for taking us to Swan Upping. We are thoroughly disgusted with the scenery hereabouts, and would away to bright new scenes. Accordingly—"

The Negro gazed at him with something close akin to rapture. With the uneducated man's love of large words he was entranced with Jules de Grandin's eloquence, yet ... Regretful resolution hardened in his wrinkled face. "Con'ol, suh," he interrupted, "mah bizness has been pow'ful bad dis season. Folks ain't haulin' like dey uster."

"One gathered as much; and from these preliminaries one assumes your price will be enormous. Very well, then. A dollar each? Two dollars?"

"Naw, suh."

"*Grand Dieu*, a profiteer, a usurer, a *voleur de chemin!* How much, then, my grand rascal? Three dollars each? I swear we'll pay no more!"

"Doctah, suh" — such munificence seemed to warrant a new title of respect — "Ah'd suttinly enjoy to make me six dollahs, but you all cain't hire me to take yuh to Swan Uppin'. Not dis time o' day, suh."

"Eh, how is that? Surely it cannot be so far—"

"Hit ain't so far to go, suh. Dat ain't whut's worryin' me. Hit's de gittin' back dat counts. Ah ain't aimin' to go pesticatin' round no daid folks' bizness."

"I do not understand. What have the dead to do with taking us to Swan Upping?"

"Plenty, suh. Dey's got a plenty to do wid hit. Don't yuh know dat place is *ha'nted*?"

"Bosh!" I broke in. "You know there aren't such things as ghosts?"

"Yassuh. Ah knows hit right enough in daytime, but de sun is settin' fast, an' it'll be pitch-black befo' we gits dere. Ah ain't goin' nowheres near dat place in darkness, suh."

There the matter rested. Plead, argue and cajole as we would, we could not prevail on him to take us to Swan Upping. With a regretful look at us he re-entered his decrepit chariot, set his wheezing motor going and drove off into the lengthening shadows, leaving us as hopelessly cut off at the small way-station as survivors of *H.M.S. Bounty* were on Pitcairn Island.

The prospect was not too inviting. Festoons of dripping icicles hung from the platform's open-sided shelter, patches of half-melted snow alternated with still larger patches of foot-fettering mud, and a chill wind whipped the waters of the Mullica into angry little whitecaps, then hurried on to howl a keening dirge around the corners of the boarded-up summer hotel. There was neither waiting-room nor ticket office, for the station consisted of a board platform roofed over at one end to afford temporary shelter to freight and such unfortunates as had to wait the trains that stopped on signal only. Nowhere, look as we would, could we descry a sign of anyone who might have been a messenger from Swan Upping. Meanwhile the sun was sinking steadily behind the western timberline, and long blue shadows

reached out toward us like malignant fingers.

"We should have motored down," I said. "Railway service to this section of the state's not anything to brag about in winter, and—"

"*Morableu*, we should have waited for the summer!" de Grandin interrupted. "Then, at least, we might have slept outdoors and sustained ourselves on berries. As it is, a gruesome death awaits us — *heurra*, it is a rescue!"

A station wagon pulled up alongside the platform, and Scott Thorowgood, wrapped to the heels in a chinchilla ulster, climbed from the driver's seat to wring my hand.

"Hullo, Trowbridge," he greeted heartily. "Mighty glad to meet you, Doctor de Grandin. Hope my little accident didn't inconvenience you too much. I got a flat just as I left the place and had to stop and change the wheel. Got your duffle ready? Fine, let's go."

"We were beginning to feel like orphans of the storm," I confessed as our vehicle got under way. "There was no way of telephoning you, and we thought there might have been some slip-up in train schedules. When we didn't find you here we tried to make arrangements with an old colored man to drive us over, but the deal fell through. He not only wouldn't entertain an offer, but intimated rather broadly that Swan Upping's—"

"I know, I know; don't tell me!" Thorowgood broke in. "It's all around the county, now. We just got a fresh staff from a New York employment office, but if they're here a week it'll set a record. Houseful of week-enders too."

"You say these tales of haunting are all new, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked. "There is no legend of an ancient ghost?"

"No, our spook is this year's model, with all the late improvements," Thorowgood responded, swinging from the main road into a long private lane. "The original Swan Upping house dates back to Colonial days, and probably there's been enough deviltry pulled off there to warrant a battalion of ghosts moving in and making it a permanent headquarters, but as far as I can ascertain no one ever heard of any ghostly visitants till we moved in. Usually old deserted houses get an unsavory reputation, but in this case the rule's reversed. Everything was quiet as a Quaker meeting till we came here. The carpenters and plumbers had hardly moved out when the ghost moved in, and began scaring my cooks and maids and laundresses out of their wits. We've had about five hundred percent labor turnover since October, and if you can't rid us of the ghost we'll either have to close the house or do our own cooking and washing.

"I thought at first it might be someone trying to scare me into selling. I've put a lot of money in the place, and it would make an ideal summer boarding-house; so, fantastic as it

sounds, I thought that maybe someone might have had a notion I could be scared off and forced to sell out at a loss. That got my dander up, and I hired a crew of detectives to come and give the place a going over—”

“Indeed? And what did they discover?”

“Nothing. Not a blessed thing. The spook lay low while they were in the house, and we couldn’t have asked a quieter time. Then, the very day they left, Daisy Mullins, the only one of all the servants who’s been with us straight through, was set upon as she went up the stairs and thrown down the entire flight. She broke her collarbone and hurt her head, poor kid, but the harm it did her body isn’t half as serious as what her mind suffered. I was over to see her in the hospital this morning, and she’s almost a nervous wreck. The doctors tell me she may go into St. Vitus’ dance.”

“U’m? And what manifestations have you yourself observed?”

Thorowgood bit the end from a cigar and set it glowing with the dashboard lighter. “Nothing!” he exploded. “Neither my daughters nor I have seen anything out of the ordinary. No one but the servants has been troubled. That’s what made me think it might have been some malicious person, or perhaps a practical joker, behind it all. I’ve offered a thousand dollars reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone caught playing ghost, but thus far no one’s laid claim to it.

“Welcome to Spooky Hollow, gentlemen.” He brought the station wagon to a halt beneath the porte-cochère and slammed the front door open. “Want to question the servants before dinner?”

“No, thank you,” answered de Grandin. “I shall take the opportunity to look the terrain over before I form a plan of action, if you please.”

“Certainly, certainly. You’re the ghostologist on this case. It’s up to you to prescribe whatever treatment you think proper.”

When he did Swan Upping over, Thorowgood had taken thought for his guests’ comfort. Our cozy room mocked at the winter darkness fingering at the window-panes. Bright curtains of glazed chintz hung at the casements, two fat armchairs had been drawn up to the blazing fire, a maple wall-case held a row of books — Heiser’s *American Doctor’s Odyssey*, Link’s *Return to Religion* and Madame Curie’s biography were three titles I saw at a glance. On the mantelpiece was a low bowl of Danish copper, jade-mellow with patina, in which a bouquet of flamboyant Cherokee roses was set. Immediately adjoining was a bathroom done in orchid tile with a deep, luxurious tub, a glassed-in shower and a row of great, fluffy towels warming themselves on a heated rack. “Name of a small green man,” de Grandin mur-

mured as his little blue eyes lighted with appreciation, “food never tastes so good as when one has been fasting, *hein*, my friend? Stand aside and let me pass, if you will be so good. I desire to defrost my frozen bones.”

Half an hour later, shaved, showered, clothed and immeasurably cheered, we went out into the hall. “Now for dinner and the ghost of Monsieur Thorowgood!” announced Jules de Grandin.

It was a royal feast our host spread out that night. Besides de Grandin and me there were several people from New York and Philadelphia, a scattering of business associates from Newark and a little man whose name I understood was Bradley, but whose address I did not catch at introduction. Wild duck, shot in the Jersey marshes ten days before and gamed to perfection, stewed green celery tops, quince jelly, spoon bread golden as new-minted coin, and burgundy as mellow as midsummer moonlight, combined to make the dinner a Lucullian banquet, and ten o’clock had sounded on the tall timepiece in the hall and echoed from the banjo clock in the library before the long Madeira cloth was cleared of silver and Wedgewood.

It was with something of the gesture of a prestidigitator ordering silence for his foremost trick that Thorowgood smiled at us benevolently as he turned to Perriby the butler. “Perriby,” he ordered, slipping a small key from his watch-chain, “two bottles of the cognac de Napoléon, 1810.”

“Mr. Thorowgood, sir, please” — Perriby returned to the dining-room, his florid face slightly paler than its wont, his long, smooth-shaven upper lip tremulous, and with no bottles in his hands — “may I speak with you a moment, sir, in private?”

“What’s the matter? — where’s that brandy?”

“If you please, sir, I’d rather not go into that smoke house. I thought I saw—”

“Oh, good Lord — you, too? Take a couple of the boys. Take half a dozen, if two aren’t enough, and get that brandy.”

“Yes, sir.” The servant bowed with frigid respect and departed.

“He’s brand-new here,” Thorowgood half whispered to de Grandin. “I had to get a new outfit last week when Daisy Mullins took her tumble, and I’ve been as careful as I could to keep this gossip from reaching ’em, but — Lord! I hope the superstitious fools don’t shy at their own shadows and drop a bottle of that cognac. That stuff cost me eighteen dollars a fifth, and the only thing needed to set me staring mad would be—”

“Mr. Thorowgood, sir!” The butler was once more at his elbow, and his face was gray with fright.

“Eh? What’s the matter now? Don’t tell me that you saw—”

“Oh, sir,” the servant interrupted, his thick, throaty voice gone high and almost squeaky, “it’s Meadows, sir. Meadows, the stable boy. ‘E’s dead, sir!” Excitement had played havoc with his carefully acquired aspirates, and his h’s fell like autumn leaves in Vallambrosa.

“Dead?” Thorowgood repeated.

“Yes, sir. Kilt. You see, I asked ‘im and Smith and Little to hacompany me to the smoke ‘ouse, like you said, sir, hand they went, though most reluctantly. When I hunlocked the door somethink hinside ‘issed at us, as hif it were a snyke, sir. I thought hit might be someone myking gyne of us, hif you don’t mind me saying so, sir, and was about to hadmonish ‘im, when Meadows, who always was a most wexatious little fighter, hif I may say so, sir, rushed right into the ‘ouse, and next hinstant we ‘eard ‘im scream hand choke, and when I played the flashlight hinto the ‘ouse, there ‘e lay, all sprawled hout, as you might say, and directly I looked at ‘im I knew ‘e was—”

“Dead?”

“Quite so, sir. The hother boys are bringin’ ‘im back now. I ran ahead to tell you—”

“I’ll bet you did!” his master cut in grimly. “All right. That’ll do.” To us:

“Will you examine him, please? It’s probable he’s only stunned or fainted. Perriby’s such a hare-brained fool....”

But the butler’s diagnosis was correct. Meadows, undersized and wiry as a jockey or a flyweight fighter, was quite dead, and must have died instantly. His eyes were opened widely, almost forced from their sockets. His mouth gaped slightly and his tongue thrust forth between his teeth, as though death caught him in the act of gagging.

De Grandin took the dead boy’s face between his palms and raised his head a little. It was as though the head were coupled to the body by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle, for there was no resistance as it nodded upward. “*Le cou brisé*,” he told me. “His neck is broken, as if he had been hanged.”

“But he wasn’t hanged,” I insisted, “and there’s no mark of violence. Might he not have fallen—”

“*Non*,” he answered positively. “Those eyes, that tongue, the whole expression of his face bear testimony of throttling. Tremendous, sudden pressure was applied, making death almost immediate, and while there was undoubtedly a subconjunctival ecchymosis, it did not have time to show lividity before he died. In an hour, maybe two, we may find bruises. Certainly the autopsy will disclose a fractured hyoid bone as well as broken vertebræ.”

“By heaven, this is too much!” Thorowgood stormed when he told him of our findings. “It was bad enough when this ghost hung round the place and scared my servants into fits, but murder is no joke, and murder has been done

tonight. I suppose I’ll have to notify the police and hold everybody here till they have finished their investigations. Meantime, I’m offering two thousand dollars, spot cash, to anyone who puts the finger on this murderer for me.

“Might as well get it over with, I suppose,” he added as he squared his shoulders and went to notify the guests that no one was to leave till given permission by the police.

It was Doris Thorowgood who put the company’s consensus into bald words. “Well,” she announced, “I’m sorry for poor Meadows and all that, but we can’t bring him back by being gloomy. I’m going to dance. Who’s with me?”

Apparently they all were, for the radio was soon relaying latest swing selections from New York and Newark, and the faint *wisp-wisp* of thin-soled slippers on the polished floor mingled with the strains of syncopated music.

“Not dancing, gentlemen?” Little Mr. Bradley paused beside us.

De Grandin eyed him coldly. “I think the dead deserve some courtesy, even if he was no more than a mere stable boy,” he answered.

“I agree with you, sir. It is an evil thing to dance in a house where death lurks. Indeed, I have a feeling we shall witness more misfortune.”

“Specifically?” de Grandin raised his eyebrows quizzically.

“No, not specifically, but generally. The moment I came in this house I felt an atmosphere of menace.”

“You are psychic, *Monsieur!*”

“Naturally.” From his waistcoat pocket Bradley drew a card which he presented to the Frenchman. Leaning forward I read:

THADDEUS BRADLEY
Clairvoyant

He was a little man, not exactly dwarfish, but so well below the average stature that he scarcely reached de Grandin’s chin. He was curiously stooped, too, whether as the result of a crippled shoulder or deliberate pose I could not quite determine. By contrast, he had a large head with a shock of curling black hair, a wide forehead with delicately curved brows, a hooked, assertive nose and dark-brown eyes, set a -thought too close together.

The little Frenchman looked at him with increased interest. “Tell me,” he asked, “do you know anything about this house, *Monsieur*? Did Monsieur Thorowgood tell you—”

“Yes, sir, he did. He told me he’d been troubled by some spirit entities which were frightening his servants and had injured one of them. He asked me to come up from Philadelphia and see what I could do to find the ghost, if—”

“Did he say it was a ghost?”

“Well, not exactly. He said the servants said it was a ghost, but he thought it was something human. However, I’m known to possess psychic powers, and if I think the house is haunted—which I do, most certainly—”

Anger kindled in de Grandin’s small blue eyes. “When did he summon you?” he interrupted.

“This morning, Doctor. I arrived shortly before noon—”

“*Le cochon, porc!* Does he think he can do this to me?”

“Eh, what’s that?”

“Did he not tell you I was coming, that he had engaged my services—”

“Well, now you mention it, he did. Yes, sir. He said you had a reputation as a ghost-breaker, but he wanted to have my opinion, too—”

“*Parbleu*, this is intolerable, this is monstrous, this is not to be endured! He has made me insulted. That I should be spied upon—”

“Oh, now, don’t take it that way, sir. I’m sure Mr. Thorowgood meant nothing by it. Just wanted to be sure, you know. It’s just as if he called another doctor in for consultation in a case of illness. Anyway, what do we care? He’s got to pay us each a fee. He doesn’t think there are such things as ghosts. Let’s convince him of his error. Maybe we could hold a séance for him, find the ghost and drive it out then each collect his fee. That way everybody’s satisfied—”

Before the rising fury in the Frenchman’s eyes he quailed to silence “Charlatan, impostor,” de Grandin almost hissed, “you would involve me in a fraud? You would manufacture a ghost to put fear into Monsieur Thorowgood that you may collect a fee — *parbleu*, yes! Why not?”

“Wha—what is it?” stammered Bradley.

“You would hold a séance, *hein?* You would produce a rapping-of-the-table, perhaps go in a trance and relay messages from some defunct Indian sachim? *Très bon*. You shall conduct a séance, my fine friend, but it shall be genuine. Let us see if we can make this evil entity produce himself. Perhaps he will materialize—”

“No, no! Not that, sir. Not me; I can’t do that! I’m not a spirit medium; I can contact controls and get through messages — I really can! — but when it comes to trying to materialize — I’m scared to monkey with it. I’ve seen some things—”

“*Corbleu*, my friend, as yet you have seen nothing. You have your choice. Either you will hold a séance here and now, or I denounce you publicly, tell everyone that you are an impostor who declared he would find a ghost here, whether it—”

“No, no, don’t do that, sir; it would ruin me!”

“You are an apt pupil, *mon ami*; you apprehend my meaning perfectly. Which is it to be, a séance or denuncia-

tion?”

The guests were all enthusiastic. Dancing might be fun, but a séance, with a dead man practically in the next room ... “My dear,” I heard Letitia Thorowgood exclaim, “it’s priceless — definitely! Maybe we can make poor Meadows tell who killed him, and why.”

Every stage trick of the charlatan was evident as Bradley prepared for the séance. Lights were turned off in the drawing-room and the adjoining hall, the guests were seated round the wall in a wide circle, with hands joined, and Doris Thorowgood took her place at the piano, softly playing *Abide With Me*. Bradley seated himself at a small table with a nickel-plated paper-knife held upright in his hand. At his request de Grandin played a flashlight’s ray upon the knife so that it stood out in the darkness like a lighted tower at night.

“No one is to speak or move until I give permission,” cautioned Bradley, gazing fixedly at the knife-point gleaming in the dark.

Silence settled on the room. From the hall outside we heard the pompous, slow tick of the tall clock; softly, softer than the clock-tick, barely audible to us, came the piano’s notes:

I fear no harm with Thee at hand to bless,
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness;
Where is death’s sting, where, grave, thy victory? ...

The paper-cutter wavered, swayed from right to left, and dropped to the floor with a light tinkle. Bradley’s eyes closed and his head, leaned back against the chair, fell a little sideways as the neck muscles relaxed.

And in that instant pandemonium broke loose. The music from the hallway banged *fortissimo* in the syncopated strains of *Satan Takes a Holiday*, and from Doris Thorowgood there came a laugh as eery as the blindfold-gropings of a lost mind; a wild, high-mounting burst of mirth that seemed to froth and churn and boil, then change from merriment to torture and geyser up into a stream that rose, flickered like a flame of torment, went up and up until it seemed no human throat could stand its strain, then dropped again until it was a chuckle of indecent glee.

Bradley was on his feet, hugging himself in sudden agony, his tortured face turned up to the groined ceiling, and with a crash as deafening as a thunder-clap every piece of fragile porcelain in a wall-cabinet was dashed down to the floor as though a giant broom had swept it from the shelves.

Then from the hall, foul as a suspiration from a charnel house, a gust of wind came sweeping, incredible, filthy, furious as a cyclone. I retched at it, I heard the man next to me give a gasp and then a gagging choke. This was no mere

fetor, it was the very noisome breath of Death, charged with the rottenness of putrefaction stored up since the first beginnings of mortality.

“Lights, lights, *pour l’amour d’un bouc!*” I heard de Grandin shout.

But there were no lights. When Thorowgood shook off his lethargy of disgust and pressed the wall-switch, a sharp *click* sounded, but the room remained as black as Erebus, and meanwhile filthiness unnamable, illimitable terror and disgust, filled the house to stifling overflowing. Coughing, strangling, almost fainting I stumbled to a window and wrenched at it. The sash was firmly set as if built in the masonry.

“*In nomine Domini conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!*” de Grandin’s conjuration sounded, not loud, but with a force of earnestness more compelling than a shout. Then *crash!* he hurled a flower-bowl through the window. The shattered glass sprayed outward not more from his missile than from the pressure of the nameless, obscene filthiness that filled the house to inundation, and I gasped great lungfuls of revivifying air as a drowning man might fight for precious breath.

From the hallway the piano sounded, beating out its rhythm with the heavy, unaccented tone of an electric mechanism, and in accompaniment to the cacophony of beaten keys and tortured strings the wild, demoniac peals of laughter gushed from Doris’ lips.

“Mademoiselle Doris, stop it, I command you!” de Grandin ordered sharply, but still the music sounded stridently, still she laughed like a witch-thing delighted at the success of some hell-brew she had concocted.

“Ha, so? Then this must be the way of it!” He gave her a resounding slap on the right cheek, then turned his hand and struck the other cheek a stinging blow.

The treatment was effective, for she raised her hands from the piano and held them to her smarting face, hysteria gone before the stimulus of sudden pain.

“One regrets heroic measures,” he apologized as she looked at him in hurt wonder, “but there are times when they are necessary. This was one of them.”

Bradley had fallen on his back and lay quaking spasmodically, hands pressed against his midriff, little buzzing noises sounding from his throat, as though he breathed through some obstruction.

“Up, man, up!” de Grandin cried, seizing him beneath the arms and dragging him up to his feet. “So! Bend over!” He bent the choking fellow forward almost as if he were a swimmer overcome by water, signaled me to hold his head between my hands, and struck him sharply on the back between the shoulders with the heel of his left hand. With the first two fingers of his right hand he traced a cross against

the man’s bent back, and murmured something in swift Latin of which I caught but a few words: “... *Deus, in nomine tuo ... exorcizo uos ... uade retro, Satanas ...*”

Bradley gave a tortured choke, like one about to strangle, and from his lips there came what seemed to be a puff of smoke. But it was no light ethereal vapor, for it plummeted to the floor and hit the polished oak with a soft slap, almost like the smacking of an open hand. For a moment it lay there like a little cone of swirling vapor, or, perhaps a pile of fine-ground powder, but suddenly it appeared to take on semblance of a shape not well defined, but vague and semi-formed, like a mass of colloid substance, or a jelly-fish which had been brought up from the bay. It was hard to define it, for it seemed to shift its outline, flowing, quivering, ever changing, now resembling a splash of albumen, now drawing in upon itself until it was almost a perfect circle, then lengthening until it seemed to be an ovoid.

The thing disgusted me. It seemed like some great spider tentatively stretching out its claws in search of prey. De Grandin seemed to realize its potency for evil, too, for while he kept the beam of the flashlight upon it and muttered Latin conjurations at it through clenched teeth, I noticed that he stood well back from it, as though he feared that it might spring at him. But it did not spring. Rather, it seemed at somewhat of a loss which way to go or what to do until, as if it formed quick resolution, it rolled as swiftly as a drop of mercury released from a thermometer to the shattered window, mounted to the sill so quickly that we had difficulty following its movement, and disappeared into the night.

“What was it?” I asked rather shakily. “I never saw a thing like that before—”

“*Parbleu*, you have not missed much amusement!” the Frenchman answered. “I cannot tell you what it was, my friend, but I know that it was very evil. It was that which killed the poor young Meadows — I would not give a centime for the life of anyone whom it attacked.”

“It seemed to come from Bradley’s throat—”

“Perfectly. Had we not acted quickly — and been lucky — it would have possessed him completely.”

“Possessed? You mean in the Biblical sense?”

“*Précisément*, nothing less; our institutions for the insane are filled with people similarly afflicted.”

“Something’s choking me,” moaned Bradley. “It’s in my throat—”

“*Non*, it is no longer there,” de Grandin soothed. “You feel the secondary pains, my friend. You fainted but you are all better, now. I should prescribe a glass of brandy. Indeed, I think that I shall join you in the medicine.”

“Then you’ve no idea what it could be?” I asked as we prepared for bed.

“On the contrary, I have several. When I first heard Monsieur Thorowgood’s account of these strange happenings I was inclined to think he might be right in attributing the so-called phenomena to the servants’ superstition or to human agencies. Even the murder of the stable boy might fit in with such a theory. Then this Thaddeus Bradley one accosted us, and I had the idea. ‘This person doubtless is a charlatan,’ I tell me, ‘but he has played at spiritism for a long time. The claims of spiritualism are debatable, to say the least. I have had a wide experience with the occult, but I would not say that it is possible for so-called mediums to get in contact with the spirits of the dead at will. On the other hand, I am convinced that there are many entities, both formed and unformed, who wish to break the barriers between the human and the super-human, or sub-human. For such as these the average medium is a gateway to desire. When he or she is entranced and off guard they enter through the breach left by his absent consciousness, usually with dire results to mankind. Also, although the usual medium is an arrant fraud, the very atmosphere in which he lives is favorable for such spirit-raids. I had no idea this Bradley could evoke the spirit which has worked his mischiefs in this place, but if I could make him go into the mummery of a séance we could get, perhaps, a glimpse of what we are opposed to. Conditions were ideal. Bradley focused all attention on himself, and every mind was intent on some manifestation of the otherworldly. The bars were down, the frontier was unguarded — if some malignant spirit hovered round the house and sought to force an entrance, this was his ideal opportunity. *Eh bien*, he recognized it!

“By his force he made Mademoiselle Doris pliant to his will. By the psychoplasm generated by the concentrated thought of all the company he assumed a sort of form and solidarity, and forced himself right into Bradley’s throat. Had we not expelled him he would have found asylum there, fed and fattened on the poor man’s physiopsychic substance, gained strength, and, like the fever germ which generates in one body, kills its host, then fares forth for more killing, would in time have issued from poor Bradley’s corpse to wreak more havoc in the world.”

“You think we’ve overcome it — whatever it is?”

“That would be a foolish boast at this time. I fear we have but started our campaign. We have balked, but not defeated it. Tomorrow, or the next day, or perhaps the next, we shall come to grips with it.”

“You think it may be a malignant ghost, a murderer’s, perhaps?”

“It may be, but I do not think so. I have met with such as that upon occasion, and usually they have a sort of pseudo-substance of their own. This one had not, but had to build himself a form of psychoplasm. As yet he is not very strong.

He has not the staying power. His strength, by which his capacity for evil is bounded, flows and ebbs, like the tides. Whether he will grow too swiftly for us—”

“Then you think that it’s an—”

“An elemental? *Bien oui*. I think that this is what for want of better nomenclature we call a ‘spirit,’ but it has never lived in human form. Evil, spiteful and dangerous it unquestionably is, but as yet it is evil discarnate. Should it become completely carnate our work will be that much more difficult.”

“You’ve referred to psychoplasm several times. Just what is it?” I asked.

“*Tiens*, what is electricity? We know how to produce it, we can harness it to our needs, we recognize its results when we see them, but we have no definition for it. So with psychoplasm. It is something like the animal magnetism to which Mesmer attributed his success at hypnotism. It seems to be of nervous origin and physiologically connected with the internal secretory organs. As nearly as we can define it, it is an all-penetrating, imponderable emanation which normally is dissipated quickly, but under certain conditions can be stabilized and energized by the intelligence of the living, or by discarnate intelligence. Often, but not always, it is luminous, the spirit-light we see at séances. Less often — *grâce à Dieu!* — it can in favorable conditions be made the vehicle to transmit force. It was through concrescence of this emanation that they which attacked Bradley became visible. But one wonders—”

He broke off, staring straight before him.

“What is it?”

“Where, by what means, did it get the necessary force to kill the Meadows boy?”

“Why—”

He waved my suggestion aside, and continued, speaking slowly, as though he thought aloud. “*Tenez*, we have more cause for worry. The psychoplasm which is loosed at every séance is the product of the minds of everybody present. It is put forth as a force.

“It leaves the body and the mind. Then what becomes of it? Is it reabsorbed? Perhaps. But does one reabsorb the very psychoplasm he put out? There is the question. We cannot surely say. Once it leaves its power house, or reservoir, it is beyond control of him from whom it emanated. It is quite likely to be seized and directed by” — he checked the possibilities off on his fingers — “stronger wills in the circle at the séance, lower, baser forms of discarnate intelligence, or by true ghosts, the spirits of ex-humans. Mademoiselle Doris was intent upon her music; she was also in a neutral state of mind, half doubting, half expecting something, though she knew not what. Certainly she was not intent on guarding from outside assaults. Thus she was an ideal prey

for some mischievous thought-form.”

“Great heavens, you think she was possessed, then?”

“No-o, neither possessed nor obsessed.”

“What’s the difference? I always thought the terms synonymous.”

“By no means, not at all. In possession the demon steals the possessed’s mind and personality. It is like vampirism, except the vampire animates a corpse; the possessing demon takes a living body from which he has forced its rightful occupant, and uses it for his own ends. In obsession the malignant spirit uses both mind and body of his victim, crippling or misdirecting the mentality, but not entirely ousting it.

“Mademoiselle Doris is nervous and high-strung, selfish, emotional, shallow, inclined to be erratic. When the spirit form attempted to invade her consciousness she gave way physically at once, and played a strain of wild and mocking music, as it bade. Mentally, she closed the bulkheads of her consciousness by going off into hysteria. Obsession has this much in common with hypnotism, it must have a mind on which to operate. No one can hypnotize an idiot or lunatic, neither can an idiot be obsessed. A person in the grip of hysteria is practically insane; therefore she was safe for the time being. But if he comes back to attack her while her mind is off its guard in sleep, or when she is controlled by evil thoughts, as in a fit of anger — *eh bien*, we may find our task a more complex one.”

“But do we know it was hysteria and not possession?” I persisted. “That awful, ghoulish laugh and the expression on her face seemed scarcely human—”

He nodded thoughtfully. “Your question is well put, my friend. But did not you notice how she came back to her senses when I slapped her in the face?”

“Yes, but—”

“No buts, if you will be so kind. In the possessed state the victim is unconscious of deeds done and words said. Thus far your case is good, but it is also true that one possessed is markedly insensitive to pain. The demon sitting at the wheel can feel no pain inflicted on the body he possesses; *alors*, we find a state of anesthesia in the possessed or obsessed. Hot objects may be handled with impunity, electric shocks are not felt.

“But was it so with Mademoiselle Doris? *Non*. I did not strike her hard, although I struck her sharply. Had she been truly possessed I might have beat her till her face was bloody, yet she would not have ceased her playing or her diabolic laughter. You see?”

“Yes, I suppose so. What’s our next move?”

He patted back a yawn. “At present, *mon vieux*, I have a rendezvous with Morpheus. *Á bientôt*.”

Beachwood Hospital where Daisy Mullins’ broken clavicle was mending was a private institution with no wards and only about a hundred beds. As we strode along the corridor amid the faint but all-pervading atmosphere of antiseptics, drugs and shut-in humanity, I reflected Thorowgood had not been niggardly in providing treatment for his injured maid.

“Queer thing about that girl,” said Doctor Broemel as he piloted us down the hallway, “she’s not in much pain — it’s just a simple fracture and it’s healing beautifully — but her nerves are shot to pieces. She hardly speaks except to keep imploring us for a night nurse. That’s absurd, of course. She doesn’t need a night nurse any more than I need feather dusters on my heels. Of course, a tumble down a flight of stairs is quite a shock, but she should be well out of it by now. She’s been here five days, and besides the broken clavicle and some slight contusions on the head she’s as sound as a nut.”

“Does she give reasons for desiring a night nurse?” de Grandin asked.

“No, she doesn’t. Just keeps saying she’s afraid to be left alone — with four nurses within twenty feet of her! Queer things, women patients.”

“You are imparting information to us?” de Grandin answered as we stopped before the door to Daisy’s room.

The place was all white tile and white enamel, with a narrow bed of spotless white. Daisy Mullins was half propped to a sitting posture, one hand strapped across her chest, a band of white gauze wound around her injured head, another bandage drawn beneath her chin to hold the first one firm. Somehow, with the wimple-like white cloths about her head and face, she had the look of a young nun, a nun carved out of tallow. Her cheeks seemed absolutely bloodless, so did her lips; her eyes seemed far too large for her countenance, and though they were light blue they seemed dark and cavernous against the pallor of her face. She glanced at us without interest. Indeed, I could not say she looked at us at all. Rather, it seemed, she was trying to see something just beyond her range of vision, and feared with desperate fear that she might sight it. It would be hard to make her tell us anything, I thought.

De Grandin laid the flowers and the huge box of bonbons he had brought upon the bedside table, and stood gazing at her for a moment. Then, with his quick, infectious smile, “*Mademoiselle*, we have come to ask your help in fighting it,” he announced.

The fear in her was suddenly a live thing, writhing like a wounded snake behind her eyes. “It?” she echoed in a whisper.

“Precisely. It. We cannot call it him or her; it is a thing — a very naughty thing, but we shall beat it, with your help.”

“You can’t fight it, it’s no use. How can you fight a thing that you can’t even see?”

“Ah, that is what you think, but you do not know me. I am a very clever person. I have neither fear of it nor doubt that I can conquer it, but I need your help. Will you not give it to me?”

“What d’ye want me to do?”

“Only tell us all about your accident — *non*, I mean your injury. Precisely how did it happen? We must know about this thing we are to fight, how it looked—”

“I tell you it didn’t look at all. I couldn’t see it. Only feel — and smell — it!”

“But if you could not see it, *Mademoiselle*, is it not possible that you fell down the stairs—”

“I didn’t trip, I didn’t fall; it threw me.” The dammed-back memories of her ordeal flooded to her lips and she spoke rapidly, as if she had to finish in a given time. “It was last Wednesday morning, when I was takin’ Miss Doris’ breakfast tray up. I was goin’ up the back stairs, and had reached the landin’ on the second floor when it set on me. I didn’t see nothin’, there wasn’t anything to see; but all at once I felt a pair o’ hands about my throat, shakin’ me till I dropped the tray, and then it threw me down the stairs so hard I tumbled half a dozen somersets as I went down, and then I must ’a’ fainted, for the next thing I knew—”

“Quite yes, we know what happened next, but what of your assailant? Is it dark at the hall landing?”

“No, sir. It’s quite light, for there’s a window at the stair turn, and the sun was shinin’. If anything had been there I’d ’a’ seen it, but there wasn’t nothin’ there, just an awful smell and then the hands around my throat—”

“Hands, *Mademoiselle*?”

“Well, no, sir, not exactly hands. It was more like someone wrapped a loop o’ Turkish towel around me, and drew it tight an’ sudden. A wet, cold towel, sir.”

“And what kind of smell was it?”

“Dreadful, sir. It like to smothered me — like sumpin dead.”

“Which did you notice first, the smell or the choking sensation?”

She wrinkled her smooth bandaged brow a moment, then: “I think it was the smell. I remember thinkin’ that a rat must ’a’ crawled into the walls and died, and just then it grabbed me.”

De Grandin tweaked the waxed ends of his mustache. “A frightful smell, a choking grasp upon your throat, a blow that knocked you down the stairs,” he recapitulated. “It was a most unpleasant experience—”

“An’ that’s not all, sir.”

“No? What then?”

“It was here last night!”

“Name of a small blue man! Here, you say?”

“Yes, sir, that it was. I woke up last night about half-past nine, and smelt it in the room. Then, just as I was fixin’ to cry out it snatched the bed-clothes off’n me an’ piled ’em on my face. I know I wasn’t dreamin’, sir. How could I pull my covers off and put ’em on my face? They’re tucked in at the foot and sides, and I’m that helpless with my arm strapped up against me—”

“It is because of this you want a night nurse?” he broke in.

“Yes, sir. I’m scared. I’m terrible scared o’ it.”

“Very well, then you shall have one. I shall speak about it as we leave, and see you have a nurse with you all night.”

“Oh, gee, thanks, sir!” The tired blood washed back in her wan cheeks. “I’ll feel lots safer, now.”

“This is the craziest business I ever heard of,” I declared as we drove from the hospital. “There’s no sense to any of it. Swan Upping’s never had the reputation of being haunted, and certainly there’s nothing about the Thorowgoods to attract ghostly visitants. Scott’s as pragmatic as the iron pipe he manufactures, and from what I’ve seen of them I’d say that neither of his daughters is interested in anything appertaining to spirits, except the kind cocktails are made of. Why should a ghost move in on them?”

He nodded. “Why, indeed?”

“And it’s such a silly, clownish sort of ghost. Scaring servants, snatching blankets off the beds, smashing crockery—”

“And killing people,” he put in.

“Exactly. And killing people. If it confined itself to buffoonery or to malignancy I could understand it, but it seems like a peevish child turned loose in a toy shop. First it plays stupid, prankish tricks; then it kills as ruthlessly as a spoiled child might smash a toy; then goes back to silly, beetle-headed capers. Sometimes it’s good-natured, sometimes vicious—”

“*Non*. There you make the mistake, *mon vieux*. It is never good-natured; always it is malignant.”

“Why, but—”

“Consider, if you please: everything it does brings some measure of discomfort to someone, whether it be but the annoyance of knocking pots and pans and plates off of the kitchen shelves, tweaking bed-clothes off of sleepers, throwing a poor, frightened girl downstairs, or breaking the neck of a stable boy. You have compared it to a naughty child. *A juste titre*. Have you ever seen a small, dull-witted, rather vicious child play with a fly? Have you observed how he pulls off its wings, then watches it intently as it crawls in agony, thereafter pulling off its legs, one at a time, and pausing between torments to observe its helpless antics? Finally, you will recall, he kills it; not to put a period to its

sufferings — oh, no — merely because he has grown tired of the cruel sport and can think of nothing else to do. There is playfulness of a sort in such actions, but there is a viciousness and cruelty, too. Does not all this remind you of the harmless pranks, as you have called them, of this poltergeist?”

Little chills of apprehension had begun to chase each other up my spine as he talked. To be confined in a house with an unseen but powerful malignancy, to be the subject of oafish experiments of a thing with the mentality of a four-year-old moron and the strength of a gorilla ... “Is there any way for us to overcome this thing?” I asked.

For several seconds he did not reply, gazing straight before him, thoughtful-eyed, tapping out a devil’s tattoo on the silver handle of his cane. At last: “The thing confronting us is technically a poltergeist, though it displays some aspects I have not seen in such phenomena before. The distinguishing characteristics of poltergeist hauntings are aimless violence unaccompanied by materialization of the manifesting entity. Generally these mischievous phenomena are associated directly or indirectly with children, adolescents, old, fragile people or those whose strength has been reduced by long illness. The skeptic’s explanation is to attribute mischief or a desire to mystify or to be revenged on someone by the child, the invalid or the old one. However, it has been demonstrated that if the child or invalid suspected be removed and an accredited medium substituted, the disturbing manifestations will be continued as effectively as ever.” He paused a moment, as if reaching out for loose thought-threads, and:

“Let’s see if I understand you,” I broke in. “A child, or someone in poor health, is generally associated with the antics of a poltergeist. Is there any explanation?”

“We cannot say, exactly. On a few occasions people in poor health, especially sufferers from enervating fevers or chronic disorders, have been seen to glow with, or exude, faint luminosity. This is scientifically attested. The haloes traditionally associated with the saints were not due to artists’ whims, nor, as has sometimes been suggested, to poetic reference to the Pentecostal flames which shone on the Apostles. The records of the early and mediaeval church testify that people noted for their piety and asceticism were often seen to radiate luminous auras. What the connection between bodily frailty and the emanation of this light may be we do not know; we only know there seems to be some. But may we not assume this luminosity is akin to astral light, psycho-physical in origin, and identical with psychoplasm? I think so. *Très bon*. The weakling child, the frail old man or woman, the invalid, can supply this force, then—”

“What about the adolescents? They are not often very frail—”

“*Précisément*. But they are peculiar people. We might almost say they are a third sex. As a physician you know of the derangement of the mind and body which accompanies adolescence; no one knows better that ‘the long, long thoughts of youth’ are often thoughts of suicide. The powerful derangements of our complex human organism accompanying adolescence make the boy or girl at that stage an ideal source of psychoplasm.”

“But why the spiritualistic medium? They’re mostly grown men and women; childish-minded, often, and sometimes rather frail, but—”

“Quite yes. But the medium who does not exude psychoplasm is no medium at all. Whether one is medium-istic because he is supplied with superabundant psychoplasm, or whether he is thus well stocked with it because he is a medium is as profitless to discuss as the question of priority between the chicken and the egg. *En tout cas*, mind cannot affect matter without the intervention of a human intermediary, whether it be a child, an invalid, an adolescent or a medium. One of these is always present. He supplies the needed psychoplasm to make the manifestation possible, serves as dynamo to generate the necessary energy—”

“But you just said that poltergeists do not materialize.”

“*Bien oui*. Ordinarily they do not; also ordinarily they are harmless, though annoying. This one is very far from harmless, this one has partially materialized, and may succeed in doing so entirely. *Alors*, we can but reason by analogy. We cannot treat this as an ordinary poltergeist, nor can we look on it as a malignant strangler merely.

“We must adapt our strategy to meet unusual conditions, and proceed most carefully.”

A note lay on de Grandin’s dressing-table:

Dear Doctor: After what occurred in this house last night I do not dare stay here another minute. I am convinced the whole place reeks with evil and probably is haunted by a savage elemental which has but one desire, to work harm to humanity. Only fire can cleanse a place so fearfully attainted, and I have advised Mr. Thorowgood to burn the whole place, house, furniture and furnishings, without delay. Only by so doing can he hope to rid the neighborhood of a deadly peril, and it is my opinion that if he remains here with his family or permits this house to be inhabited, dreadful tragedy will result. For Mr. Thorowgood’s sake, as well as your own, I hope you will add your advice to mine, and urge on him the need for acting quickly.

Yr. obt. svt.

Thaddeus Bradley.

“Well, what about it?” I demanded as I passed the letter back to him. “I’ve always heard that fire’s a cure for hauntings.”

His thrifty Gallic soul was horrified at the suggestion. "Burn this fine house, this so exquisite furniture? But no, I will not hear of it. We do not know just how this thing came in, nor why, but if it entered it can leave. Our problem is to provide an exit."

"Do you think it's an elemental?"

"*Je ne sais pas*. It may be so. The aimlessness of its violence indicates a very low mentality, and yet—" He broke off, staring into space.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"Have you not noticed an increasing method in its acts? At first it seemed experimenting, trying out its power; then when it had thrown the Mullins girl downstairs it murdered Meadows, then sought to give itself a ponderable form, to force an entrance into Monsieur Bradley's body. What will its next move be, more killing or a fresh effort to materialize? Which would you do, were you a poltergeist?"

"If I were a polt— don't be absurd!"

"I was never more serious, my friend. Conceive yourself as evil, infinitely evil, loving wickedness for its own sake and desiring above everything to gain strength that you might work more harm. What would you do?"

"Why, I suppose I'd try to draw vitality from some fresh victim. There's no strength to be had from the dead—"

"*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert!* Why had I not considered that? Come, my friend, let us hasten, let us rush, let us fly!"

"Where, in heaven's name—"

"To the hospital. At once. And we do go in heaven's name, too.

"You are invaluable, incomparable, my old one," he assured me as the big car gathered speed. "Had you not given me the suggestion—"

"Whatever are you talking of?"

"Of you, my priceless old one, and the hint that you let fall unwittingly. Did not you say, 'There's no strength to be had from the dead'?"

"Of course. Is there?"

"How do we know it? Who can say? In common with all discarnate intelligences, this thing we are opposed to gains strength from body emanations. Someone in that house had furnished these until it found itself sufficiently supplied with force to throw the poor young Mullins person down the stairs, to kill the so unfortunate young Meadows, finally to brave us all at the séance and make a bold attempt to take the Bradley person's body by assault. Is that not so?"

"Why, I suppose so, but—"

"No buts, I do entreat you. Where else had it been yesternight? At half-past nine, to be specific?"

"Why, you can't mean the—"

"By blue, I do. I do, indeed! At half-past nine the Mullins girl was wakened by its noisome stink and felt it snatch the

covers from her. She was its point of contact. It had handled her before, had overcome her. Is it not probable it had its motivating psychoplasm from her at the first?"

"*Bien*. Let that question pass. We can return to it anon. What interests us immediately is that in a place devoted to the sick, the dying and the dead it would have found a feast of strength-imparting emanations, and that within half an hour of its visit there it returned to Swan Upping to do the poor young Meadows man to death.

"Now, attend me: Granted that such things thrive on vital force exuded from the human body, can we say with certainty — can we say at all, indeed — the flow of such force stops with death? Certainly, it continues during sleep. Is it not possible that the very process of disintegration of the body strengthens it? We know there are two kinds of death, somatic and molecular. A man 'dies' legally and perhaps medically when his respiration ceases and his heart stops beating. But though the man is dead his individual cells live on for varying periods. The brain, for instance, lives in this way for a possible ten minutes, while the muscle of the heart may survive twice that long. As for the hair-roots and the nails, they are the same a week succeeding death as they were when it occurred. Why should these emanations stop at death? The graves of saints become the shrines where miracles are wrought; many of the most revolting vampire phenomena are associated with unhallowed tombs. Why could not this thing have stored up energy from the sick, the dying and the dead in that hospital, then, after killing Meadows, used the vital force set free by him as rigor mortis crept upon him—"

"That's too fantastic—"

"*Parbleu*, the whole thing is fantastic! The fantastic seems to be the commonplace. Should things keep on as they are going, only the commonplace will be fantastic, I damn think!"

"Is there good reason for retaining the young Mullins woman here, *Monsieur*?" he questioned Doctor Broemel.

"Actually, there isn't, Doctor," Broemel answered. "Naturally, she's more comfortable here with our facilities than she would be at home, but she's certainly sufficiently advanced to go, if you desire it."

"*Merci beaucoup*," de Grandin smiled.

Five minutes later, as we entered Daisy's room:

"*Mademoiselle*, we have the pleasant tidings for you. It has been decided that you leave the hospital—"

"But I can't do that, sir. I have no home. I'd been livin' in a furnished room in New York before I came down here in October, and I don't think Mr. Thorowgood will want me round the place, unable to dress myself, and everything—"

"*Ah bah*, you make the mistake. It is not to Swan Upping

that you go, nor to a furnished room, but to an hotel at Asbury Park. A nurse will go with you to see that you are taken care of; arrangements will be made with a physician at the shore to inspect the progress of your healing fracture, and you shall stay there as the guest of Monsieur Thorowgood until you are all well. Are not those joyous tidings?"

The girl burst into tears. "Y-you mean he's doing all this just for me and my salary goes on, too, just like he said it would?"

"Indubitably, *Mademoiselle*."

"When do I leave?"

"At once. As soon as you can get your clothes on. A motor is waiting to convey you to the shore."

"Oh, sir," she sobbed happily, "I'll never be able to tell him how delighted and surprised I am—"

"*Corbleu*," de Grandin chuckled as we left the hospital, "I damn think he will be the surprised one, although, perhaps, he will not be delighted, when he learns what I have done in his name."

"What's our next move?" I asked as we drove back to Swan Upping.

"To ask some questions of Monsieur Thorowgood. One part of my surmise has proved correct. Undoubtlessly it was the Mullins girl from whom this haunting thing drew strength. You heard her say she came here in October. That must have been soon after Monsieur Thorowgood moved in. She is the perfect type, thin, inclined to anemia, undernourished. It was from her he drew his first vitality. Yes, certainly."

"Then why did he turn on her—"

"*Tiens*. He had no further use for her. He had gained sufficient strength from her to go about his own nefarious business; accordingly, he cast her away, literally."

"Yes," Thorowgood told us, "the house was practically rebuilt, but we used old material as much as possible. The addition to the north wing where the servants' quarters are, and the smoke house which we use for wine cellar, were entirely built of old red brick and old timber. They've preserved the weathered colors beautifully, haven't they? No one would guess they weren't a part of the original house—"

"By blue, my friend, you would be surprised at things which people guess!" de Grandin interrupted. "Can you tell us where these bricks and timbers came from?"

"Why, yes. I picked 'em up at Blakeley's lumber yard at Toms River."

"Ah-ha, we make the progress. Excuse us, if you please. We go to interview this Monsieur Blakely."

His little round blue eyes were dancing with excitement; every now and then he gave a chuckle as we drove pell-mell toward Toms River.

"What are you so pleased about?" I asked. "You look like the cat that's just dined on the canary."

"Not quite, my friend," he answered with an impish grin. "Say rather that I look like one about to dine upon roast poltergeist." He raised his hands before him and brought them slowly toward each other. "We have him in a vise. Why did he trouble no one but the servants? Why was it that he failed to annoy guests or family Until last night? Because he was a snob? *Mais non*. Because the servants' quarters and the smoke house where the so unfortunate young Meadows met his death were built of olden brick and timber—"

"What has that to do with it? The bricks and timbers of the main house are old as those they built the north wing and the smoke house with—"

"*Mais certainement*, but of a different origin undoubtlessly. Regard me, if you please:

"Thoughts are things. We cannot see or touch or weigh them, but they are things. They have the power to impress themselves upon inanimate objects, on sticks and stones and bricks, and like wheat buried with the mummy they may lie dormant for an age, then sprout to life when given new and favorable environment. The sorcerer who treasures earth from an unhallowed grave or the rope which hanged some master criminal is practising more than mere symbolism, I assure you.

"Again: In every case of poltergeist activities we find that two things are essential, physical limits, as of walls, and some mediumistic person to transform the stored-up evil force from static to dynamic. Here we have the ideal combination, bricks and boards and timbers which undoubtlessly have been in contact with some evil-living, evil-thinking persons, and a source of psychoplasm — Daisy Mullins — to energize the accumulated force, to focus it and make it possible for it to have a physical and fulminant effect."

"Aren't you taking a lot for granted?"

He fairly glowered at me. "When you see a patient with high temperature, nose-bleed, abdominal tenderness and distension and an inclination toward profound lethargy, do you have to take a blood test, must you see the typhosus bacillus in your microscope before you decide he is suffering from enteric fever and begin appropriate treatment? Of course not. So in this case. So many diagnostic factors are apparent that I have no hesitancy in predicting what we shall learn when we speak with the peerless lumberman at Toms River."

"Sure, I remember that junk," the Blakeley foreman said. "It lay around our yard ten years. I thought that we were stuck with it for keeps till Mr. Thorowgood saw it."

"Ah, yes, and could you tell us where it came from?"

“Sure. Centermead, Doc Bouton’s sanitarium. The old man ran a private bughouse there for close on thirty years, and went crazy as a basketful o’ eels before he finally killed hisself. Say, how’d you ’a’ liked to be shut up in a nut college with the doctor loony as a chinch-bug, beatin’ up an’ torturin’ the patients, an’ even killin’ ’em, sometimes?”

Jules de Grandin drew a deep breath. “By damn, I can inform the cross-eyed world such treatment would have driven off my goat,” he answered solemnly.

The foreman was still gaping when we drove away.

“You see, it matches perfectly,” he said triumphantly. “Every necessary element is present. The long association with the mad — the living dead — the lustful cruelty of a doctor who had yielded up his sanity through contact with the sick in mind, the suffering, the torture, the despair.... But yes, could these bricks and timbers speak they would relate a tale to give us nightmare of the soul for many years to come. It is small wonder that the haunting influence acts with low intelligence; it is the tincture, the very distillate of compressed madness with which these bricks are saturated to the overflowing point. All that was needed was the energizing force supplied by Daisy Mullins.”

“And what do we do next?”

“*Mais cela parle tout seul* — the thing speaks for itself. We have but to demolish that north wing and smoke house, remove the source of the infection, and the hauntings will be cured. My friend, this Jules de Grandin is one devilish clever fellow. Is he not?”

“I’ve heard you say so,” I returned.

A wrecking-crew was already at work when we caught the solitary eastbound train for Harrisonville next morning.

“Doctor de Grandin?” a Western Union messenger accosted us as we drew up before my house. “I have an urgent message for you.”

The missive was brief with telegraph terseness, but imperative: “Men unable to continue work because of accidents stop need your advice immediately.”

“Take the extension and listen as we talk, if you please,” he asked me as he rang up Thorowgood. “I should like to have you hear the conversation.

“*Allo?*” as the connection was made. “It is I, de Grandin. What seems to be the matter, if you please?”

“Plenty,” Thorowgood answered tersely. “You’d hardly left when things began to happen. A workman fell off the roof and broke his leg. He swore somebody pushed him, but I smelled liquor on his breath, so I can’t be sure o’ that. Then another man got a broken arm when half a dozen bricks fell on him; one of ’em hit his foot with a pick-ax and nearly cut it off. The place looked like a battlefield, and the men quit

cold. Told me to go jump in the lake when I offered double time if they’d stay on the job. What’re we going to do?”

“*Eh bien*, he is of the obduracy, this one. He does not take his ouster calmly.”

“See here, this is no time to wisecrack. This thing has hurt a girl, killed a man and injured half a dozen others. Now it takes possession of my house. How’re we going to get rid of it?”

“I would suggest you leave him in possession overnight. Move your entourage to an hotel, and come back tomorrow morning with a fresh crew of workmen prepared to dynamite the walls. Also, bring back the young Mullins girl. I have need of her. Doctor Trowbridge and I will motor down and meet you I at Swan Upping in the morning. *Au ’voir*, my friend.

“You will excuse me?” he asked as he put the monophone back in its cradle. “I have work to do. There are authorities to be consulted and *matériel* to be collected. I shall be back for dinner.”

It was not until dessert that he spoke concerning his work of the afternoon. Then, irrelevantly: “You know the works of Judge Pursuivant?” he asked.

“Who?”

“The very learned, very able, very well-informed Keith Hilary Pursuivant. What a scholar, what a man! His book *The Unknown that Terrifies* is worth the ransom of an emperor to any occultist. I read him this afternoon, and in him I found comfort. Silver, says the learned Judge, is specific protection against every form of evil. You apprehend?”

“Was that bundle you brought home some magic formula of his?”

“Not precisely,” he grinned. “*Monsieur le Juge* supplied the thought, I follow his suggestion. I secured a supply of silver wire and netting.”

“Silver wire — for goodness sake!”

“*Précisément, mon vieux*. For goodness’ sake, no less.”

“But why silver? Wouldn’t any other metal do as well?”

“By no means. Silver, as the learned judge has pointed out, with a number of citations, is a potent force against all evil. Iron, most earthly of all metals, is abhorrent to the ghostly tribe, so much so that when Solomon King of Israel reared his temple to the Most High God with the help of Hiram King of Tyre and that great architect Hiram the Widow’s Son, no tool of iron was heard to ring throughout the building operation, since they were helped by friendly *djinn* who could not have abided in the neighborhood of sharpened iron. But for discarnate evil, evil vague and without definition, silver is the better metal. Ghostly foes incapable of being killed to death with leaden bullets, witches, werewolves and vampires, all are vulnerable to

silver shot. Does not your own Monsieur Whittier, who was a very learned man as well as a great poet, mention it? But certainly. In his narrative of the garrison beleaguered by a phantom foe he relates:

“Ghosts or witches,” said the captain, “thus I foil the Evil One!”

And he rammed a silver button from his doublet down his gun.

“And you expect to overcome this powerful thing with silver netting and some wire?” I asked incredulously.

“I expect to overcome him in that manner,” he replied in a flat, toneless voice, fixing an unwinking stare of challenge on me.

The scene which greeted us at Swan Upping was reminiscent of a circus about to strike camp. Two trucks stood idling on the rear driveway; a crew of wreckers waited to commence work; back and to one side was a small red wagon with the word EXPLOSIVES lettered ominously on its sides and front.

“*Très bon*. All is prepared, I see,” de Grandin smiled. “Where is the Mullins girl, if you please?”

“Waiting there with the nurse,” Thorowgood waved toward a limousine.

“Ah, yes. Will you excuse me while I persuade her?” For some five minutes he engaged her in a whispered conversation, then came hurrying back to us. “She has consented, it is well,” he told us as he cut the wrappings of his parcel.

His preparations were made quickly. A bed of blankets was laid in the partially demolished smoke house and Daisy Mullins lay on it. Working deftly he enveloped her in length on length of silver-wire gauze, laminating each fold on the next until she was encased in the light netting like a mummy in its wrappings. Only at her mouth did he permit an opening, and over this he hinged a little door of netting and tied a length of thread to it.

“*Bien*,” he patted her encouragingly. “I shall be but little longer, *Mademoiselle*.”

With heavier silver wire he wove a basket-like covering for her, leaving something like six inches between her body and the cage.

“You are quite comfortable?” he asked. She nodded, looking at him with wide eyes in which her confidence in him was struggling with abysmal fear. From the pocket of his jacket he drew a little mirror to which a string had been attached. This he twisted round his left forefinger, permitting the glass to hang pendulumwise. “Eyes upon the mirror, if you please,” he ordered, as he began to swing it slowly back and forth.

“Tick—tock; tick—tock!” he recited in a monotone, keeping time to the slow oscillation of the glass. “The clock is ticking, *Mademoiselle*, slowly, slowly, ver-ry slowly. Tick—tock; tick—tock; you are ver-ry tired. You are so very weary you must sleep; sleep is the thing you most desire. Sleep and rest, rest and sleep. Tick—tock; tick—tock!”

The girl’s eyes wavered back and forth, following the gleaming arc the mirror marked, but as he droned his monody they became heavy-lidded, finally closed. “Sleep—sleep,” he whispered. “Tick—tock; sleep—sleep!”

“Now what—” I began, but he silenced me with a fierce gesture and stood looking at the sleeping girl intently.

For perhaps two minutes he stood statue-still regarding her; then carefully, like one who tiptoes through a room where a restless sleeper lies, he bent down, took a length of silver wire in his right hand, and grabbed the thread attached to the hinged door above her mouth. “*Regardez, s’il vous plaît!*” he whispered almost soundlessly.

I started, but kept silent. From between her lightly parted lips a little thread of vapor issued. “Breath,” I told myself. “It’s cold today....”

But it was not breath. Scarcely thick enough for liquid, it was yet too ponderable to be called vapor, and seemed to have a semi-solid, gelatinous consistency. Too, it flowed in quasi-liquid fashion across her lower lip, but with a quivering instability, like quicksilver. Then it seemed to lighten and assume a gaseous buoyancy and hover in midair above her. It was taking form, too, of a sort, not definite, but shifting, changing, seeming to flow and melt upon itself and, ameba-like, to put forth gastropodal extensions of its substance. Like an animalculum in tainted water it floated driftingly above the girl’s lips, joined to her lightly opened mouth by a ligament of smoky-seeming semi-fluid; waxing larger every second. In the quarter light of the smoke house it gleamed and glistened with a putrid phosphorescent glow. Gradually, insensibly at first, but growing stronger every instant, the foul effluvium of its overpowering stench spread through the place, fulsome, nauseous, sickening.

“I think that is enough, me,” de Grandin said, and gave the string he held a sharp pull. The hinged deadfall above the girl’s face-covering dropped, shearing through the foggy wisp that issued from her lips. The inchoate, amorphous thing that floated over her suddenly contracted, bent its finger-like extensions in upon itself, like a spider curling up when sprayed with an insecticide. Then it bounced toward de Grandin as surely and purposefully as though it saw him and intended to attack him.

He raised his two-foot length of silver wire like a sword, but its protection was unneeded. The almost shapeless mass of foulness that rushed at him struck full against the silver cage that he had woven over Daisy, and, as if it struck a

spring, bounced back again.

There was something fascinating, and revolting, in its antics. It was like one of those toys of the physical laboratory called Cartesian devils which, as the membranes of their bottles are pressed down or released, rise, sink or float according to the pressure. Up it surged until it struck the wire cage; then down again it recoiled till it touched the silver netting which he had wrapped round the girl. Then up it rushed again, only to be driven back by contact with the silver cage.

“*Dans les mâchoires de l'étau!* I have you in the vise, my most unpleasant one!” de Grandin cried triumphantly. “Take her up, Friend Trowbridge; help me with her, if you will.”

Carefully we lifted the unconscious girl and bore her to the waiting car. As we came out into the light I noticed that the foul thing hovering over her became transparent, almost invisible. But its overpowering stench remained to tell us it was there.

Electric drills worked furiously, dynamite was placed at proper intervals, and at a signal battery plungers were thrust down. There was a detonation and a rumbling roar, and walls and roofs of servants' quarters and smoke house came toppling down in ruins.

The wreckers worked with methodical speed. Load after load of shattered brick and timber was piled upon the trucks and hustled to the river, Humped into the turbid, frosty water, and replaced by other loads. By noon the wreckage had been cleared away, and only empty gaping cellars and a brash of broken bricks and mortar told where the structures had been.

“Stand back, my friends!” de Grandin ordered. “I am about to liberate him!”

Holding a lash of wire defensively, he bent and wrenched an opening in the cage above the sleeping girl.

“Begone, avaunt, aroint thee, naughty thing!” he commanded, switching vigorously at the almost invisible globular shape that hovered in midair above her body.

There was a flicker, as of unseen lightning, and a soughing *whish!* as if a sudden strong wind blew past us. In a moment the foul odor faded, growing fainter every instant. Before five minutes had elapsed it had disappeared.

“And that, my friends,” he told us, “is indubitably that.”

The dinner had been perfect as only the inspired chef of the Reading Club could make it. Oysters and champagne, turtle soup with dry sherry, sole with chablis, partridge with Château Lafite ... de Grandin passed a lotus-bud shaped brandy snifter back and forth beneath his nose and turned his eyes up to the ceiling with a look of ecstasy. “*What is it that the vintners buy one-half so precious as the stuff they sell?*”

he misquoted Omar Khayyám.

“Never mind the poetry,” Thorowgood commanded. “How'd you do it? I know you put it over, but—”

“But it was so simple, *Monsieur,*” supplied Jules de Grandin. “Simple like the binomial theorem or the hypothesis of the Herr Professor Einstein. Yes.” He warmed the glass between his cupped palms, inhaled again, then drank as if it were a solemn rite he practised.

“My friend Judge Pursuivant gave me the necessary hint,” he added. “Granted silver would repulse this thing, we were enabled to confine it while we wrecked the buildings from which it emanated. So we put the Mullins girl in his way, enabled him to half-materialize, and then — *eh bien,* he was excessively annoyed when he found what we had done to him, *n'est-ce-pas?*”

“It required but a brief investigation to find that these bricks and timbers came from an old house where evil had run riot. Evil thoughts, evil sentiments, evil instincts, despair and violent death had washed those bricks like ocean waves. They were saturated with it. They were very reservoirs of wicked power, waiting only for some mediumistic help to bring them into focus, just as sunlight needs a burning-glass to enable it to start a fire. This focussing medium was supplied — all unconsciously — by the poor Mullins girl. The static power of evil became dynamic force by use of psychoplasm which it stole from her. You thwarted it when you removed her to the hospital, but it pursued her thither, renewed its strength killed the stable boy and almost took possession of the Bradley person's body. When we removed her from the hospital its source of energy was weakened, but it still had strength enough to fight the wreckers off.

“Then I took counsel with myself. We would bring the Mullins girl to it. We would place her in a deep, hypnotic sleep. There was its chance. It could not resist the opportunity of strengthening itself from her. Ha, but it did not take me into its calculations! I had made arrangements, me. Her I enclosed in silver netting, so it could not do her injury. Only her mouth did I leave unprotected, and as soon as it had partially materialized so we could see it, I dropped the trap across its source of energy, and left it high and dry, unable to retreat, unable to go forward, hemmed in on every side by silver. Then while we held him incommunicado we pulled down his nest about his ears. We robbed him of his power house, his source of potency.

“Experience has taught us that a poltergeist cannot operate without material limits, such as walls, and neither can he operate without an energizing medium. We may compare him to gunpowder. Drop it loose upon the earth and nothing happens. Touch fire to it and it goes up in harmless flame and smoke. But confine it in a twist of paper, and touch fire to it, and *pouf!* we have the grand Fourth of July explosion.

So with the poltergeist. The walls are to him as the paper covering is to the squib, *le pétard*, the — how do you call him? — the cracker-of-fire? Very well. It needs then but the medium to set him off, and there he is. Unconfined, he is harmless. Remember how those bricks lay for ten years in Monsieur Blakeley's lumber yard and nothing untoward happened? That was because they lay in the open. But when you built them into solid walls—

“D'ye think it'll be safe to have that Mullins girl around the house? She's been a faithful little thing, standing by me when the other servants ran out, but—”

“You need not distress yourself, *Monsieur*. The evil-

saturated bricks have been dumped in the river. They are no longer a potential source of harm. Just as the poltergeist could not function without her, she cannot energize a power which is not present.”

“Where do you suppose that poltergeist force went?” I put in.

“*Tenez*, who can say? Where does the flame go when one blows the candle out? He is obliterated, dispersed, swallowed up — *comme ça!*”

He raised the brandy snifter to his lips and drained it at a gulp.

The House Where Time Stood Still

THE FEBRUARY wind was holding carnival outside, wrenching at the window fastenings, whooping round the corners of the house, roaring bawdy chansons down the chimney flues. But we were comfortable enough, with the study curtains drawn, the lamps aglow and two fresh oak logs upon the andirons taking up the blazing torch their dying predecessors flung them. Pleased with himself until his smugness irritated me, Jules de Grandin smiled down at the toe of his slim patent-leather pump, took a fresh sip of whisky-soda, and returned to the argument.

“But no, my friend,” he told me, “medicine the art is necessarily at odds with medicine the science. As followers of Æsculapius and practitioners of the healing art we are concerned with individual cases, in alleviating suffering in the patient we attend. We regard him as a person, a complete and all-important entity. Our chief concern for the time being is to bring about his full recovery, or if that is not possible, to spare him pain as far as in our power lies, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Of course,” I rejoined. “That’s the function of the doctor—”

“*Mais non*. Your term is poorly chosen. That is the function of the physician, the healer, the practitioner of medicine as an art. The doctor, the learned savant, the experimenting scientist, has a larger field. He is unconcerned with man the individual, the *subspecies aeternitatis*. Him he cannot see for bones and cells and tissues where micro-organisms breed and multiply to be a menace to the species as a whole. He deals with large, great bodies like—”

“Sir Haddingway Ingraham an’ Sergeant Costello, if ye plaze, sors,” interrupted Nora McGinnis from the study entrance.

“Yes, *parbleu*, exactly like them!” de Grandin burst out laughing as the two six-footers hesitated at the doorway, unable to come through together, undecided which should take precedence.

“Regard, observe them, if you please, Friend Trowbridge!” he ordered as he looked at the big visitors. “*Quel type, mais quel type; morbleu, c’est incroyable!*”

To say that the big Briton and the even bigger Celt were of a common type seemed little less than fantastic. Ingraham — Sir Haddingway Ingraham Jamison Ingraham, known to all his friends familiarly as Hiji, was as typically an Englishman of the Empire Builder sort as could be found in literature or on the stage. So big that he was almost gigantic, his face was long and narrow, high-cheeked, almost saddle-leather tanned, with little splayed-out lines of sun-wrinkles

about the outer corners of his eyes. His hair was iron-gray, center-parted, smooth as only brilliantine and careful brushing could make it, and by contrast his small military mustache was as black as the straight brows that framed his deep-set penetrating hazel eyes. His dinner clothes were cut and draped with such perfection that they might as well have borne the label Saville Row in letters half a foot in height; and in his martial bearing, his age and his complexion, you could read the record of his service to his king and country as if campaign ribbons had adorned his jacket: the Aisne, Neuve Chapelle, the second Marne, and after that the jungle or the veldt of British Africa, or maybe India. He was English as roast beef or Yorkshire pudding, but not the kind of Briton who could be at home in London or the Isles, or anywhere within a thousand miles of Nelson’s monument, save for fleeting visits.

Costello was a perfect contrast. Fair as the other was dark, he still retained his ruddy countenance and smooth, fresh Irish skin, although his once-red hair was almost white. If Hiji was six feet in height the sergeant topped him by a full two inches; if the Englishman weighed fourteen stone the Celt outweighed him by a good ten pounds; if Ingraham’s lean, brown, well-manicured hand could strike a blow to floor an ox, Costello’s big, smooth-knuckled fist could stun a charging buffalo. His clothes were good material, but lacked elegance of cut and were plainly worn more for protective than for decorative purposes. Smooth-shaved, round-cheeked, he might have been an actor or a politician or, if his collar were reversed, a very worldly, very knowing, very Godly bishop, or a parish priest with long experience of the fallibility of human nature and the infinite compassion of the Lord.

Thus their dissidence. Amazingly, there was a subtle similarity. Each moved with positively tigerish grace that spoke of controlled power and almost limitless reserves of strength, and in the eyes of each there was that quality of seeing and appraising and recording everything they looked at, and of looking at everything within their range of vision without appearing to take note of anything. As usual, de Grandin was correct.

Each bore resemblance to the other, each was the perfect type of the born man-hunter, brave, shrewd, resourceful and implacable.

“But it is good to see you, *mes amis!*” de Grandin told them as he gave a hand to each and waved them to a seat be-

side the fire. "On such a night your company is like a breath of spring too long delayed. Me, I am delighted!"

"Revoltin' little hypocrite, ain't he?" Hiji turned to Costello, who nodded gloomy acquiescence.

"*Comment?* A hypocrite — I?" Amazement and quick-gathering wrath puckered the small Frenchman's face as if he tasted something unendurably sour. "How do you say—"

"Quite," Hiji cut in heavily. "Hypocrite's the word, and nothin' less. Pretendin' to be glad to see us, and not offerin' us a drink! On such a night, too. Disgustin' is the word for it."

"*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*" wailed de Grandin. "Oh, I am humiliated, I am desolated, I am—"

"Never mind expressions of embarrassment, you little devil. Pour that whisky; don't be sparin' o' your elbow!"

In a moment Scotch and soda bubbled in the glasses. Ice tinkled in Costello's. "None in mine, you blighted little thimblerrigger; d'ye want to take up space reserved for whisky?" Hiji forbade when de Grandin would have dropped an ice-cube in his glass.

Refreshed, we faced each other in that silence of comradery which only men who have shared common perils know.

"And now, what brings you out on such a night?" de Grandin asked. "Smile and grin and play the innocent as you will, I am not to be imposed upon. I know you for the sybarites you are. Neither of you would thrust his great nose out of doors tonight unless compulsion forced him. Speak, thou great ungainly ones, thou hulking oafs, thou species of a pair of elephants. I wait your babbling confidences, but I do not wait with patience. Not I. My patience is as small as my thirst is great — and may I never see tomorrow's sunrise if I see it sober!"

Hiji drained his glass and held it out to be refilled. "It's about young Southerby," he answered gloomily. "The poisonous little scorpion's managed to get himself lost. He's disappeared; vanished."

"Ah? One is desolated at the news." De Grandin leant back in his chair and grinned at Ingraham and Costello. "I am completely ravaged at intelligence of this one's disappearance, for since I have abandoned criminal investigation in all its phases, I can look upon the case objectively, and see how seriously it affects you. May I prescribe an anodyne?" he motioned toward the syphon and decanter.

"Drop it, you little imp o' Satan!" Ingraham replied gruffly. "This is serious business. Yesterday we had a matter of the greatest importance — and secrecy — to be transmitted to the embassy in Washington. There wasn't a king's messenger available, and we did not dare trust the papers to the post; so when young Southerby — dratted little

idiot! — stepped in and told the Chief he'd do his Boy Scout's good deed by runnin' the dispatches down to Washington, they took him on. He's been knocking round the consulate a year and more, gettin' into everybody's hair, and the Chief thought it would be a holiday for the staff to get him out from under foot awhile. The little blighter does know how to drive a car, I'll say that for him; and he's made the trip to Washington so often that he knows the road as well as he knows Broadway. Twelve hours ought to do the trip and leave him time for meals to spare, but the little hellion seems to have rolled right off the earth. There ain't a trace o' hide or hair of him—"

"But surely, you need not concern yourself with it," de Grandin interrupted. "This is a matter for the police; the good Costello or the state constabulary, or the Federal agents."

"And the newspapers and the wireless, not to mention the cinema," broke in Hiji with a frown. "Costello's not here officially. As my friend he's volunteered to help me out. As a policeman he knows nothin' of the case. You'll appreciate my position when I tell you that these papers were so confidential that they're not supposed to exist at all, and we simply can't report Southerby's disappearance to the police, nor let it leak out that he's missin' or was carryin' anything to Washington. All the same, we've got to find those precious papers. The Chief made a bad blunder entrustin' 'em to such a scatterbrain, and if we don't get 'em back his head is goin' to fall. Maybe his won't be the only one—"

"You are involved, my friend?" De Grandin's small eyes widened with concern.

"In a way, yes. I should have knocked the little blighter silly the minute that he volunteered, or at least have told the Chief he wasn't to be trusted. As it was, I rather urged him to accept the offer."

"Then what do we wait for? Let us don our outdoor clothes and go to seek this missing young man. You he may elude, but I am Jules de Grandin; though he hide in the lowest workings of a mine, or scale the sky in a balloon—"

"Easy on, son," Hiji thrust a hand out to the little Frenchman. "There's nothin' much that we can do tonight."

"I've already done some gum-shoe wor-rk, sor," Costello volunteered. "We've traced 'im through th' Holland Tunnels an' through Newark an' th' Amboys and New Brunswick. Th' trail runs out just th' other side o' Cranberry. It wuz four o'clock when he left New York, an' a storm blew up about five, so he musta slowed down, for it wuz close to eight when he passed Cranberry, headed for Phillydelphia, an'" — he spread his hands — "there th' trail ends, sor, like as if he's vanished into thin air, as th' felly says."

De Grandin lit a cigarette and leant back in his chair, drumming soundlessly on the table where his glass stood,

narrowing his eyes against the smoke as he stared fixedly at the farther wall.

“There was mingled rain and snow — sleet — on all the roads last night,” he murmured. “The traffic is not heavy in the early evening, for pleasure cars have reached their destinations and the nightly motorcade of freight trucks does not start till sometime near eleven. He would have had a lonely, slippery, dangerous road to travel, this one. Has inquiry been made for wrecks?”

“That it has, sor. He couldn’t ’a’ had a blowout widout our knowin’ of it. His car wuz a Renault sports model, about as inconspicuous as a ellyphunt on a Jersey road, an’ that should make it a cinch to locate ’im. That’s what’s drivin’ me nuts, too. If a young felly in a big red car can evaporate — howly Mither, I wonder now, could that have any bearin’—” He broke off suddenly, his blue eyes opened wide, a look almost of shocked amazement on his face.

“A very pleasant pastime that, my friend,” de Grandin put in acidly as the big detective remained silent. “Will you not confide your cause for wonder to us? We might wish to wonder, also.”

“Eh? O’ course, sor.” Costello shook his shoulders with a motion reminiscent of a dog emerging from the water. “I wuz just wonderin’—”

“We gathered as much—”

“If sumpin else that’s happened, recently, could have a bearin’ on this case. Th’ Missin’ Persons Bureau has had lookouts posted several times widin th’ past three months fer persons last seen just th’ other side o’ Cranberry — on th’ Phillydelphia side, that is. O’ course, you know how so many o’ these disappearances is. Mostly they disappear because they wants to. But these wuz not th’ sort o’ cases ye’d think that of. A truck driver wuz th’ first, a fine young felly wid a wife an’ two kids: then a coupla college boys, an’ a young gur-rl from New York named Perinchief. Th’ divil a one of ’em had a reason for vamoosin’, but they all did. Just got in their cars an’ drove along th’ road till they almost reached Cranberry, then — bingo! no one ever heard o’ one of ’em again. It don’t seem natural-like. Th’ state police an’ th’ Middlesex authorities has searched for ’em, but th’ devil a trace has been turned up. Nayther they nor their cars have been seen or heard from. D’ye think that mebbe there is sumpin more than coincidence here?”

“It may not be probable, but it is highly possible,” de Grandin nodded. “As you say, when people disappear, it is often by their own volition, and that several persons should be missed in a short period may quite easily be coincidental. But when several people disappear in a particular locality, that is something else again.

“Is there not something we can do tonight?” he turned to Ingraham.

“No,” the Englishman replied, “I don’t believe there is. It’s blacker than the inside of a cow out there, and we can’t afford to attract attention lookin’ for the little blighter with flashlights. Suppose we do a move tomorrow before dawn and see what we can pick up in the neighborhood where Southerby was last reported.”

Dawn, a raw, cold February dawn well nigh as colorless and uninviting as a spoiled oyster, was seeping through the lowering storm clouds as we drove across the bridge at Perth Amboy and headed south toward Cranberry. Hiji and Costello occupied the rear seat; de Grandin rode beside me, chin buried in his greatcoat collar, hands thrust deep in his pockets.

“See here,” I asked him as an idea struck me, “d’ye suppose this lad has skipped? You heard Hiji say how valuable the papers he was carrying are, and apparently he begged to be allowed to carry them. These youngsters in the consular and diplomatic service usually live beyond their means, and sometimes they do queer things if they’re tempted by a large amount of cash.”

“I wish I could believe that,” he returned, cowering lower in his seat. “It would have saved me the discomfort of emerging from a warm bed into a chill morning. But I know *les anglais*, my friend. They are often stupid, generally dull; socially they are insufferable in many cases, but when it comes to loyalty Gibraltar is less firm. Your English gentleman would as soon consider eating breakfast without marmalade as selling out his honor or running from an enemy or doing anything original. Yes.”

A little light, but no sunshine, had strengthened in the sky when we drew up beside the roadway a half-mile beyond Cranberry. “All right,” Hiji called as he dismounted; “we might as well start here and comb the terrain. We have a fairly good line on our bird up to this point, and — hullo, there’s a prospect!”

He nodded toward a corduroyed Italian, obviously a laborer, who was trudging slowly up the road walking to the left and facing traffic, as pedestrians who hope to survive have to do on country highways.

“*Com’ esta?*” de Grandin called. “You live near here?”

The young man drew his chin up from his tightly buttoned reefer and flashed a smile at him. “*Si, signor,*” he returned courteously, and raised a finger to his cap. “I live just there, me.”

With a mittened hand he waved vaguely toward a patch of bottom land whence rose a cumulus of early-morning smoke.

“And you work long hours, one surmises?”

Again the young man smiled. “*Si,* all day I worka; mornin’, night, all time—”

“So you walk home in darkness?”

A smile and nod confirmed his surmise.

"Sometimes the motors cause you trouble, make you jump back from the road, *hein?*"

"Not moch," the young Italian grinned. "In mornin' when I come to work they not yet come. At night when I come back they all 'ave gone away. But sometimes I 'ave to jomp queek. Las' night I 'ave to jomp away from a beega rad car—"

"I think we are upon the scent, my friends!" de Grandin whispered. Aloud: "How was that? Could he not see you?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "I theenk 'e craz'," he answered. "Always I walka dees side a road, so I can see car come, but dees a one 'e come from other side, an' almost bang me down. Come ver' fast, too, not look where he go. Down there" — again he waved a vague hand down the road — "'e run into da woods. I theenk 'e get hurt, maybe, bot I not go see. I ver' tired, me, and want for to get 'ome."

De Grandin pursed his lips and rummaged in his pocket for a coin. "You say the young man left the road and ran into the woods? Did you see his car?"

"*Si, signor.* Heef I don' see heem I not be 'ere now. Eet was a beega rad car, lika dose we see in old contry, not small like dose we see 'ere."

"And where did this one leave the road?"

"You see dose talla tree down by de 'ill op dere?"

"Perfectly."

"E go off road about a honnerd meters farther on."

"Thank you, my peerless one," the Frenchman smiled, as he handed the young man a half-dollar. "You have been most helpful." To us: "I think that we are on the trail at last."

"But I can't think that Southerby would have stopped to take a drink, much less get drunk," objected Ingraham, as we hastened toward the point the young Italian indicated. "He knew how devilishly important those things were—"

"Perhaps he was not drunk," the Frenchman cut in cryptically as we walked toward the little copse of evergreens which lay back from the road.

An earth cart-track, deeply rutted with the winter rains, ran through the unkempt field which fringed the road and wound into the heart of the small wood lot, stopping at the edge of a creek which ran clattering between abrupt banks of yellow clay.

"Be gob," Costello looked down at the swirling ochre water, "if yer little friend ran inter this, he shure got one good duckin', Hiji."

"*Eh bien*, someone has run into it, and not so long ago," de Grandin answered, pointing to a double row of tire tracks. "Observe them, if you will. They run right down the bank, and there is nothing showing that the car was stopped or that

its occupant alighted."

"By Jove, you're right, Frenchy," Ingraham admitted "See here" — he indicated a pair of notches in the bank — "here's where he went down. Last night's storm has almost washed 'em away, but there the tracks are. The blighted little fool! Wonder how deep, it is?"

"That is easily determined," de Grandin drew his knife and began hacking down a sapling growing at the water's edge. "Now" — he probed experimentally — "one may surmise that — *morbleu!*"

"What is it?" we exclaimed in chorus.

"The depth, my friends. See, I have thrust this stick six feet beneath the surface, but I have not yet felt bottom. Let us see how it is here." He poked his staff into the stream some ten feet beyond his original soundings and began to switch it tentatively back and forth. "Ah, here the bottom is, I think — *non*, it is a log or — *mon Dieu*, attend me, *mes amis!*"

We clustered around him as he probed the turbulent yellow water. Slowly he angled with his pole, swishing it back and forth, now with, now against the rushing current, then twirled it between his hands as if to entangle something in the protruding stubs of the roughly hacked-off boughs.

"*Ha!*" he heaved quickly upward, and as the stick came clear we saw some dark, sodden object clinging to its tip, rising sluggishly to the surface for a moment, then breaking free and sinking slowly back again.

"You saw it?" he demanded.

"Yes," I answered, and despite myself I felt my breath come quicker. "It looked like a coat or something."

"Indubitably it was something," he agreed. "But what?"

"An old overcoat?" I hazarded, leaning over his shoulder to watch.

"Or undercoat," he replied, panting with exertion as he fished and fished again for the elusive object. "Me, I think it was an — ah, here it is!" With a quick tug he brought up a large oblong length of checkered cloth and dragged it out upon the bank.

"Look at him, my Hiji," he commanded. "Do you recognize him?"

"I think I do," the Englishman responded gravely. "It's the tartan of the clan MacFergis. Southerby had some Scottish blood and claimed alliance with the clan. He used that tartan for a motor rug—"

"*Exactement.* Nor is that all, my friend. The minute I began exploring with this stick I knew it was not bottom that I touched. I could feel the outlines of some object, and feel something roll and give beneath my pressure every now and then. I am certain that a motor car lies hidden in this stream. What else is there we cannot surely say, but—"

"Why not make sure, sor?" Costello broke in. "We've

found th' car, an' if young Mither Southerby is drownded there's nothin' to be hid. Why not git a tow-line an' drag whatever's in there out?"

"Your advice is excellent," de Grandin nodded. "Do you stay here and watch the spot, my sergeant. Hiji and I will go out to the road and see if we can hail a passing truck to drag whatever lies beneath that water out. Trowbridge, my friend, will you be kind enough to go to yonder house" — he pointed to a big building set among a knot of pines that crowned a hill which swept up from the road — "and ask them if they have a car and tow-line we may borrow?"

The storm which had been threatening for hours burst with berserk fury as I plodded up the unkempt, winding road that scaled the hill on which the old house stood enshrouded in a knot of black-boughed pine trees writhing in the wind. The nearer I drew to the place the less inviting it appeared. At the turning of the driveway from which almost all the gravel had been washed long since, a giant evergreen bent wrestling with the gale, its great arms creaking, groaning, shaken but invincible against the storm. Rain lashed against the walls of weathered brick; heavy shutters swung and banged and crashed, wrenched loose from their turn-buckles by the fury of the wind; the blast tore at the vines that masked the house-front till they writhed and shuddered as in torment; even the shadowy glimmer of dim light glowing through the transom set above the door seemed less an invitation than a portent, as if warning me that something dark and stealthy moved behind the panels. I pulled my hat down farther on my brow and pushed the collar of my greatcoat higher up around my ears.

"Someone's up and stirring," I told myself aloud as I glanced up at the feeble glow above the door. "They can't very well refuse to help us." Thus for the bolstering of my morale. Actually, I was almost shaking with a sort of evil prescience, and wanted more than anything to turn and run until I reached the roadway where my friends were waiting.

"Come, man, don't be a blithering fool!" I bade myself, and seized the rusty iron knocker stapled to the weather-blasted door.

There was something reassuring in the shock of iron upon iron. Here was reality; just a commonplace old farmhouse, run down and ruinous, but natural and earthy. I struck the knocker twice more, making it sound sharply through the moaning wind and hissing rain, waited for a moment, then struck again.

What sort of response I'd expected I had no accurate idea. From the ruinous appearance of the place I had surmised it had been used as a multiple dwelling, housing several families of day-laborers, perhaps a little colony of squatters washed up by the rising tide of unemployment which

engulfed our centers of industry. Perhaps a family of discouraged farmer folk used a portion of it and closed off the rest. Had a Negro or Italian answered my impatient knock I should not have been startled, but when the door swung open and a tall man in semi-military uniform looked at me with polite inquiry I was fairly breathless with surprise. A liveried chauffeur opening the door of the old ruin seemed somehow as utterly incongruous as a Zulu chieftain donning dinner-clothes for tribal ceremonies.

His expression of inquiry deepened as I told my errand. It was not until I had exhausted five minutes in futile repetitions that I realized he understood no word I spoke.

"See here," I finally exclaimed, "if you don't understand English, is there anybody here who does? I'm in a hurry, and—"

"In-gliss?" he repeated, shaking his head doubtfully. "No In-gliss 'ere."

"No," I responded tartly, "and I don't suppose you've any Eskimos or Sioux here, either. I don't want an Englishman. I have one already, and a Frenchman and an Irishman, to boot. What I want is someone who can help me haul a motor car out of the brook. Understand? Motor car — sunk — brook — pull out!" I went through an elaborate pantomime of raising a submerged vehicle from the muddy little stream.

His sallow, rat-like countenance lit up with a sudden gleam as I completed my dumb-show, and he motioned me to enter.

The door had seemed so old and weather-weakened that I'd feared my knocking might shake loose a panel, but it swung behind me with a solid bang, and the clicking of the lock that sounded as the portal closed struck a highly modern and efficient note.

Barely over the threshold, I came to a full stop. Something faintly irritating, like a swarm of small black ants, seemed crawling up my neck and on my scalp. Instinct, untrammelled and un verbalized, was giving warning: "Here is peril!" But reason scoffed at instinct: "What peril can there be in an old farmhouse burdened with decrepitude, almost on the verge of falling in upon itself?"

But as I stared about me I realized the look of desolation and decay was but a shell of camouflage about a wholly different condition. New the place might not have been, but its interior repair was perfect. The air was heavy, scented like the atmosphere that permeates cathedrals after celebration of the Mass — the sharp and sweet, yet heavy, scent of incense borne from censers swung by priests.

The floor was brightly waxed and polished, the walls encrusted with a terra-cotta colored lacquer and, as church walls are embossed with stations of the Cross, were pitted with two rows of little niches framed in polished black wood. Before each framed recess there burned a little lamp,

something like a sanctus light, which shed a wavering fulgent spot upon the image nested in the cavity. Each statuette was wrought in gleaming white stone, and though each differed from the others, all had one thing in common: they were uncompleted. Scarcely human, yet not exactly bestial, were the beings portrayed. Here a creature which seemed part ape, part man, was struggling with strained muscles to emerge from the rough ashlar from which the sculptor had but partly hewn it; there a female figure, perfect as to head and throat, seemed melting at the shoulders into a vague amorphousness as misshapen and unsymmetrical as the bloated body of an octopus shorn of tentacles, and hid her grief and horror-stricken face behind an arm clipped off at the elbow. Here was a head as bald of crown as any shaven-pated mediæval monk, but with a face obscured by long and matted hair, waving wildly as a harpy's tresses whipped by tempest-winds. Beyond it was a niche in which a scarcely-started group of statuary rested. Vague and almost formless as a wisp of shifting cloud, it still showed outlines of a pair of figures, obviously masculine and feminine, as far as faces were concerned, but with bodies bulbous as the barrel of a squid, staring at each other with a look of surprised consternation, of terror mixed with loathing, as if each saw in the other a mirroring of his deformity, and abhorred his vis-à-vis as a reminder of his hideousness.

"Nightmare sculpture, hewn from dreams of madness ..." the quotation flashed across my mind as I followed the tall man in livery down the hallway.

My guide rapped at a door set at the rear of the corridor, waited for a moment, then stood aside to let me enter. Facing me across a flat-topped desk sat a small, stoop-shouldered man, reading from a large book through a pair of Crookes'-lens spectacles.

"Doctor," my conductor introduced in perfect English, "this gentleman came knocking at our door a few moments ago, going through some most extraordinary antics and mumbling something about a motor car sunk in our brook."

I looked from one of them to the other in utter, stupefied amazement, but my astonishment increased tenfold at the seated man's reply. "Stravinsky," he said sternly, looking at me through the purplish-black of his thick glasses, "how dare you leave your quarters without permission? Go upstairs with Mishkin at once."

"I beg your pardon," I stammered, "my name's not Stravinsky. I'm Doctor Samuel Trowbridge of Harrisonville, and some friends of mine and I need help in raising a sunken motor car from the brook that runs between the highway and your place. If you'll be kind enough to tell your chauffeur to—"

"That will do," he broke in sharply. "We've heard all that

before. Go to your room at once, or I shall have to order you into a strait-waistcoat again."

"See here," I began in a rage, "I don't know what this nonsense means, but if you think for one moment—"

My protest died half uttered. A pair of sinewy hands seized me by the elbows, drawing my arms sharply to my sides, a wide strap of woven webbing was thrown about my body, like a lasso, pinioning both elbows, drawn tightly through a buckle and snapped into position. I was securely bound and helpless as ever captive was.

"Confound you!" I cried. "Take this devilish harness off me! What d'ye mean—"

Something smooth and soft and smothering, like a piece of wadded silk, was thrust against my face, shutting out the light, covering mouth and nose; a sickly-sweet, pungent odor assailed my nostrils, the floor seemed suddenly to heave and billow like a sea lashed by the wind, and I felt my knees give way beneath me slowly.

"Feeling better, now, Stravinsky" the suave, low voice of the round-shouldered man woke me from a troubled sleep.

I sat up, staring round me stupidly. I lay upon a narrow iron cot of the sort used in the free wards of hospitals, uncovered except for a thin cotton blanket. The bed stood in a little cubbyhole not more than six feet square, and was the only article of furniture in the apartment. A small window, heavily barred, let in a little light and a great quantity of cold air together with occasional spatterings of rain. Directly facing me was a stout wooden door made without panels but fitted with a barred wicket through which my captor looked at me with a rather gentle, pitying smile. Close behind him, grinning with what seemed to be sadistic malice, was the liveried man who'd let me in.

"You'll be sorry for this!" I threatened, leaping from the cot. "I don't know who you are, but you'll know who *I* am before you're done with me—"

"Oh, yes, I know perfectly who you are," he corrected in a gentle, soothing voice. "You are Abraham Stravinsky, sixty-five years old, once in business as a cotton converter but adjudged a lunatic by the orphans' court three weeks ago and placed in my care by your relatives. Poor fellow" — he turned sorrowfully to his companion — "he still thinks he's a physician, Mishkin. Sad case, isn't it?"

He regarded me again, and I thought I saw a glimmer of amusement in his solicitous expression as he asked: "Wouldn't you like some breakfast? You've been sleeping here since we had to use harsh measures day before yesterday. You must be hungry, now. A little toast, some eggs, a cup of coffee—"

"I'm not hungry," I cut in, "and you know I'm not Stravinsky. Let me out of here at once, or—"

“Now, isn’t that too bad?” he asked, again addressing his companion. “He doesn’t want his breakfast. Never mind, he will, in time.” To me:

“The treatment we pursue in cases such as yours is an unique one, Stravinsky. It inhibits the administration of food, or even water, for considerable periods of time. Indeed, I often find it necessary to withhold nourishment indefinitely. Sometimes the patient succumbs under treatment, to be sure; but then his insanity is cured, and we can’t have everything, can we? After all, Stravinsky, the mission of the sanitarium is to cure the disease from which the patient suffers, isn’t it, Stravinsky?”

“Make yourself comfortable, Stravinsky. Your trouble will be over in a little while. If it were only food you are required to forgo your period of waiting might be longer, but prohibition of water shortens it materially — Stravinsky.”

The constant repetition of the name he’d forced upon me was like caustic rubbed in a raw wound. “Damn you,” I screamed, as I dashed myself against the door, “my name’s not Stravinsky, and you know it! You know it — you *know it!*”

“Dear, dear, Stravinsky,” he reproved, smiling gently at my futile rage. “You mustn’t overtax yourself. You can’t last long if you permit yourself to fly into such frenzies. Of course, your name’s Stravinsky. Isn’t it, Mishkin?” He turned for confirmation to the other.

“Of course,” his partner echoed. “Shall we look in on the others?”

They turned away, chuckling delightedly, and I heard their footsteps clatter down the bare floor toward the other end of the corridor on which my room faced.

In a few minutes I heard voices raised in heated argument, seemingly from a room almost directly underneath my cell. Then a door slammed and there came the sound of dully, rhythmically repeated blows, as if a strap were being struck across a bed’s footboard. Finally, a wail, hopeless and agonized as if wrung from tortured flesh against the protest of an undefeated spirit: “Yes, yes, anything — *anything!*”

The commotion ceased abruptly, and in a little while I heard the clack of boot heels as they went upon their rounds.

The hours passed like eons clipped from Hell’s eternity. There was absolutely no way to amuse myself, for the room — cell would be a better term for it — contained no furniture except the bed. The window, unglazed, small and high-set, faced an L of the house; so there was neither sky nor scenery to be looked at, and the February wind drove gusts of gelid rain into the place until I cowered in the corner to escape its chilling wetness as though it were a live, malignant thing. I had been stripped to shirt and trousers, even shoes and stockings taken from me, and in a little while my teeth were

chattering with cold. The anesthetic they had used to render me unconscious still stung the mucous membranes of my mouth and nose, and my tongue was roughened by a searing thirst. I wrenched a metal button from my trousers, thrust it in my mouth and sucked at it, gaining some slight measure of relief, and so, huddled in the sleazy blanket, shivering with cold and almost mad with thirst, I huddled on the bed for hour after endless hour till I finally fell into a doze.

How long I crouched there trembling I have no idea, nor could I guess how long I’d slept when a hand fell on my shoulder and a light flashed blindingly into my face.

“Get up!” I recognized the voice as coming from the man called Mishkin, and as I struggled to a sitting posture, still blinking from the powerful flashlight’s glare, I felt a broad web strap, similar to the one with which I had at first been pinioned, dropped deftly on my arms and drawn taut with a jerk.

“Come,” my jailer seized the loose end of my bond and half dragged, half led me from my cell, down the stairs and through a lower hall until we paused before a door which had been lacquered brilliant red. He thrust the panels back with one hand, seized me by the shoulder with the other, and shoved me through the opening so violently that, bound as I was, I almost sprawled upon my face.

The apartment into which I stumbled was in strong contrast to the cell in which I’d lain. It was a large room, dimly lighted and luxurious. The walls were gumwood, unvarnished but rubbed down with oil until their surface gleamed like satin. The floor of polished yellow pine was scattered with bright Cossack rugs, barbarian with primary colors. A sofa and deep easy-chairs were done in brick-red crushed leather. A log fire blazed and hissed beneath the gumwood over-mantel and the blood-orange of its light washed out across the varnished floor and ebbed and flowed like rising and receding wavelets on the dark-red walls. A parchment-shaded lamp was on the table at the center of the room, making it a sort of island in the shadows, and by its light I looked into the face of the presiding genius of this house of mystery.

He had taken off his dark-lensed glasses, and I saw his eyes full on me. As I met their level, changeless stare I felt as if the last attachments of my viscera had broken. Everything inside me had come loose, and I was weak to sickness with swift-flooding, nameless terror.

In a lifetime’s practice as physician one sees many kinds of eyes, eyes of health and eyes diseased, the heaven-lighted eyes of the young mother with her first-born at her breast, the vacant eye of fever, the stricken eye of one with sure foreknowledge of impending death upon him, the criminal’s eye, the idiot’s lack-luster eye, the blazing eye of madness. But never had I seen a pair of eyes like these in a human

face. Beast's eyes they were, unwinking, topaz, gleaming, the kind of eye you see in a house cat's round, smug face, or staring at you speculatively through the bars that barricade the carnivores' dens at the zoo. As I looked, fascinated, in these bestial eyes set so incongruously in a human countenance, I felt — I knew — that there was nothing this man would not do if he were minded to it. There was nothing in those yellow, ebony-pupiled eyes to which one could appeal; no plea addressed to pity, decency or morals would affect the owner of these eyes; he was as callous to such things as is the cat that plays so cunningly and gently with a ball one moment, and pounces on a hapless bird or mouse so savagely the next. Feline ferocity, and feline fickleness, looked at me from those round, bright, yellow eyes.

"Forgive the lack of light, please, Doctor Trowbridge," he begged in his soft, almost purring voice. "The fact is I am sensitive to it, highly photophobic. That has its compensations, though," he added with a smile. "I am also noctiloptic and have a supernormal acuity of vision in darkness, like a cat — or a tiger."

As he spoke he snapped the switch of the desk lamp, plunging the apartment into shadow relieved only by the variable fire-glow. Abruptly as a pair of miniature motor lights switched on, the twin disks of his eyes glowed at me through the dimness with a shining phosphorescent gleam of green.

"That is why I wear the Crookes'-lensed glasses in the daytime," he added with an almost soundless laugh. "You won't mind if we continue in the darkness for a little while." The vivid glow of his eyes seemed to brighten as he spoke, and I felt fresh chills of horror ripple up my spine.

Silence fell, and lengthened. Somewhere in the darkness at my back a clock ticked slowly, measuring off the seconds, minutes... I caught myself remembering a passage from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

*"O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
... and Faustus must be damn'd!"*

The shadowed room seemed full to overflowing with manifested, personalized evil as the magician's cell had been that night so long ago in Wurtemberg when Mephistopheles appeared to drag his screaming soul to everlasting torment. Had the floor opened at my feet and the red reflection of the infernal pit shone on us, I do not think I should have been surprised.

I almost screamed when he spoke. "Do you remember — have you heard of — Friedrich Friedrichsohn, Doctor Trowbridge?"

The name evoked no memories. "No," I answered.

"You lie. Everyone — even you half-trained American physicians — knows of the great Friedrichsohn!"

His taunt stung a mnemonic chord. Dimly, but with increasing clarity, recollection came. Friedrich Friedrichsohn, brilliant anatomist, authority on organic evolution ... colonel-surgeon in the army which Franz Josef sent to meet its doom on the Piave ... shellshocked ... invalidated home to take charge of a hospital at Innsbruck — now memory came in a swift gush. The doctors in Vienna didn't talk about it, only whispered rumors went the rounds of schools and clinics, but the fragmentary stories told about the work they'd found him at, matching bits of shattered bodies, grafting amputated limbs from some to others' blood-fresh amputation-wounds, making monsters hideous as Hindoo idols or the dreadful thing that Frankenstein concocted out of sweepings from dissecting-rooms... "He died in an insane asylum at Korneusburg," I replied.

"Wrong! Wrong as your diagnoses are in most instances, *mein lieber Doktor*. I am Friedrich Friedrichsohn, and I am very far from dead. They had many things to think of when the empire fell to pieces, and they forgot me. I did not find it difficult to leave the prison where they'd penned me like a beast, nor have I found it difficult to impose on your credulous authorities. I am duly licensed by your state board as a doctor. A few forged documents were all I needed to secure my permit. I am also the proprietor of a duly licensed sanitarium for the treatment of the insane. I have even taken a few patients. Abraham Stravinsky, suffering from dementia præcox is — was — one of them. He died shortly after you arrived, but his family have not yet been notified. They will be in due course, and you — but let us save that for a later time.

"The work in which I was engaged when I was interrupted was most fascinating, Doctor. Until you try it you cannot imagine how many utterly delightful and surprising combinations can be made from the comparatively few parts offered by the human body. I have continued my researches here, and while some of my experiments have unfortunately failed, I have succeeded almost past my expectations in some others. I should like to show you them before — I'm sure you'll find them interesting, Doctor."

"You're mad!" I gasped, struggling at the strap that bound my arms.

I could feel him smiling at me through the dark. "So I have been told. I'm not mad, really, but the general belief in my insanity has its compensations. For example, if through some deplorable occurrence now unforeseen I should be interrupted at my work here, your ignorant police might not feel I was justified in all I've done. The fact that certain subjects have unfortunately expired in the process of being remodeled by me might be considered grounds for

prosecuting me for murder. That is where the entirely erroneous belief that I am mad would have advantages. Restrained I might be, but in a hospital, not a tomb. I have never found it difficult to escape from hospitals. After a few months' rest I should escape again if I were ever apprehended. Is not that an advantage? How many so-called sane men have *carte blanche* to do exactly as they please, to kill as many people as they choose, and in such manner as seems most amusing, knowing all the while they are immune to the electric chair or the gallows? I am literally above the law, *mein lieber Kollege*.

"Mishkin," he ordered the attendant who stood at my elbow, "go tell Pedro we should like some music while we make our tour of inspection.

"Mishkin was confined with me at Korneusburg," he explained, as the clatter of the other's boot heels died away beyond the door. "When I left there I brought him with me. They said he was a homicidal maniac, but I have cured his mania — as much as I desired. He is a faithful servant and quite an efficient helper, Doctor Trowbridge. In other circumstances I might find it difficult to handle him, but his work with me provides sufficient outlets for his — shall we call it eccentricity? Between experiments he is as tractable as a well-trained beast. Of course, he has to be reminded that the whip is always handy — but that is the technique of good beast-training, *nicht wahr?*"

"Ah, our accompaniment has commenced. Shall we go?"

Seizing the end of my tether, he assisted me to rise, held the door for me, and led me out into the hall.

Somewhere upstairs a violin was playing softly, *Di Provenza il Mar*, from *Traviata*. Its plaintive notes were fairly liquid with nostalgic longing:

From land and wave of dear Provence
 What hath caused thy heart to roam?
 From the love that met thee there,
 From thy father and thy home? ...

"He plays well, *nicht wahr?*" Friedrichsohn's soft voice whispered. "Music must have been instinctive with him, otherwise he would not remember — but I forget, you do not know about him, do you?" In the darkness of the corridor his glowing eyes burned into mine.

"Do you remember Viki Boehm, *Herr Doktor?*"

"The Viennese coloratura? Yes. She and her husband Pedro Attavanta were lost when the *Oro Castle* burned—"

His almost silent laughter stopped me. "Lost, *lieber Kollege*, but not as you suppose. They are both here beneath this roof, guests of their loving *Landsmann*. Oh, they are both well, I assure you; you need have no fears on that score. All my skill and science are completely at their service, night

and day. I would not have one of them die for anything!"

We had halted at a narrow lacquered door with a small design like a coronet stenciled on it. In the dim light of a small lamp set high against the wall I saw his face, studious, arrogant, unsmiling. Then a frigid grimace, the mere parody of a smile, congealed upon his lips.

"When I was at the university before the war" — his voice had the hard brittleness of an icicle — "I did Viki Boehm the honor to fall in love with her. I, the foremost scientist of my time, greater in my day than Darwin and Galileo in theirs, offered her my hand and name; she might have shared some measure of my fame. But she refused. Can you imagine it? She rebuffed my condescension. When I told her of the things I had accomplished, using animals for subjects, and, of what I knew I could do later when the war put human subjects in my hands, she shrank from me in horror. She had no scientific vision. She was so naïve she thought the only office of the doctor was to treat the sick and heal the injured. She could not vision the long vistas of pure science, learning and experimenting for their own sakes. For all her winsomeness and beauty she was nothing but a woman. *Pfui!*" He spat the exclamation of contempt at me. Then:

"Ah, but she was beautiful! As lovely as the sunrise after rain, sweet as springtime in the Tyrol, fragile as a—"

"I have seen her," I cut in. "I heard her sing."

"So? You shall see her once again, *Herr Doktor*. You shall look at her and hear her voice. You recall her fragile loveliness, the contours of her arms, her slender waist, her perfect bosom — see!"

He snatched the handle of the door and wrenched it open. Behind the first door was a second, formed of upright bars like those of a jail cell, and behind that was a little cubicle not more than six feet square. A light flashed on as he shoved back the door, and by its glow I saw the place was lined with mirrors, looking-glasses on the walls and ceiling, bright-lacquered composition on the floor; so that from every angle shone reflections, multiplied in endless vistas, of the monstrous thing that squatted in the center of the cell.

In general outline it was like one of those child's toys called a humpty-dumpty, a weighted pear-shaped figure which no matter how it may be laid springs upright automatically. It was some three feet high and more than that in girth, wrinkled, edematous, knobbed and bloated like a toad, with a hide like that of a rhinoceros. If it had feet or legs they were invisible; near its upper end two arm-like stubs extended, but they bore no resemblance to human pectoral limbs. Of human contours it had no trace; rather, it was like a toad enlarged five hundred times, denuded of its rear limbs and — fitted with a human face!

Above the pachydermous mass of shapelessness there poised a visage, a human countenance, a woman's features,

finely chiseled, delicate, exquisite in every line and contour with a loveliness so ethereal and unearthly that she seemed more like a fairy being than a woman made of flesh and blood and bone. The cheeks were delicately petal-like, the lips were full and sensitive, the eyes deep blue, the long, fair hair which swept down in a cloven tide of brightness rippled with a charming natural wave. Matched by a body of ethereal charm the face would have been lovely as a poet's dream; attached to that huge tumorous mass of bloated horror it was a thousand times more shocking than if it too had been deformed past resemblance to humanity.

The creature seemed incapable of voluntary locomotion, but it was faced toward us, and as we looked at it, it threw its lovely head back with a sort of slow contortion such as might be made by a half-frozen snake. There was neither horror nor hatred, not even reproach, in the deep-blue eyes that looked at Friedrichsohn. There was instead, it seemed to me, a look of awful resignation, of sorrow which had burned itself to ashes and now could burn no more, of patience which endures past all endurance and now waits calmly for whatever is to be, knowing that the worst is past and nothing which can come can match that which is already accomplished.

"Her case was relatively simple," I heard Friedrichsohn whisper. "Mishkin and I were cruising in a motorboat off shore when the *Oro Castle* burned. We picked her and her husband up, gave them a little drink which rendered them unconscious and brought them here. She gave us very little trouble. First we immobilized her by amputating both legs at the hip; then, in order to make sure that she would not destroy herself or mar her beauty, I took off both arms midway between shoulder and elbow. That left a lovely torso and an even lovelier face to work with.

"You're wondering about her beautifully swollen trunk? Nothing could be simpler, *herr Kollege*. Artificially induced elephantiasis resulted in enormous hypertrophy of the derma and subcutaneous tissue, and we infected and reinfected her until we had succeeded in producing the highly interesting result you observe. It was a little difficult to prevent the hypertrophy spreading to her neck and face, but I am not the greatest doctor in the world for nothing. She suffers nothing now, for the progress of her condition has brought a permanent insensitiveness, but there were several times during the progress of our work when we had to keep her drugged. Elephantiasis begins as an erysipelatosus inflammation, you know, and the accompanying lymphangitis and fever are uncomfortable.

"Internally she's quite healthy, and Mishkin makes her face up every day with loving care — too loving, sometimes. I caught him kissing her one day and beat him for an hour

with the knout.

"That put a chill upon her ardor. I do not let him feed her. That is my own delightful duty. She bit me once — the lovely little vixen! — but that was long ago. Now she's as tame and gentle as a kitten.

"Ingenious, having her room lined with mirrors, isn't it? No matter which way she may look — up, down or sidewise — she cannot fail to contemplate herself, and compare her present state of loveliness with what she once possessed.

"Viki!" he rattled the bars of her cage. "Sing for our guest, Viki!"

She regarded him a moment with incurious, thoughtful eyes, but there was no recognition in her glance, no sign that she had heard his command.

"Viki!" Again he spoke sharply. "Will you sing, or must we get the branding-iron out?"

I saw a spasm of quick pain and apprehension flash across her face, and: "That is always effective," he told me, with another soft laugh. "You see, we altered Pedro Attavanti, too. Not very much. We only blinded him and moved his scalp down to his face — a very simple little grafting operation — but he went mad while we were working on him. Unfortunately, we were short of anesthetics, and non-Aryans lack the fortitude of the superior races. Once a day we let him have his violin, and he seems quite happy while he plays. When Viki is intractable we have an excellent use for him. She can't bear to see him suffer; so when we bring him to her door and let her watch us burn him with hot irons she does whatever we ask her.

"Shall we get the irons, Viki," he turned to the monstrous woman-headed thing in the cell, "or will you sing?"

The hideous creature threw its lovely head back, breathing deeply. I could see the wattled skin beneath the throat swell like a puffing toad as it filled its lungs with breath; then, clear and sweet and true as ever Viki Boehm had sung upon the concert stage, I heard her voice raised in the final aria of *Faust*:

"Holy angels, in heaven blest,
My spirit longs with thee to rest ..."

Surely, the ecstatic melody of that prison scene was never more appropriately sung than by that toad-thing with a lovely woman's head.

The song still mounted poignantly with an almost piercing clarity as Friedrichsohn slammed the door and with a jerk that almost pulled me off my feet dragged me down the hall.

"You'll be interested in my heart experiment, *Herr Doktor*," he assured me. "This is a more ambitious scheme, a far more complicated—"

I jerked against the harness that confined me. "Stop it!" I

demanded. "I don't want to see your fiend's work, you sadistic devil. Why don't you kill me and have done with—"

"Kill you?" The mild, surprised reproach in his voice was almost pathetic. "Why, Doctor Trowbridge, I would not kill anyone, intentionally. Sometimes my patients die, unfortunately, but, believe me, I feel worse about it than they do. It's terribly annoying, really, to carry an experiment almost to completion, then have your work entirely nullified by the patient's inconsiderate death. I assure you it upsets me dreadfully. A little while ago I had almost finished grafting arms and legs and half the pelt from a gorilla to an almost perfect human specimen, a truck driver whose capture caused me no end of trouble, and would you believe it, the inconsiderate fellow died and robbed me of a major triumph. That sort of thing is very disconcerting. Shall we proceed?"

"No, damn you!" I blazed back. "I'll see myself in Hell before—"

"Surely, you're not serious, Doctor?" He dropped his hand upon my shoulder, feeling with quick-kneading fingers for the middle cervical ganglion. "You really mean you will not come with me?" With a finger hard and pitiless as a steel bolt he thrust downward on my spine, and everything went red before me in a sudden blaze of torment. It was as if my head and neck and throat were an enormous exposed nerve on which he bore with fiendish pressure. I felt myself reel drunkenly, heard myself groan piteously.

"You will come with me now, won't you, *lieber Kollege*?" he asked as he released the pressure momentarily, then bore down on my spine again until it seemed to me my heart had quite stopped beating, then started up again with a cold, nauseating lurch. I could see his eyes blaze at me through the dark, feel his fingers fumbling at my skull-base.

"Don't — don't!" I panted, sick with pain. "I'll—"

"*Ist gut*. Of course you will. I knew that you would not be stubborn. As I was saying, this next experiment I propose making is more ambitious than any I have tried before. It involves the psyche quite as much as the body. Tell me, Doctor, is it your opinion that the physical attraction we call love springs more from contemplation of the loved one's face or figure?"

He tapped me on the shoulder with a rigid forefinger, and I shrank from the contact as from a heated iron. Sick revulsion flooded through me. What atrocity was hatching in the diseased mind of this completely irresponsible mad genius?

"Why — I — what do you mean?" I stammered stupidly. My head and neck still pained me so that I could hardly think.

"Precisely what I say, *mein lieber Kollege*," he snapped back acidly. "Every day we see cases which make us wonder. Men love and marry women with faces which might

put Medusa to shame, but with bodies which might make a Venus jealous. Or, by contrast, they fall in love with pretty faces set on bodies which lack every element of beauty, or which may even be deformed. Women marry men with similar attributes. Can you explain these vagaries?"

"Of course not," I returned. "Human beings aren't mere animals. Physical attraction plays its part, naturally, but intellectual affinity, the soul—"

"The psyche, if you please, *mein Kollege*. Let us not be mediæval in our terminology."

"All right, the psyche, then. We see beneath the surface, find spiritual qualities that attract us, and base our love on them. A love with nothing but the outward-seeming of the body for foundation is unworthy of the name. It couldn't last—"

"Fool!" he half laughed and half snarled. "You believe in idealistic love — in the love that casteth out fear and endureth all things?"

"Absolutely"

"So do those two down there—"

He had halted at a turning of the hallway; as he spoke he pressed a lever, sliding back a silent panel in the floor. Immediately beneath us was a small room, comfortably furnished and well lighted. On a couch before the open fire a boy and girl were seated, hand in hand, fear written on their faces.

He was a lad of twenty-two or so, slightly made, with sleek, fair hair and a ruddy, fresh complexion. I did not need to hear him speak to know that he was English, or that I had the answer to the disappearance of the British consul's messenger.

The girl was younger by a year or so, and dark as her companion was blond.

Their costumes and positions were reminiscent of domestic bliss as portrayed in the more elaborate motion pictures; he wore a suit of violet pajamas beneath a lounging-robe of purple silk brocade, and a pair of purple kid house-boots. She was clothed in an elaborate hostess coat of Persian pattern, all-enveloping from throat to insteps, but so tight from neck to hips that it hid her lissome form no more than the apple's skin conceals the fruit's contours. From hips to hem it flared out like a ballerina's skirt. Laced to her feet with narrow strips of braided scarlet leather were brightly gilded sandals with cork soles at least four inches thick, and the nails of her exquisitely formed hands and feet were lacquered brilliant red to match the sandal straps.

"No," she was saying as Friedrichsohn slid back the panel, "it isn't hopeless, dear. They're sure to find us sometime — why, you were a king's messenger; the consulate will turn the country inside out—"

His bitter laugh broke in. "No chance! I've stultified myself, blasted my name past all redemption. They'll let me rot, and never turn a hand—"

"Neville! What do you mean?"

He put his elbows on his knees and hid his face in his cupped hands. "I should have let 'em kill me first," he sobbed, "but — oh, my dear, you can't imagine how they hurt me! First they beat me with a strap, and when that didn't break my spirit the little man with the black glasses did something to my neck — I don't know what — that made me feel as if I had a dentist's drill in every tooth at once. I couldn't stand the dreadful pain, and — and so I signed it, Lord, forgive me!"

"Signed what, dearest?"

"A letter to the consul tellin' him I'd sold the papers that he'd trusted with me to the Germans, and that I'd hooked it with the money. I shouldn't have found it hard to die, dear, but the pain — the awful pain—"

"Of course, my dear, my poor, sweet dear" — she took his head against her bosom and rocked it back and forth as if he were a fretful child and she his mother — "I understand. Rita understands, dear, and so will they when we get out of here. No one's responsible for things he's done when he's been tortured. Think of the people who denied their faith when they were on the rack—"

"And of the ones who had the stuff to stick it!" he sobbed miserably.

"Honey, listen. I don't love you 'cause you're strong and masterful and heroic; I love you 'cause you're you." She stopped his wild self-accusation with a kiss. Then back again to her first theme:

"They're sure to find us, dear. This is Twentieth Century America. Two people can't just disappear and stay that way. The police, the G-men—"

"How long have we been here?" he interrupted.

"I — I don't quite know. Not being able to look out and see the sun, I can't form estimates of time. We don't know even when it's night and when it's day, do we? All I remember is that I was late in leaving Philadelphia and I was hurrying to avoid the evening traffic from New York when, just outside of Cranberry, something flew against my face and stung me. I thought at first that it was a mosquito, but that was silly. Even Jersey skeeters don't come around in February. The next thing I knew I was awfully dizzy and the car was rocking crazily from one side of the road to the other; then — here I was. I found myself in a soft bed, and my clothes were gone, but these sandals and this house-coat were laid out for me. There was a bathroom letting off my chamber, and when I'd finished showering I found breakfast — or maybe it was luncheon or dinner — waiting for me on a tray beside the bed. They don't intend to starve us, sugar,

that's a sure thing. Haven't you been well fed, too?"

"Yes, I have. My experience was about the same as yours, except that I've seen them, the tall, thin man who looks like a walkin' corpse, and the little pipsqueak with black glasses. But I didn't see 'em till today — or was it yesterday? I can't seem to remember."

The girl knit her smooth brows. "Neither can I. I've tried to keep count of the meals they've served, allowing three meals to a day, so I could form some estimate of the time I've been here, and I've tried so hard to lie in wait and catch the one who serves 'em; but somehow I always seem to fall asleep, no matter how I strive to keep awake, and — it's funny about sleeping, isn't it? When you wake up you can't say if you've just dozed for five minutes or slept around the clock—"

The boy sat forward suddenly, gripping both her hands in his. "That's it! I'm sure of it! No wonder time seems to stand still in this place! They drug us — dope us some way, so that we go to sleep whenever they desire it. We don't know how long these drugged sleeps last. We may have been here weeks, months—"

"No, dear," she shook her head. "It isn't summer, yet. We haven't been here months."

"We may have been." Wild panic had him in its grip, his voice was rising, growing thin, hysterical. "How can you tell?"

"Silly!" She bent and kissed him. "Call it woman's intuition if you like, but I am sure we haven't been cooped up here for a month."

They sat in silence a few minutes, hand interlaced in hand; then:

"Rita?"

"Yes, dear?"

"When we get out — if we get out, and if I square myself with the Chief — will you marry me?"

"Try to keep me from it, Mister Southerby, and you'll find yourself right in the middle of the tidiest breach-of-promise suit you ever saw! D'ye think that you can compromise me like this, sit here with me, dressed as we are, and without a chaperon, then ride off gayly? You'll make an honest woman of me, young feller me lad, or—" Her mask of badinage fell away, leaving her young face as ravaged as a garden after a hail storm. "Oh, Neville, you do think they'll find us, don't you?"

It was his turn to comfort her. "Of course, of course, my darling!" he whispered. "They'll find us. They can't help but find us. Then—"

"Yes, honey, then" — She snuggled sleepily into his arms — "then we'll always be together, dear, close — so close that your dear face will be the first thing that I see when I

awake, the last I see before I go to sleep. Oh, it will be heaven ... heaven."

"I shall be interested to find out if it will. Time will tell, and I think time will side with me." Friedrichsohn pressed the spring that slipped the silent panel back in place, and rose, helping me up from my knees. "It will be an interesting experiment to observe, *nicht wahr, mein Kollege?*"

"Wha—what d'ye mean?" I stammered, my voice almost beyond control. What dreadful plan had taken form behind that high, white brow? Would he subject this boy and girl to dreadful transformation? I had seen the remnant of the lovely Viki Boehm. Did he dare ...

His soft, suave voice broke through my terrified imaginings. "Why, simply this, *mein lieber Kollege*: They are ideal subjects for my test; better, even, than I had dared hope. I caught the girl by the simple device of waiting by the roadside with an airgun loaded with impregnated darts. The slightest puncture of the epidermis with one of my medicated missiles paralyzes the sensory-motor nerves instantly, and as she told the young man, when she woke up she was in bed in one of my guest rooms.

"But my experiment requires Jill to have a Jack, Joan a Darby, Gretel a Hänsel, and so I set about to find a mate for her. Eventually this young man came along, and was similarly caught. I had arranged for everything. Their sleeping-quarters open on a common sitting-room, his to one side, hers upon the other. Each morning — or each night, they can't tell the difference — I permit them to awaken, open the automatic doors to their rooms, and let them visit with each other. When I think that they have made love long enough I — ah — turn the current off and put them back to sleep."

"How do you mean—"

"Have not you noticed a peculiar odor here?"

"Yes, I smelled the incense when I first came in—"

"*Jawohl*. That is it. I have perfected an anesthetic gas which, according to the strength of its concentration, can put one in a state of perfect anesthesia in a minute, a second, or immediately. It is almost odorless, and such slight odor as it has is completely masked by the incense. Periodically I put them to sleep, then let them re-awaken. That is why they cannot guess the intervals of time between their meetings, and — what is more important — when they begin to reason out too much, I see that they become unconscious quickly. I turned the anesthetic on when he began to guess too accurately concerning my technique a moment ago. By this time both of them are sleeping soundly, and Mishkin has taken them to bed. When I see fit, I shall allow them to awake and eat and take their conversation up where they left off, but I do not think they will. They are too preoccupied with each other to give much thought to me — just now, at least."

"How long have they been here?" I asked. "I heard her say that she came first—"

"What is time?" he laughed. "She does not know how long she's been my guest; neither does he, nor you, *Herr Doktor*. It may have been a night I let you sleep, in Stravinsky's cell, or it may have been a week, or two—"

"That's nonsense," I cut in. "I should have been half starved if that were so. As it is, I'm not even feeling hungry—"

"How do you know we did not feed you with a nasal tube while you were sleeping?"

I had not thought of that. It upset my calculations utterly. Certainly in normal circumstances I should have been ravenous if I'd been there but four and twenty hours. A longer period without nourishment and I should have felt weak, yet I felt no hunger...

"To return to our young lovers," Friedrichsohn reminded me. "They are better suited to my purpose; better, even, than I'd thought. When I captured him I could not know that they had known each other for some time, and were more than merely mildly interested in each other. Since they have been my guests, propinquity has made that interest blossom into full-blown love. Tomorrow, or the next day — or the next day after that — I think I shall begin to work on them."

"To — work — on — them?"

"*Jawohl, mein lieber Kollege*. You saw the fascinating beauty treatment I gave Viki Boehm? *Ist gut*. I shall put them quietly to sleep and subject them to precisely similar ministrations. When they awake they'll find themselves in the dove-cote I have prepared for them. It is a charming, cozy little place where they can contemplate each other as the little lady said, where the face of each shall be the first thing that the other sees when he awakes, the last thing he beholds before he goes to sleep. It is larger than the chamber I assigned to Viki — more than twice as large — and one of them shall rest at one end of it while the other occupies the other, facing him. It has been lined with mirrors, too, so that they can see themselves and each other from both front and back. That is necessary, *Herr Doktor*, since they will not be able to turn around. Lacking legs, a person finds himself severely handicapped in moving, *lieber Freund*."

"But why should you do this to them?" I faltered, knowing even as I asked the question that reason had no part in his wild plans.

"Can you ask that after our discussion of the merits of the face and form as stimulants of love? I am surprised and disappointed in you, *mein Kollege*. It is to see if love — the love they pledge so tenderly to each other — can stand the sight of hideous deformity in the loved one. Their faces will be as they are now, only their forms will be altered. If they

continue to express affection for each other I shall know the face is that which energizes love, but if — as I am sure they will — they turn from each other in loathing and abhorrence, I shall have proven that the form is more important. It will be a most diverting comedy to watch, *nicht wahr, Herr Doktor?*”

Horror drove my pulses to a hurrying rhythm. Something sharp, something penetrating as a cold and whetted knife-blade, seemed probing at my insides. I wanted to cry out against this outrage, to pray; but I could not. Heaven seemed unreal and infinitely far away with this phosphorescent-eyed monstrosity at my elbow, his pitiless, purring voice outlining plans which outdid Hell in hellish ingenuity.

“You can’t — you can’t do this!” I gasped. “You wouldn’t dare! You’ll be found out!”

“That’s what Viki Boehm said when I told her of the future I had planned for her,” he broke in with a susurrating laugh. “But they didn’t find me out. They never will, *Herr Doktor*. This is a madhouse — pardon me, a sanitarium — duly licensed by the state and impervious to private inquiry. People expect to hear cries and shrieks and insane laughter from such places. Passersby and neighbors are not even curious. My grounds are posted against trespassers; your law insures my privacy, and no one, not even the police, may enter here without a warrant. I have a crematory fully equipped and ready to be used instantly. If attempts are made to search the house I can destroy incriminating evidence — inanimate and animate — in a moment and without trouble. I shall prosecute my work uninterrupted, *lieber Kollege* — and that reminds me, I have a proposal to make you.”

He had reached the red-walled room again, and he pushed me suddenly, forcing me into a chair.

“There are times when I feel Mishkin is inadequate,” he said, taking out a cigarette and setting it alight. “I have taught him much, but his lack of early training often makes him bungle things. I need a skilled assistant, one with surgical experience, capable of helping me in operations. I think you are admirably fitted for this work. Will you enlist with me—”

“I?” I gasped. “I’ll see you damned first.”

“Or will you fill Stravinsky’s coffin?”

“Stravinsky’s — coffin?”

“Exactly. You remember that I told you Abraham Stravinsky was a patient here and that he died the day you came? *Jawohl*. His family have not yet been notified of his death. His body is preserved and waiting shipment. Should you accept my offer I shall notify his relatives and send his corpse to them without delay. If you decline” — the green eyes seemed to brighten in the gloom as they peered at me — “I shall put him in the crematory, and you shall take his place in the coffin. He was a Hebrew of the orthodox

persuasion, and as such will have a plain pine coffin, rather than a casket. I have several boxes like that ready, one of them for you, unless you choose to join me. You are also doubtless aware that the rules of his religion require burial of the dead within twenty-four hours of death. For that reason there is small fear that the coffin will be opened. But if it should be, his family will not know that it is you and not their kinsman whom they see. I shall say he died in an insane seizure, as a consequence of which he was quite battered in the face.

“You need not fear, *mein lieber Kollege*: the body will be admirably battered — past all recognition. Mishkin will attend to all the details. He has a very dexterous talent with the ax, but—”

“But he will not exercise it, I damn think!” From behind me Jules de Grandin spoke in ordinary conversational tone, but I recognized the flatness of his voice. Cyclopean fury boiled in him, I knew. Friedrichsohn might be insane, fierce and savage as a tiger; de Grandin was his match in fierceness, and his clear French brain was burdened with no trace of madness.

“*Kreuzsakrament!*” As de Grandin stepped before me Friedrichsohn launched himself across the table, leaping like a maddened leopard. “You—”

“It is I, indeed, thou very naughty fellow,” de Grandin answered, and as the other clawed at him rose suddenly into the air, as if he were a bouncing ball, brought both feet up at once, and kicked his adversary underneath the chin, hurling him unconscious to the floor. “*Tiens*, a knowledge of *la savate* is very useful now and then,” he murmured, as he turned and loosed the strap that bound my arms and transferred it to his fallen foeman. “So, my most unpleasant friend, you will do quite nicely thus,” he said, then turned to me.

“*Embrasse moi!*” he commanded. “Oh, Trowbridge, *cher ami, brave camarade*, I had feared this stinking villain had done you an injury. *Alors*, I find you safe and sound, but” — he grinned as he inspected me — “you would look more better if you had more clothing on!”

“There’s a chest behind you,” I suggested. “Perhaps—”

He was already rummaging in the wardrobe, flinging out a miscellany of garments. “These would be those of Monsieur Southerby” — he tossed a well-cut tweed suit on the floor — “and these a little lady’s” — a woolen traveling-suit with furred collar came to join the man’s clothes. “And this — ah, here they are!” My own clothes came down from the hooks and he thrust them at me.

“Attire yourself, my friend,” he ordered. “I have work elsewhere. If he shows signs of consciousness, knock him on the silly head. I shall return for him anon.”

Hurrying footsteps clattered on the floor outside as I dragged on my clothes. A shout, the echo of a shot....

I flung the door back just in time to see de Grandin lower his pistol as Mishkin staggered toward the front door, raised both arms above his head and crashed sprawling to the floor.

"My excellent de Grandin!" Jules de Grandin told himself. "You never miss, you are incomparable. *Parbleu*, but I admire you—"

"Look, look!" I shouted. "The lamp—"

Clawing blindly in the agony of death, Mishkin's hand had knocked one of the red-globed oil lamps from its place before a statuary niche. The lacquer-coated, oil-soaked walls were tinder to the flame, and already fire was running up them like a curtain.

"In there," I cried. "Southerby and a young girl are locked up there somewhere, and—"

"Hi, Frenchy, where the devil are you?" Hiji's hail came from the transverse corridor. "Find Trowbridge yet? We've got Southerby and a—" He staggered out into the central hall with the still unconscious Southerby held in his arms as if he were a sleeping babe. Behind him came Costello with the girl, who was also sunk deep in anesthesia.

"Whew, it's gettin' hotter than Dutch love in here!" the Englishman exclaimed. "We'd best be hookin' it, eh, what?"

"Indubitably what, my friend," de Grandin answered. "One moment, if you please." He dashed into the red room, reappearing in a moment with arms filled with clothes. "These are their proper raiment," he called, draping the garments over Hiji's shoulder. "Take them to the garage and bid them dress themselves becomingly for public appearance. Me, I have another task to do. Assist me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge."

Back in the red-walled room he raised the fallen madman, signing me to help him. "The place will be a furnace in a moment," he panted, "and me, I am not even one of the so estimable young Hebrews who made mock of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery wrath. We must hasten if we do not wish to cook!"

He had not exaggerated. The oil-soaked walls and floors were all ablaze; lashing, crackling flames swept up the stairway as if it were a chimney flue.

"Good heavens!" I cried, suddenly remembering. "Up there — he's got two others locked in cells—"

Down from the upper story, clear and sweet and growing stronger, came a voice, the voice of Viki Boehm:

*"So stürben wir, um ungetrennt,
Ewig einig ohne end ..."*

*"So should we die, no more to part,
Ever in one endless joy ..."*

The mounting notes of a violin accompanied the words of Tristan and Isolde's plea for death which should unite them in the mystic world beyond life.

"*Mon Dieu! Concede misericors, Deus ...*" De Grandin looked up at the fire-choked stairway. "There is no chance of reaching them—"

The crash of breaking timbers drowned his words, and a gust of flame and sparks burst from the stairwell as the draft was forced down by the falling floors. The song had died; only the roar of blazing, oil-soaked wood sounded as we bent our heads against the smoke and staggered toward the door. "It is their funeral pyre — *fidelium animae per misericordiam Dei, requiescat in pace!*" de Grandin panted. "A-a-ah!"

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Are you—"

"Bid Hiji or Costello come at once!" he groaned. "I — am — unable—"

"You're hurt?" I cried solicitously.

"*Vite, vite* — get one of them!" he choked.

I rushed through the front door and circled around the house toward the garage. "Hiji — Costello!" I shouted. "Come quickly, de Grandin's hurt—"

"*Pardonnez-moi, mon ami*, on the contrary I am in the best of health, and as pleased as I can be in all the circumstances." At my very heels de Grandin stood and grinned at me.

"You got clear? Good!" I exclaimed. Then: "Where's Friedrichsohn?"

There was no more expression in his small blue eyes than if they had been china eyes in a doll's face. "He was detained," he answered in a level voice. "He could not come."

Suddenly I felt an overmastering weakness. It seemed to me I had not eaten for a year; the cold bit at my bones as if it were a rabid wolf. "What day is it?" I asked.

"You are unpatriotic, my friend. It is the anniversary of the Great Emancipator's birth. Did not you know?"

"February twelfth? Why, that's today!"

"*Mon Dieu*, what did you think it was, tomorrow or yesterday?"

"But — I mean — we left Harrisonville on the morning of the twelfth, and I've been in that place at least—"

He glanced down at his wrist watch. "A little over two hours. If we hasten we shall be in time to lunch at Keyport. They have delicious lobster there."

"But—but—"

"Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin, these are Miss Perinchief and Mr. Southerby," Hiji broke in as he and Costello came from the garage shepherding a most ecstatic-looking pair of youngsters.

"I've seen—" I began; then: "I'm very glad to meet you

both.” I acknowledged the introduction.

He made me tell him my adventures from the moment I had left him by the brook where Southerby’s car was foundered, listening with tear-filled eyes as I described the loathsome things Friedrichsohn had made of Viki Boehm and her husband, weeping unashamedly when I recounted what I’d overheard while I looked through the trap-door into the room in which young Southerby and Rita Perinchief confessed their love. “And now, in heaven’s name, what were you doing all that time?” I asked.

“When you failed to return we were puzzled. Costello wished to go to the farmhouse and inquire for you, but I would not permit it. One took at that place and I knew it had the smell of fish upon it. So I posted them out by the great tree at the turning of the driveway, where they could be in plain sight while I crept around the house and sought an opening. At the last I had to cut the lock away from the back door, and that took time. I do not doubt the Mishkin rascal watched them from some point of vantage. *Bien*. While he was thus engaged Jules de Grandin was at work at the back door.

“At last I forced an entrance, tiptoed to the front door and unfastened it, signaling to them that all was well. I was waiting for them when I saw that *sale chameau* Friedrichsohn come down the stairs with you.

“‘Can this be endured?’ I ask me. ‘Can anyone be permitted to lead my good Friend Trowbridge as if he were a dog upon a leash? *Mais non*, Jules de Grandin, you must see to this.’ So I crept up to the room where he had taken you and listened at the keyhole. *Voilà tout*. The rest you know.”

“No, I don’t,” I denied. “How did Hiji and Costello know where to look for Southerby and Rita?”

“*Tiens*, they did not know at all, my friend. They came in and looked about, and they espied the Mishkin rogue on guard before their prison door. He ran, and they broke down the door and brought the prisoners out. They should have shot him first. They have no judgment in such matters. *Eh bien*, I was there. It is perhaps as well. I have had no target

practice for a long, long time—”

“Did they find the papers Southerby was carrying?”

“But yes. Friedrichsohn set no value on them. They were in the desk of the room where you first saw him. Hiji has them safely in his pocket.”

“It seems incredible I was in there such a little while,” I mused. “I could have sworn that I was there at least a week—”

“Ah, my friend, time passes slowly in a prison. What you thought was hours’ space as you lay shivering in that cell was really only half an hour or so. Time does not pass at all, it stands entirely still while you are sleeping. They rendered you unconscious with their gas, and woke you in perhaps five minutes. Suggestion did the rest. You thought that you had slept around the clock-dial, and since you could not see the sun, you had no clue to what the hour really was. Sleep and our own imaginings play strange tricks upon us, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

The broiled live lobster was, as he had promised, delicious. Luncheon done, de Grandin, Hiji and Costello marched toward the bar, with me bringing up the rear. Neville Southerby and Rita Perinchief cuddled close together on a settle set before the fireplace in the lounge. As I passed the inglenook in which they snuggled side by side, I heard her: “Honey lamb, I think I know how Robinson Crusoe felt about his island when they’d rescued him. He kept remembering it all his life, and even though he’d undergone a lot of hardships there, he loved it. Somehow, I’ll always feel that way about the place that madman shut us up in. Just suppose they’d never found us ... suppose we’d stayed there always, just the two of us, being with each other always, looking at each other ... we might have been changed some by being cooped up, but—”

“*Morbleu*, my friend, you look as if you’d seen a most unpleasant ghost!” de Grandin told me as I joined them at the bar and reached unsteadily for a drink.

“I have,” I answered with a shudder. “A most unpleasant one.”

Mansions in the Sky

“*V*raiment,” Jules de Grandin looked up from his reading, parentheses of concentration between his brows. “It is precisely as he says, that Monsieur Kipling.”

“Eh?” I answered, stifling an incipient yawn. It was raining, steadily and coldly, and had been since mid-afternoon. An icy wind souged through the bare gray trees, and flocks of sparrows huddled shivering in the shelter of the dripping eaves. The study fire was dying, and I was almost waterlogged with sleepiness. “What’s true?” I murmured with scant interest.

“Why, this epigram he makes, my friend:

“The sins ye do by two and two
Must be paid for one by one.”

“I dare say,” I returned, “but if you don’t mind, I think that I’ll turn in.”

The phone bell rang a short, sharp stuttering warning, first querulously, then insistently, finally with a frantic, drilling clamor. I half decided to ignore it; the night was foul, and I was dog-tired after a long, trying day. But habit overcame my inclination. “Hullo?” I challenged gruffly as I took the instrument from its cradle.

“Doctor Trowbridge, will you come right away, please? It is my niece. She has hurt herself; perhaps she may be dead already—”

“Hold on,” I cut in, “who is this?”

“Kimon Sainpolis, Doctor. It is my niece Stephanola. She is badly hurt.”

“What’s the nature of the injury,” I began, but the sharp click of the phone thrust back into its hooks broke my query off half uttered, and I turned toward the surgery for my first-aid kit with a sigh of exasperation.

De Grandin joined me at the front door, his trench coat belted and his felt hat already turned down in anticipation of the outside rain.

“Where to, *mon vieux*?” he asked. “May not I go, also? It is dull work, staying by oneself when others are about their business.

“Of course, glad to have you,” I responded as I climbed into my car and shot the starter. “Kimon Sainpolis, the Greek importer, just called. It seems his niece has met some sort of accident — pretty serious, too, I gathered, for he said she might be dead.”

We turned into the boulevard and headed toward the heights where Sainpolis, grown rich with vending wine in

Prohibition days, and richer still since his activities were legalized, had built his big stone mansion.

The wind was bitter as a witch’s curse as we began to mount the hill, and by the time we reached our destination there was a glaze of ice across my windshield reminiscent of the frosting on old-fashioned barroom mirrors. It was almost midnight, but every window in the house was bright as we drew up at the curb and hastened up the path of marble tiles that led to the wide porch.

Inside there was the sound of voices speaking in the stage-whisper of ill-suppressed excitement as the butler met us at the door and ushered us across the hill. Somewhere upstairs a woman laughed and wept by turns in the shrill timbre of hysteria.

“Doctor Trowbridge, this is kind of you, indeed,” Sainpolis exclaimed as he rushed down the wide stairs to greet us. “I am almost frantic — Doctor de Grandin!” he acknowledged my introduction with a deep bow, “I am honored that you, the great occultist, have consented to come out with Doctor Trowbridge! My niece—”

“Where is she?” I broke in sharply. Out patient might be dying while we stood there talking.

“Upstairs, sir. She is — oh, but it is terrible! How shall I ever face my brother, her poor father? He sent her to me from the old country when she was only three years old. Now—” He wrung his slender white hands in an agony of despair. “You will help me keep it secret, Doctor?”

“Where is she?” I repeated. “And what’s wrong with her?”

“Ah, yes, of course, Doctor. You must know all — all — if you are to help me. Come.”

Up the thickly carpeted steps we followed him, down a hallway wide enough to have served a hotel, till we paused before a partly-opened door.

“In there!” he whispered as he stood aside and waved dramatically. “You will find her in there, gentlemen.”

De Grandin was before me by the fraction of a step, and as he crossed the threshold he came to a sharp halt, letting his breath out in a low “*Ha*?”

Before an ormolu-framed cheval glass, like a *couturière*’s dummy overturned, a girl lay on the slate-gray carpet. The sheer rose chiffon of her evening dress was crumpled round her like the petals of a wilting flower, pale yellow hair like wind-blown floss swirled round her face, a silver brocade evening sandal had slipped off one silk-sheathed foot and lay gaping emptily upon its side.

All this I saw at first glance. My second look showed what de Grandin had seen at first.

Below the golden head, where it rested on the velvet carpet, was a sickening dark-red stain, slowly spreading as the gilt clock on the dressing-table ticked the seconds away nervously.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed. “Suicide!”

“Quite yes,” de Grandin nodded. “It was not us, but the funeral director and the coroner Monsieur Sainpolis should have called.”

“But we mustn’t have the coroner!” our host wailed from the doorway. “I appeal to you as doctors to prevent a scandal. I have called you to attend my niece. If she is dead, you can certify—”

“Be quiet, if you please,” de Grandin ordered sharply. “Not one word from you! Answer me: When did this happen?”

“Not fifteen minutes ago,” Sainpolis answered. “We had been to the theatre, Madame Sainpolis, my niece and I. Stephanola had been nervous and upset all afternoon; during the final intermission she complained of feeling faint and begged us to allow her to come home. We let her go, but before she had been gone five minutes we decided to follow her. Our car drove up just as she dismissed her taxi, and we entered the house not two minutes behind her. We heard her slam her door; before we could get halfway up the stairs we heard a shot. See” — he pointed to the tiny pistol lying by her outstretched hand — “it was with that she did it.”

De Grandin eyed him levelly. “You can assign no reason for this so unfortunate occurrence?”

Sainpolis raised his shoulders in a shrug of eloquent negation. “You know as much as I do, sir. My niece was only twenty-two and was affianced to an estimable young man. As far as I know they had no quarrel.”

“U’ m?” de Grandin tweaked his small mustache. “She had shown no signs of melancholy — what of this afternoon?”

Sainpolis looked thoughtful. “I could not call it melancholy,” he replied at length, “but she has certainly been nervous at times. Six months or so ago she lost a pair of gloves. They were practically new, and quite expensive, but it seemed to me she brooded over their loss far more than she should. It was certainly not natural.”

Abruptly he returned to his original theme: “You will help me, gentlemen? You can say it was not suicide — I will say she hurt herself while playing with the toy pistol, and that I summoned you in all haste; you can bear me out in your statements. The disgrace of a suicide in the family will practically ruin me — my brother will declare a feud on me — she will be denied the last rites of the church—”

De Grandin motioned him to silence. “If you are troubled only on those scores, *Monsieur*, we can certainly assist you,”

he answered. “*Mademoiselle* your niece was rendered melancholy by the loss of her so pretty gloves; she brooded on their loss; *alors*, she shot herself. *Voilà*. Sane people do not do such things, and the church will not refuse its comfort to a person who has killed herself while mad. We can give you our opinion that she must have been of unsound mind when she destroyed herself. Do not make yourself uneasy on that account, *Monsieur*.”

“But the police,” Sainpolis almost wailed. “They will spread the news broadcast—”

“Excuse me, sir,” the butler paused discreetly at the entrance, eyes carefully averted from what lay on the floor, “there’s a gentleman from the police here asking for Miss Stephanola. I’ve told him she is indisposed—”

I had not thought Sainpolis’ face could have been paler than it was already, but at the serving-man’s announcement the blood seemed visibly to drain out of his countenance, leaving it as livid as the features of a long-dead corpse. “The — police?” he choked. “Tell them to go away, tell them anything. They must not know; we cannot see them now—”

“*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur*, there you do make the great mistake,” de Grandin interrupted. “A crime has been committed here, the crime of suicide. The police must be notified. Await me, and touch nothing in this room!” Tip-toeing down the corridor he leaned across the marble balustrade and looked down to the lower hall.

Below us stood a big red-headed man, looking interestedly, but not at all with awe, at the articles of almost priceless vertu with which Sainpolis had adorned his house. As he turned we saw his face, smooth-shaven, florid, curiously calm.

“*Gloire!*” de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. “We are in luck, it is the good Costello. *Holà, mon vieux!*”

The big detective started at the little Frenchman’s hail, and, “Glory be, Doctor de Grandin, sor, who’d a’ thought to find you here?” he answered with an eye-krinkling smile. “It’s on th’ level, then, about th’ lady’s bein’ laid up?”

“*Hélas, mon brave*, it is more serious than that,” de Grandin replied. “We were called in haste to tend her, but a greater one than we arrived before us.”

“Arra, sor, ye mane she’s dead?”

“Completely.”

“What wuz it, sor?”

“It seems to have been suicide by gunshot.”

The utterly expressionless expression which policemen, undertakers and lawyers can assume at will spread across Costello’s face.

“Does it, now, indade?” he answered. “That’s that, then. We’d best be lookin’ round a bit before th’ coroner’s men mess everything up wid their chicken-tracks.”

“You will leave us, if you please, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin

ordered Sainpolis as we re-entered the death chamber. "There are certain observations to be made which might distress you."

As the worried little man crept out he bent above the body. The pistol lying on the floor was little larger than a toy, and as nearly as I could determine was of .22 caliber. When de Grandin held it to me after a quick inspection I followed his example and put the muzzle to my nose. Faint, but quite perceptible, the sulfurous reek of burnt gunpowder came to me.

That the weapon had been held against the girl's head there was no doubt, for the wound disfiguring the scalp had been torn into a cross-shaped scar by escaping gases plowing up the tissue, and the skin each side of the aperture was tattooed in converging lines like wheel-spokes by dark powder-stains. An area of slightly burned flesh ringed the hole, and a disk of powder-blackening half an inch or so in diameter marred the skin. From the irregularity of the wound it was evident that the bullet had crashed through the temporal bone at the junction of the coronal and squamous sutures, and had been directed upward to the brain.

"*Bien*," de Grandin nodded. "All indicia of self-destruction are apparent. Now, if the fingerprints upon the pistol are the poor young person's—"

"Yis, sor," Costello broke in with what seemed to me unnecessary emphasis, "I'm particu'ly anxious to git a sample o' her fingerprints. "

"*Mais, c'est très simple*," answered de Grandin as he lit a wax match, let its oily flame discolor the smooth surface of a hand mirror and, one after another, proceeded to rub lampblack on the dead girl's well-manicured finger-tips, then transfer impressions to a sheet of paper from a memorandum pad which lay upon the rosewood writing-desk.

"You are satisfied it was a suicide, *mon sergent*?" he asked as he completed his task.

"It seems so, sor," Costello answered, "but—"

"Yes—but?" de Grandin prompted.

"Oh, nothin', sor. I wuz just wonderin' how she got hep."

"She which?" the Frenchman asked. "This 'hep', what is he, if you please?" but before the sergeant could reply, "*Ohé, la pauvre!*"

"What's that, sor?"

"Observe." He motioned toward the far side of the room where a *prie-dieu* stood against the wall, a shelf containing two extinguished candles, a covered crucifix and a rosary fastened to the wall above it. "*Cette pauvre*," he repeated. "See, she veiled the cross before she shot herself all dead!" Stepping across the room he bowed formally to the cross and lifted off the tulle scarf which obscured it. "*Parbleu*, this is a most unusual-looking prayer book," he added as he bent and picked a slender volume bound in gold-stamped vellum

from the velvet cushions of the prayer-bench.

"Regard him, if you please," he ordered, holding out the little book for our inspection.

We saw its covers were secured by a gold clasp held by a tiny padlock.

"Hey, sor, ye can't do that widout a search warrant!" Costello warned sharply.

"No? You amaze me, my friend." From his hip, where he wore it lashed to his back brace-straps — "*pour les circonstances imprévues*" — de Grandin drew his double-edged apache knife and calmly forced the book's lock. It gave way with a snap, revealing not a volume of devotions, but a blank book whose pages were thickly covered with a fine, irregular script.

"French!" exclaimed Costello in disgust as he glanced at the small writing. "A lotta good that'll do me."

"It may," de Grandin replied with a grin. "There have been times when I believed I understood that language. Perhaps I can translate it for you." He thrust the volume in his pocket, and:

"Ye can't do that, sor," protested the detective. "It's agin th' law."

"So in an unhappier day was bootlegging but I have the recollection no one ever stopped to think about it," answered the small Frenchman. "Luckily I am under no compulsion to observe the niceties of police etiquette, and undoubtlessly this small book will prove of help to us. Permit me to suggest you look out of the window for a moment, my friend. The view tonight is very fine."

Astonishingly, as the big detective turned his back upon him, he dropped upon his knees beside the crumpled little body, joined his hands and bowed his head in silent prayer a moment.

"*Eh bien*," he rose and brushed his trouser knees, "let us be upon our way, my friends. It seems we have accomplished all we can here. We are agreed it was a suicide? *Très bon*. Let us notify the coroner to that effect."

"And now, my old one, tell me what this 'hep' is," he demanded of Costello as we gathered round the study fire. "You have the idea how the poor young *demoiselle* contracted it?"

Costello grinned. "Sure, sor, it ain't a thing, it's sumpin that ye feel. Like" — his eyes roved round the room in search of inspiration — "well, sor, ye're hep when ye're jerry-like as if a felly tried to snatch yer overcoat in a restaurant, an' ye realized what it wuz that he wuz up to as he started to do it."

The frown of fierce fixed concentration faded from de Grandin's face. "One comprehends entirely, *mon vieux*. When one is hep he has become wise, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

“Sure, now, sor, ye wouldn’t ‘a’ been kiddin’ me?” Costello asked reproachfully.

“By no means, my incomparable one. But what was it that the so unfortunate young woman had become hep to?”

Once more Costello looked serious. “I ain’t sayin’ she destroyed herself on this account, but it’s worth considerin’,” he replied, reaching in his pocket and drawing forth a slip of folded paper. “This come by special delivery to Headquarters about ten o’clock, an’ I’d come out to ask th’ pore young gur-rl about it when I finds she’s up an’ shot herself.”

The paper was a noncommittal sheet of cheap white bond such as can be had at any ten cent store, and the message which it bore was composed of words and letters cut from a newspaper, capitals and lowercase characters oddly assorted:

‘if you waNt to DIshcover who made the burglaries in THIS city YOu should look at stePhanolA SainpOlis fingERprintS”

That was all.

Costello cleared his throat. “We ain’t exactly advertisin’ it, sor, but these burglaries that’s been committed here th’ past six months has been done mighty slick, an’ we haven’t got to first base wid ’em. It a’most seems as if th’ felly that’s pulled ’em has gone out of his way to leave his fingerprints around. A’most like he signs his jobs, ye might say. Three-four times we’ve made a pinch, an’ it looked as if we had dead wood on ’em, but when we come to matchin’ up th’ fingerprints th’ whole case melted.”

“You could not identify the culprits’ prints left at the scene of crime?”

“No, sor, that we couldn’t. There ain’t no record of ’em here or in th’ criminal or non-criminal files in New York an’ Washin’ton.”

“You have a copy of the miscreant’s prints with you?”

“Right here, sor.” The sergeant drew a second slip of paper from his wallet and laid it on the table.

Glass in hand, he and de Grandin compared the copy with the set of prints made of the dead girl’s digits. Even I, who am no expert, could read the damning likeness as I compared them through the lens. The wanted criminal’s fingerprints and those of Stephanola Sainpolis were identical.

“Bates hell, sors, don’t it?” asked Costello. “Here’s a young gur-rl, rich and well brought up an’ wid no nade to want fer annything longer thin it takes to ask fer it; yet off she goes an’ takes to burglary. One o’ them fool thrill-hunters, she wuz, I’d say, an’ just to make th’ game more dang’rous she went an’ left her fingerprints all over every job she pulled.”

He returned the papers to his pocket, and: “Wonder who it wuz that tipped us off, an’ why?” he added thoughtfully. “Belike she had a partner in th’ wur-rk, some uneddycated

crook who got mad at her when she wouldn’t come across wid more swag, an’ double-crossed her for revenge.”

“I think you’re wrong there, Sergeant,” I told him. Ever since I’d seen the treacherous message I’d been wrestling with memory, and recollection came to me just as he finished speaking. “When I was a youngster serving my internship at old Bascomb Hospital I used to see notes sent the clinic by our foreign out-patients. Part of my work was translating them into English for the records and I remember how our English sibilants confused them. You’ll note the sender of this note says ‘dishcover’ for ‘discover.’ Our English ‘sh’ and ‘ch’ and the combinations of our sibilants ‘c,’ ‘z’ and ‘s’ are things few foreigners except the Scandinavians and Dutch ever seem able to grasp unless they’ve had more than ordinary training in English orthography. They’ll use ‘sh’ for the combination of ‘c’ and ‘s,’ or ‘s’ and ‘c’ — as in ‘discover’ — eight times out of twelve. I believe whoever pasted up this note was foreign born and quite unused to writing English. He may speak it fairly well, but when it comes to writing it he’s virtually illiterate.”

“*Parbleu*, my friend, you put the finger squarely on it!” de Grandin exclaimed. “Me, I made those very mistakes which you point out when I was studying English. The girl has slipped from Friend Costello’s net by suicide, but he may be able to arrest the one who betrayed her, thus meting out poetical and criminal justice at the same time. Tomorrow I will translate her diary,” he added to Costello. “It may be we shall find some clue in it.”

He was in the library most of the next day, and when he joined me at dinner there was an oddly sad expression on his face.

“Find anything in the diary?” I asked.

“Much; a great deal,” he replied with something like a sigh, “but I must ask your indulgence. Wait until the good Costello joins us, so we need have only one narration of the story.”

Police routine delayed Costello until after nine o’clock, and several times I thought de Grandin would explode with impatience. Within two minutes after we had gathered in the study he stood before us like a teacher about to address his class, the dead girl’s diary in one hand, a sheaf of notes clutched in the other.

“My friends,” he began impressively, “we three owe a humble apology to the dead. All of us condemned her as a criminal who chose suicide as an escape from justice last night. It was not so. She was the victim of a villain blacker than the devil’s lowest coal-vault. Attend me. Here is the story which her journal tells:

“Two years ago, when she was only twenty, she was attending school near Morristown. A fashionable school it

was, one where the pupils were continually chaperoned, except when they were most in need of supervision. It seems the girls had found a way of getting out unseen at night and going to the near-by city, almost at will. *Eh bien*, I think the managers of that school took more trouble to investigate their pupils' families' bank accounts than they did to look up their background, for assuredly they had some queer fish there. One of them was a girl whom the diary designates as Amy, and it was she whom the poor young Mademoiselle Sainpolis shared rooms with. *Tiens*, she shared other things as well, for anon this Amy took her to a roadhouse near the school, and there they met a man called Niccolo — last name unknown.

"He had a way with women, this one. A handsome dog he must be, and a vain and vicious one.

"This poor one thought that she was seeing life when she met him; even when she learned he was a criminal she was more thrilled than shocked, and when he dared her to take cocaine she was still more fascinated. *Tenez*, the path down to Avernus is a smooth one. Within two months she had joined him in a criminal foray, acting as his lookout while he burglarized a house.

"In her journal she recounts how she suffered with remorse next day, and vowed to have no more to do with him. Within a week she kept another rendezvous, and this time they held up a dining-car.

"Then fear came to the aid of conscience. The papers told of the blond girl who helped the highwayman, and she was sure she would be recognized if she remained near Morristown. She wrote her uncle, begged to be allowed to come home, and left the school next day.

"Earnestly she strove to make amends for her misdeeds. Every day she went to church, each night she prayed for hours for forgiveness. It seemed her prayers were answered, for in a short time she met a young man named Strapoli, and their love was almost instantaneous. They were affianced, preparations for their wedding were in progress, then" — he paused and waved his hand as if announcing an arrival — "Niccolo re-entered. She, as she thought, was done with him, but he had not by any means concluded his relationship with her. Oh, no.

"She was beautiful, she was wealthy, she was much to be desired. He meant to have her. *Ha*, but he was subtle, that one!

"He called her on the telephone, and she, poor innocent, went in mortal fear to the appointed place. She offered him whatever he desired if only he would leave her, and he reproached her for her lack of faith, told her he knew they lived in different worlds, and all he wanted was to say good-bye and beg some little keepsake from her. What do you think he asked for a souvenir, *hein?*"

Pausing, he looked expectantly from me to Costello; then, as we made no answer: "Her gloves, by damn, he asked her gloves of her! You comprehend?"

"I recall Sainpolis said she'd lost a pair of gloves six months or so ago, but I don't see the connection," I answered. "She knew where they were—"

"*Précisément*. That is exactly why she was driven first to desperation, then to madness, finally to self-destruction. The gloves were glacé kid, and almost new, she says so in her diary. She gave them to him gladly, and came home with a great fear gone from her; but in a few days all her dreams of happiness were dissolved. Why did he ask her gloves? I ask you."

Vaguely recollection knocked upon the door of my memory. "Didn't Portia and Nerissa beg Bassanio's and Gratiano's gloves after the trial in *The Merchant of Venice* in order to plague them later on?" I asked.

"*Tu parles, mon vieux*. But what they did in sport this one did in deadly earnest. From the gloves he had matrices of her fingerprints made, and these he had cemented to the fingertips of rubber gloves—"

"Be gorry, sor, I git it!" Costello almost roared. "That's why th' burglar wuz so careless wid his fingerprints — that's why we couldn't match 'em up, no matter how we tried—"

"*Exactement*. And this Niccolo, this reptile, this snake in human guise, wrote to his victim, telling her each time he projected a burglary and informing her that her fingerprints would be found at the scene of crime.

"Imagine yourselves that! She scanned the papers every day to learn if any clue had been discovered. Nothing; nowhere; never! All the papers told her that the burglar left his fingerprints, but his identity—"

"Well, for goodness' sake, why didn't she denounce him?" I interjected. "She could have told the police that her fingerprints were forged—"

He threw me a God-give-me-patience look. "Quite yes, but if he were apprehended her adventures into crime would have come to light, also. Remember that, my friend. Only in his safety lay her own. Also, she was much in love with Monsieur Strapoli, and stood in mortal fear of scandal. She dared not speak, yet if she remained quiet she was still in danger. *Misère de Dieu*, how she must have suffered!

"For six months this went on, six months she lived and moved beneath the shadow of this Damocletian sword; for half a year she roasted in a Hell of fear, grilled on the iron of her conscience. Then came the last blow to her shattered morale.

"Not content with having made a criminal of her, not satisfied with having introduced her to the habit of cocaine, this species of a camel must make a final demand. She must, he told her, dismiss the young Strapoli and accept him as her

fiancé. He would have her beauty and her wealth at once and live in idleness upon the fortune which she brought him.

“She might have given him the money, but herself she denied him, and he took revenge. Only yesterday he notified her that unless she married him forthwith he would denounce her to the police.

“Last night she and her aunt and uncle went to the theatre, to a play called *Evil Communications*. It is a melodrama dealing with a blackmail plot. In it the heroine who has forsaken her criminal associates and married happily is about to be denounced by one with whom she has been involved in crime. She sees her happiness about to be destroyed, her children branded with her hidden infamy. She kills herself. The suggestion took hold on Mademoiselle Sainpolis. She left the theatre, left her aunt and uncle, hurried home and — *tiens*, the rest we know. We came, the good Costello came; but she had gone.”

“Bedad,” commented Costello, “I’d like to have ’bout fifteen minutes private conversation wid this Niccolo. Me an’ a two foot length o’ rubber hose.”

She was very lovely in her casket. The scars of autopsy had been obliterated by the skill of the embalmers, a gown of white lace — fashioned for her wedding day — enfolded her slim form, a white lace mantilla draped her shining hair; in the slender, oleander-white hands crossed piously upon her virgin bosom a rosary was twined. Our testimony had convinced the priest, and her funeral was held in church with the lovely, long-drawn ceremony of high mass as celebrated by the Greek communion, a choir of forty voices singing *a cappella* and incense rising in an almost choking cloud of sweetness. Six young girls robed in white and veiled like brides were pallbearers; floral offerings filled two open touring-cars which headed the procession from St. Helena’s to the tiny Greek Orthodox cemetery.

“Mister Strapoli, if ye plaze, sors,” announced Nora McGinnis shortly after dinner the evening following the funeral. “He says as how he ain’t a patient,” she added rather grimly, for the rule against admitting patients after office was of her own devising, and one she imposed on both my clientele and me with rigorous inflexibility.

The young man who came in a moment later was typical of the city’s café life. His dinner suit was of exaggerated cut, trousers fitted snugly at the waist and hips but bellowing into flowing bottoms at the foot; a purple grosgrain cummerbund was bound so tightly round his waist as to suggest a corset, his double-breasted jacket sloped sharply from the shoulders to the waist, then flared above the hips. Black hair, rather long, was brushed straight back without a part and trained down on his cheeks in long sideburns. The bandoline with

which it was dressed gave it a finish flat and shiny as a skullcap of black patent leather. He was the perfect “sheik” type, reminiscent of the days when Valentino and Novarro were the *beaux idéals* of motion picture lovers. He was lithe and graceful as a panther in his movements, but somehow the impression which he gave was of a panther which has been hunted till the fear of hounds and guns is in its sleek pelt like a barb.

“Doctor de Grandin?” he asked tentatively in a light but musical voice.

“I am he,” de Grandin answered, eyeing him with none too much approval. “What is it that you wish?”

“I am Anthony Strapoli. Stephanola Sainpolis was — we were to have been married.”

The little Frenchman shot me a quick glance as if to warn me, “Silence, my friend, tell him nothing. Let me handle this.” To the young man:

“You have our deepest sympathy, *Monsieur*. I, who have had the experience, know how the heart bleeds at the thought that we shall not see those we love again—”

“But I have seen her, sir. I saw her last night. That’s why I’ve come to you. They tell me you know all about such things.”

De Grandin’s narrow brows rose slightly. “You imply you saw her in the spirit?”

“No, sir. In the flesh. I swear it!”

For an instant the small Frenchman eyed him narrowly; then: “Say on, *Monsieur*, I listen.”

The young man dropped into a chair and fixed his large dark eyes upon de Grandin’s small blue ones. “It wasn’t any ghost or spirit I saw, sir,” he announced earnestly. “It was Stephanola, in the very body I have known and loved.

“I lead the band at Casa Ayer, and last night was a special occasion, our first broadcast on a national hook-up, so I couldn’t be away, though it almost broke my heart to go through with it. I played at both the dinner and the supper shows, and it was two o’clock before we were through, almost three when I reached home. I was so tired that I could hardly stand, but when I went to bed I couldn’t sleep; so, sometime between three and four I got up and went to the bathroom for a dose of veronal. I took a stiff shot and was going back to bed when I happened to look into the living-room. Something white was shining there.”

“Shining, *Monsieur*?” de Grandin repeated in a flat voice.

“Yes, sir. At first I thought it was the moonlight on the polished floor, but when I looked again I saw it was the lower part of a white dress, a woman’s long white gown. I stepped into the room, and there was Stephanola. Don’t look at me like that, sir. I tell you she was there!”

“But certainly,” de Grandin soothed. “Conditions were ideal for the vision. The broken heart, the tired, frayed

nerves, the sedative—”

“It wasn’t any vision, as you call it. It was my girl, there in the living, breathing flesh. She stood there in her bridal gown, the one they used to bury her, with the white lace veil across her golden hair, just as I’d hoped to see her at the altar.

“At first I was afraid. Everyone’s afraid of ghosts, even if they’re of the ones they’ve loved; so I began to cross myself, and said, ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son—’

“But before I finished she put her hand out to me. ‘Don’t say it, Tony,’ she begged. ‘If you do I’ll have to go away, and I don’t want to leave you so soon.’

“So there I stopped with my hand in the air, right where I’d touched myself upon the forehead when I began to form the cross, and the invocation half pronounced.

“She stepped toward me, and I saw the motion of her train against the floor, and when the moonlight shone on her she cast a shadow. Ghosts don’t make shadows, so I began to lose my dread of her, and when she put her hand on mine it was cool and soft, just as it always was, not cold and ghostly.

“‘Tony dear,’ she whispered, and I could feel her breath against my cheek, ‘you’ve got to help me. I need your help most dreadfully, my dear. I’m a sinner, Tony, for I took the life that wasn’t mine to take, but there is a way open for me to forgiveness if you’ll help me. Won’t you help me, please, Tony?’

“She looked so beautiful and sorrowful and appealing that before I realized what I did I’d put my arms around her and was drawing her to me. I could feel her in my arms, feel the pressure of her body against mine. It was no ghost I held, but a sweet living girl, the same one I’d embraced a thousand times before.

“She didn’t shrink from me nor hold back when I bent to kiss her, but — I don’t quite know how to say it — something — something I could feel, but couldn’t see, seemed to come into the room just then. I can’t describe it, really. It wasn’t palpable, and yet it was. I couldn’t see nor hear nor feel it, but I knew it was there. A thing invisible and soundless had displaced some of the room’s air — you know how it is when you’re standing in a phone booth and someone else crowds in, but doesn’t touch you? And I had a sense of being watched.”

“Watched? Inimically?” de Grandin prompted as the boy stopped with a puzzled frown.

“No, sir. It was as if someone very sad, but not at all hostile, stared at me with a long, calm look.” His shapely slim hands made a gesture of futility. “It’s just impossible to describe, sir. There was no chill, no fear, no sensation I can name at all, but I suddenly felt she and I were not alone, and kissing her right then would be — well, sort of indecent.

“She stepped back from my arms and put her hands upon

my shoulders. ‘Listen, Tony dear,’ she told me, ‘listen carefully; this is terribly important. See.’ From her dress she drew a big red rose and put it in my hand. ‘This is from me, dear, the only gift that I can give you now. Do you recognize it?’

“I looked, and thought I did. Among the flowers I’d sent for her funeral was a spray of Gloire de Dijon roses, twenty-two of them, one for each year of her life. ‘Keep it, Tony,’ she added, ‘it will help you realize this is not a dream you’re having. Kneel dearest.’

“The veronal had started working by this time and I was getting dizzy. I don’t know whether I knelt purposely or whether I stumbled and fell, but next moment I was on my knees before her and she held her hands against my lips. Somehow that — that presence — which came into the room with her didn’t seem forbidding any more, and I kissed her fingers, starting with the little finger of her right hand, counting off ten kisses, and ending with her left little finger. Then, very gently, she drew her hands from mine and laid them on my eyes.”

The look of simulated interest with which de Grandin had regarded Strapoli gave way to an amiable frown of concentration. “And when she did this you saw something?” he demanded almost sharply.

The young man’s shoulders came up in a puzzled shrug. “Yes, sir, I did, but it didn’t seem to make much sense.”

“Suppose you tell us what you saw, and let us be the judges of its sense or senselessness, *Monsieur*.”

“At first I saw nothing but indistinguishable blackness, just as you always do when you first close your eyes; then, as the pressure of her fingers on my lids seemed to grow, the black appeared to fade to a dark blue, and soon this was all shot with stars, like the sky on a clear night before the moon has risen. Then slowly, like the fade-in in a motion picture, the image of a house appeared against the sky, not quite shutting out the star-specked heavens, but seemingly imposed on them. It was a big house, something like this, but with more grounds around it, and with evergreens growing by the porch. I saw it plainly, but in miniature, as if it were very far away, or as if I looked at it through the wrong end of an opera glass. There were no lights in any of the windows, but a sort of soft illumination, like moonlight, made it plain as day to me.”

“And what occurred then, if you please?”

“Nothing, sir. I knelt there, looking at that house through my closed eyelids for what seemed several minutes; then I felt the pressure on my lids lighten, and when I opened my eyes I was alone, kneeling in the center of the room with a big red rose in my hand.

“I started to get up, but the veronal had taken hold, and I

fell forward in a heap and lay there in a drugged sleep till almost noon today. When I recovered consciousness I'd have thought it all a dream, if it were not for this." From the breast pocket of his dinner coat he drew a tissue paper parcel, handling it as reverently as if it were a sacred relic.

The soft white wrappings came away, revealing a great red Gloire de Dijon rose, slightly wilted and with several petals coming loose, but still retaining its deep color and breathing forth a rich scent from its golden heart.

"This was still clutched in my hand when I waked," he told us. "Something, I don't know what, told me that it was from the spray I'd sent to Stephanola, and as quickly as I could I dressed and hurried to the cemetery. All the floral tributes were in place around her grave or on it, and almost at the mound's head, where her breast would be, they'd put my spray of roses. I counted every blossom on it. There were twenty-one left."

Slowly de Grandin poured three drinks, tendering one to our guest, one to me.

"No, thanks," the young man refused. "Sometimes I drink a little wine. I never touch hard liquor."

"*Mon Dieu*, and you have such an amiable face, too!" de Grandin exclaimed in a shocked voice. Then: "*Eh bien*, whatever else you were last night, you were not drunk when you beheld this vision, *mon vieux*."

A reproachful look came into the young man's dark eyes. "You don't believe me, sir!" he almost wept.

"*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert*, I do, my friend," the little Frenchman answered earnestly, "but there are some features of your vision which daunt me. Precisely, what is it that you would have me do?"

Strapoli smiled sadly. "I think I've come to you for moral support more than anything else," he replied. "Mr. Sainpolis told me you were an expert in the occult, and I'd like to have your opinion—" He paused, swallowed once or twice; then, hurriedly: "Did I do wrong to let the vision stay, or should I have sent it — her — away with an invocation of the Trinity? I went to Father Anastapoul this morning and told him everything, and he tells me I was wrong. He says the living have no right to contacts with the dead except through prayer, and that demons often take the forms of those we loved in life to lure us to damnation."

"The reverend father has some factual basis for his statement," de Grandin answered with a thoughtful nod. "It is unfortunately all too true that what we thought the spiritual manifestation of one we loved turns out to be a foul succubus, but I should say the evidence in this particular case seems to point elsewhere. Tell me, *Monsieur*, what does your own heart say?"

"Why, that I did no wrong, sir. I believe it was Stephanola, not her ghost or spirit, but herself, and that she

came to me for help because she loves me, just as I love her. There's nothing I would not have done for her when she was living; why should I deny her aid, now that she's dead?"

Tears were streaming down his face, and other tears were glinting on de Grandin's lashes as he answered, "Why, indeed, my friend? Do not attempt to evoke her as you value your salvation do not seek communication with her through a spiritualistic medium — but if she comes again unbidden, receive her as a lover should. You would not have hurt her living; can you find it in your heart to hurt the helpless dead?"

"What d'ye make of it?" I asked as the door closed on our visitor. "Did he actually see her, or was it just a tired brain in a tired body, plus a dose of veronal, that gave him an hallucination?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "*Le bon Dieu* knows, not I. There is much truth in that old saying that the wish is father to the thought. Who of us has not heard the voice of one whom he has loved and lost — perhaps beheld him? Such experiences come oftenest when we are in that no man's land between full consciousness and sleep. It is entirely possible he wished so hard for her that his tired senses heard the pleadings of his heart and vouchsafed him a vision. On the other hand, we have the rose for evidence."

"Yes, but the rose might have been there all the time," I argued. "Gloire de Dijons were her favorite flowers; he might possibly have bought one, put it in a vase, and then forgotten it. And as for one blossom being missing from the spray out in the cemetery, the wonder is that there were any left. I noticed how the young men hurried with the flowers following the funeral. If Mr. Martin had caught them he'd have given them a lecture. I've often heard him say the floral tributes deserve almost as great care as the body, because they're tokens of love."

"An estimable man, that Monsieur Martin," he returned. "He is a funeral director in a thousand. Come, let us go and drink to him."

"Bedad, sor, he's at it again, th' impident spalpeen!" Sergeant Costello stalked into our breakfast room, his usually florid face gone almost apoplectic with fury.

"*Morbleu*, do you say so? And who in Satan's foul name is he, and what has he been at?" de Grandin answered with a grin.

"Why, this here now felly, th' one that ye were afther readin' about in Miss Sainpolis' diary. Bad cess to 'im, wid th' pore young gur-rl hardly cold in her grave he's goin' round burglarizin' houses an' lavin', fingerprints all over th' place. Ouch, it's th' brazen one he is! Belike he thinks we didn't check her fingerprints when we found that she wuz dead, an' o' course, he don't know nothin' about th' diary,

so he thinks he's safe as long as—"

"One moment, if you please!" de Grandin shut him off. "Me, I feel the birthpains of an idea stirring in my brain. I have what you call the hunch!" He raised a hand to enjoin silence; then: "Where did he commit this latest outrage?"

"'Twas Misther Westmorsham's house, out on th' Bordentown Road, sor. Th' family wuz to Atlantic City, an' th' servants had been given time off. This mornin' they come back to find th' house picked clean as a wishbone, wid furs an' silverware and jools and Lord knows what all carted off.

"An' how d'ye s'pose he got in? Why, through th' front door, if ye plaze. Jimmied it and walked right in, as bold as brass. We know he done it sometime between midnight an' this mornin', for th' harness bull on th' beat tried th' door at twelve an' one, an' agin at half-past three. At half-past six this mornin' a prowler car passin' by seen it wide open, an' when they went in to investigate they found th' whole place gutted clean as any carcass in a butcher-shop."

"*Parbleu*, it strikes a chord, my friends!" de Grandin cried. "Me, I have the idea. *Oui-da, ma petite pauvre*, I get the message which you sent!"

"Howly Moses, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, d'ye let him shart his drinkin' so early in th' mornin'?" Costello asked me in well-simulated reproach.

"Never mind the ill-timed witticisms, thou great stupid one," de Grandin shot back. "Come with me, at once, immediately, right away. Take me to this house of Monsieur Westmorsham, let me look at it, and I will show you how to lay this miscreant by the heels. Come, hurry, we waste time!"

The supper show was more than half done when the captain showed us to our table at the Casa Ayer. The slow, deliberately erotic notes of *Mood Indigo* trickled like a spate of hot spiced wine from the battery of saxophones set in the front rank of the orchestra while several young and shapely women cavorted on the dance floor in a flood of purple light.

De Grandin waved the menu card aside. "I have not the hunger," he announced. "Bring me a dozen lobster sandwiches and a pint of champagne *brut*, no more."

I ordered a Welsh rarebit and a mug of ale, and looked around the darkened room. Here and there a man's shirtfront or a woman's shoulders gleamed in dim highlight, but for the most part the whole place was steeped in shadow. On the stand before the orchestra I descried our visitor of the night before leading the musicians with the deftness of long practice, his task mechanical as drawing breath.

At the table next to us a party of two women with their escorts talked in strident tones, decrying music, food and entertainment. As a match flared I caught sight of them. The women were the sort one might expect to see at night clubs,

powdered, painted, curled and bleached until all semblance of their natural selves had vanished. Curiously, although they wore the irreducible minimum of clothes, they seemed overdressed. One of the men faced from me; the other I saw full face in the orange flare of the match, and instinctively I hated him. Somehow, for all his obviously freshly-shaven face and spotless linen, he seemed unclean. Dark-skinned he was, swarthy as a mulatto, with curling black hair, full, red lips and dancing black eyes. But though he smiled it seemed to me he did so more in contempt than merriment, and the gleam in his eyes was decidedly more malicious than jocund. Handsome he was, certainly, but in the way that Mephistopheles is pictured; cruel, arrogant and vicious.

"My Gawd," I heard him sneer, "d'je ever see a cornier show?"

The match winked out, and as the darkness hid him from me I heard the clinking chime of metal on the tiled floor. He had offered the ultimate in insults to the club's talent, flung a fistful of coppers to them.

The lights flashed on and de Grandin beckoned to a waiter, handing him a note. In a moment young Strapoli joined us.

"You have something to tell me, sir?" he asked as we shook hands.

"Not now, a little later, perhaps," returned de Grandin. "First, I would have you tell me something. You recognize this picture, *hein*?" From his pocket he produced a small photograph and showed it to Strapoli.

The young man studied it a moment, and I saw his face go pale. "Yes, sir!" he replied emphatically. "That's the house I saw last night when Stephanola put her hands against my eyes. I'd recognize it anywhere. It's a real place, then?"

"*Assurément*, very real," de Grandin answered somewhat grimly, "and your recognition of it makes clear something which has puzzled me. I think I know now what it is that *Mademoiselle la Morte Amoureuse* attempts to tell us, and why. Attend me, if you please, my friend: It is more than merely probable that she will come to you again, and when she comes it is a certainty that she will show another of these mansions in the sky to you."

"Yes, sir?" expectantly.

"*Précisément*. When this occurs you are to notify me instantly. You comprehend?"

"But suppose she comes at night, as she most likely will—"

"Whether morning, noon or night, my friend, you are to let me know immediately. It is of the greatest importance."

Mystified, but willing to co-operate, Strapoli turned to rejoin his band, but as he passed the table next to ours he tripped, stumbled, and fell full length upon the floor.

"You" — he rose, eyes blazing as he faced the dark-

skinned man who had flung coppers to the dancers — “you tripped me!”

“Yeah, I tripped yuh. So what?” the other countered, rising from his chair and lurching forward menacingly.

Strapoli’s hand drew back, but before he had a chance to strike, the other was upon him, bringing up his knee and striking him violently in the stomach. It was as foul a blow as I had ever seen, and Strapoli crumpled to the floor, the breath completely knocked from him.

“Get fresh wid me, punk, will ya?” snarled the swarthy one. “For two cents I’d send yuh where I sent—” he broke off, laughing, and turned to his companions.

“C’mon, let’s blow this lousy joint,” he ordered.

Astoundingly, none of the waiters or attendants made a move to stop him as he swaggered from the place, and as we lifted Tony to his feet I whispered, “Don’t you want to prosecute him? He attacked you without provocation, and both Doctor de Grandin and I will testify we saw him start the fight—”

“Oh, no, sir, thank you,” he mumbled as he rearranged his clothes. “We wouldn’t dare do that.”

“No, and why, not?” asked de Grandin.

“That’s Niccolo Frezzi — Nick the Brute — sir; he’s the toughest mug in town. They’d lie for me and beat me up if I had him arrested. No one ever dares to cross him.

“He’s suspected of all kinds of crimes, but the police can’t pin anything on him, and if anybody dares appear against him, even in a traffic case, he’s sure to get a dreadful beating in a day or two. Everybody knows that Nick the Brute does it, but there’s never any legal proof of it, so—”

He brushed a fleck of dust from his sleeve and walked unsteadily to his place on the bandstand.

It was hardly daylight when the call came. Strapoli’s voice was half hysterical.

“She’s been here, sir,” I heard him tell de Grandin as I picked up the extension telephone which stood beside my bed. “What? Yes, sir; she showed me another house—”

“*Très bon*, my friend, arise and dress. I shall join you instantly—”

In five minutes we were rushing through the dawn-gray streets toward Strapoli’s apartment, pausing only to pick up Costello.

“Sure, an’ this hunch o’ yours had better be a good one,” the sergeant growled as he climbed in beside us. “Gittin’ a man up at th’ crack o’ dawn—”

“Be quiet,” broke in de Grandin. “Unless I am much more mistaken than I think we shall crack other things beside the dawn before we finish this day’s work. You have a two-foot length of hose in readiness?”

“Hose? — Fer th’ love o’ Mike, sor—”

“*Exactement*. Did not you say you would enjoy a conversation with this so vile Niccolo — you and a length of rubber hose?”

“O’ course, sor, but—”

“No buts, my friend. I have the idea who this Niccolo is. If all goes as I think that it will go, I shall deliver him into your hands before so very long.”

Strapoli waited for us on his doorstep.

“Sorry I couldn’t call you sooner,” he apologized, “but I fell asleep again when Stephanola left, and just woke up a little while ago.”

“Never mind,” de Grandin answered. “You are sure that you can recognize the house she showed you.”

“Certain, sir.”

“*Très bien*.” Slowly, looking carefully from right to left we cruised the residential sections of the city, beginning at the eastern suburbs, weaving slowly across town, finally threading through the wider avenues of the west end.

Abruptly, “There it is; I recognize it!” Tony called as we idled past a big house in Tunlaw Street. “I’d know it anywhere.”

Costello consulted a typed list. “Yep, this is one of ’em,” he announced. “Th’ Fanshaws live here, but they’re all in Florida. We have instructions to kape a special watch on it.”

“U’ m? Let us see how well instructions have been carried out,” de Grandin replied as we walked across the lawn.

Step by careful step we circled the place, testing door and window fastenings. Everything was in order.

“All right, sor, an’ where do we go from here?” the sergeant asked.

De Grandin took his chin between his thumb and forefinger. At length: “Who has the keys?” he asked.

Costello referred to his list again. “They’re at th’ family lawyer’s, but—”

“No buts, if you will be so kind. Secure them all soon, and bring at least two officers to mount guard in the house. The robber has not yet appeared, but I am confident he will.”

All day we waited for a summons to the Fanshaw house, but none came. By dinner time de Grandin was as nervous as a cat; when nine o’clock had sounded he was almost frantic.

“She cannot do this,” he declared. “But no, she cannot make the fool of Jules de Grandin.”

“What the deuce are you maundering about?” I asked.

“No matter, let us go and see for ourselves. I will phone Monsieur Strapoli to accompany us; he is not due at Casa Ayer till eleven.”

The big old house was quiet as a tomb as Strapoli, de Grandin, Costello and I let ourselves in at the kitchen door.

“Seen anything?” the sergeant asked the patrolman

waiting in the kitchen.

“Everything quiet as the stock exchange on Sunday, sir.”

“Umph? What’s next, sor?” the sergeant asked de Grandin.

“First we reconnoiter the terrain, then we sit and wait his coming. Be assured, he will come, my friends. The dead do not make jokes.”

From room to room we walked, led by the beam of his flashlight. The place was still with that dead silence peculiar to deserted houses, and I had an eery feeling we were not alone, that unseen eyes were on us, watching with sardonic amusement.

“*Halte la!*” de Grandin ordered as we paused upon the threshold of the drawing-room. “*A silence*, he is coming, I think!”

Softly, so softly that it might have been mistaken for the scraping of a wind-blown branch against the window-pane, a sound came to us from the high French window overlooking the side garden. It came again, louder this time; then a sharp click sounded as the sash swung inward.

Against the back-drop of the cloudy starless night the window showed oblong and dark; dark and empty, like a hole. Then, barely darker than the outer darkness, we saw it: a man’s form cased in skin-smooth tights, head covered by a tight hood — no chance for fallen hairs to give police a clue — hands encased in what seemed rubber gloves.

For a moment he paused on the sill like a cat about to leap down from a fence; then soundlessly he dropped into the room and seemed to fade into the shadows.

We were four to one, and two of us were armed, but for an instant terror gripped me by the throat. There was something so inhuman in the tight-clothed burglar, such a suggestion of uncanny cruelty and power...

De Grandin broke the spell. “*Eh bien, Monsieur le Voleur*, you are very welcome!” he announced. “We have waited long, but not with patience—”

Flashlights cleft the blackness, and like miniature lightnings came the flamings of two pistols, then a third. Boots pounded on the hardwood floors as the two patrolmen rushed to join us. I saw a shadow loom against the window for an instant, then saw it topple inward as a whirring missile struck it.

“Tur-rrn on th’ lights, ye omadhauns!” Costello bellowed, and after a brief fumble a switch clicked, almost blinding us with the sudden brilliance from the chandelier. Before the window lay a figure cased in clinging black silk jersey like an acrobat’s costume, save that a hood-like helmet covered neck and chin and head, leaving only a small oblong of face visible, and this was barred by the wisp of a black silk mask. Beside the supine body lay de Grandin’s little automatic; a larger weapon was half clutched in one of the man’s flaccid,

rubber-gloved hands.

Costello leaned and snatched the mask off of the fellow’s face. I recognized him instantly: the man who threw the coppers at the Casa Ayer, then tripped and beat Tony Strapoli.

“Well, well,” the sergeant chuckled. “Nick th’ Brute in person, an’ not a movin’ pitcher. We got dead wood on ’im at last—”

“He is also the Niccolo mentioned in the poor Sainpolis girl’s diary,” de Grandin added.

“Th’ divil!”

“Not quite, but almost, *mon sergent*. See, I saved him for you. I might have shot him, but I chose to throw my pistol at his head and stun him.”

“Whatever for, sor? Why should ye be so tender—”

The little Frenchman grinned, “Did not I hear you once remark that you would like a quarter-hour’s conversation with this one — you and a piece of rubber hose? Very well, then. You would not enjoy such a conversation with a wounded man.”

“Be gob, ye’re right, sor. It’ll be a pleasure—”

“Doctor!” one of the patrolmen called. “This feller’s hit bad—”

In our excitement we had failed to notice that Strapoli was not with us. Now we turned to see him lying by the farther wall, a spreading stain across his shirtfront. From the corners of his mouth there welled twin rivulets of blood. De Grandin gave a softly deprecating exclamation. “*C’est trop fort* — he is shot through the lung, my friend. See, it is a pulmonary hemorrhage!”

Strapoli’s pulse was weakening rapidly, almost all semblance of expression had faded from his eyes, yet as we knelt beside him he achieved the vestige of a smile.

“*Mon pauvre garçon*,” whispered de Grandin, “we have him in a vise, he cannot wriggle from the clutches of the law this time, and we shall make him pay through the nose—”

Strapoli paid no heed. His almost-vacant eyes were fixed on something which we could not see, something which appeared to be a foot or so above and before him. He raised his hands, palms facing, then drew them downward toward him. The pantomime was perfect. He held a face between his palms, drew it closer, closer to his own ... “Stephanola!” he murmured, and we saw his lips form in a kiss, then fall apart as a bright cataract of blood poured through them, and he fell back, supine, on the floor.

The two policemen arranged him, folded hands across his breast, dropped a coat over his face. De Grandin knelt in prayer a moment, then bounded up to join Costello.

“An’ it’ll be th’ hot squat for yours, bozo,” the sergeant was saying almost jocularly to the man in tights who was

now regaining consciousness. “Ye’ve made a monkey o’ th’ law a long, long time, but this time we’ve put th’ finger on ye. Ye’ll not be batin’ th’ rap this time. Them rubber gloves ye’re wearin’, wid th’ pore gur-rl’s prints stuck on ’em, will pin a dozen burglaries on ye, but ye’ll niver do a day o’ time for ’em. Oh, no, my bucko! Ye’ve kilt a man in th’ commission o’ th’ felony o’ housebreakin’, an’ it’s th’ electric chair that ye’ll be warmin’ before firecrackers pop, so help me.”

The two patrolmen were arguing. “Of course I didn’t put it there,” denied one hotly. “Where the devil would I get it in this empty house; besides do I look like an undertaker or sumpin’?”

“Well, where’d it come from, then?”

“Whist, ye divils, have ye no shame? Where’s ye’re rayspict for th’ dead?” Costello, reproved in a bull-bellow. “What’s all th’ fussin’ for?”

“Aw, Sarge, Milligan says I put this flower on ’im, an’ I told him he was fulla prunes. Where’d I get a flower in this place?”

“What flower?” broke in Costello.

“This one, right here, sir,” the young patrolman pointed to Strapoli’s body.

Clasped in the pale hands folded on his breast Strapoli held a lovely Gloire de Dijon rose, fresh, dew-jeweled, breathing out a cloud of perfume from its golden heart.

“Do not dispute, *mes enfants*,” de Grandin ordered. “We know the donor of that flower.” He laid a hand upon his breast and made a sweeping bow to the great empty room. “*Félicitations, mes amis*,” he said, as if congratulating an affianced couple.

“Quite yes, but how can one explain it otherwise?” he said as we forgathered in my study shortly after midnight. “Did not she give the explanation when she first appeared to young Strapoli? But certainly. ‘I have sinned, but there is a way open to forgiveness,’ she told him. Of course, if she could bring this so vile Niccolo to justice she would acquire merit, perhaps attain to pardon for her self-destruction.

“She and the young Strapoli were in love, hence *en rapport*. She could, it seems, appear to him at will, while others could not sense her presence.

“When first he told us of his experience, how she laid her hands upon his eyes and made him see that mansion in the sky, I thought the whole occurrence too fantastic to be other than a dream.

“*Ha*, but next morning when you came with tidings of the burglary, I had at once the thought:

“‘He saw a house, a big, fine, empty house last night ... such a mansion has been burglarized ... Jules de Grandin, get a picture of that house and show it to the young Strapoli. If he recognizes it as the one his vision showed him, that is what she meant.’

“*Parbleu*, I did; he did, and the case was proved. *Assurément*.

“‘She has foreknowledge of the naughty Niccolo’s intentions,’ I tell me. ‘When next she gives her lover the impression of a house, we have only to go there and wait his coming.’

“*Tenez*, she came again. She showed him another house; he told us; we searched until we found the house of his vision. We waited there — *voilà*.”

The House of the Three Corpses

WE WERE walking home from Mrs. Douglas Lemworth's garden party.

Once a year the Old Dragon of Harrisonville Society holds a "fair" for blind and crippled children, and if you are engaged in the professions you attend, buy several wholly useless knickknacks at outrageous prices, drink a glass of punch or cup of tea and eat a cake or two, then leave as unobtrusively as possible. Even in most favorable conditions her parties are horrendous; tonight it had been a foretaste of Purgatory.

Though dark had long since fallen, the city sweltered in the mid-June heat. Sidewalks and roadways were hot to the touch; even the moon, just past the full and shaped like a bent pie-plate, seemed panting in a febrile sky. Absolutely stirless, the air seemed pressing down like a black blanket dipped in steaming water, and as Jules de Grandin simmered outwardly he boiled with fury within.

"*Grand Dieu des chats,*" he fumed, what an abominable *soirée!* It was not bad enough that they should stifle us with vapid talk and senseless laughter, that they should force us to be polite when we wished to shed our coats and shoes and act the rowdy; *non, cordieu,* they must pile insult upon injury and give us *sacré* lemon punch to drink! I am outraged and affronted. I am maimed for life; never shall I get my face straight from that dreadful taste!"

Despite my own discomfort I could not forbear a grin. The look of wrathful incredulity upon his face when he discovered that the lemonade was only lemonade was funnier than anything I'd seen in months.

"Well, cheer up," I consoled as we turned from the side street into the avenue, "we'll be home soon and then we'll have a Tom Collins."

"Ah, lovely thought!" he breathed ecstatically. "To shed these so uncomfortable clothes, to feel the cool gin trickle down our throats — *morbleu,* my friend, is not that strange?"

"Eh?" I answered, startled by his sudden change of subject. "What?"

"Regard her, if you please. *La porte de la maison,* she is open."

Following the direction of his nod I saw the door of a big house across the street swing idly on its hinges, displaying a vista of dimly lighted hall.

In almost any other section of the city opened front doors on a night like this would have been natural as hatless men or girls without their stockings; but not in Tuscarora Avenue. That street is the last outpost of the pre-Depression era. Housegirls in black bombazine and stiff white lawn may still

be seen at work with mop and pail upon its low white-marble stoops at daybreak, lace curtains hang in primly white defiance of a changing world at its immaculately polished windows, housemen in uniform come silent-footed as trained cats to take the visitor's hat and gloves and walking-stick; no matter what the temperature may be, Tuscarora Avenue's street doors are never left open. "Perhaps" — I began; then — "good heavens!"

Sharp and poignant as an acid-burn, wordless, but hair-raising in intensity, the hail came to us from the open door.

"*Allons!*" de Grandin cried. "*Au secours!*"

We dashed across the street, but at the mansion's small square porch we paused involuntarily. The place seemed so substantially complacent, so smugly assured.... "We shall feel like two *poissons d'avril* if what we heard was someone crying out in a bad dream," he murmured as he tapped his stick on the sidewalk. "No matter, better to be laughed at for our pains than emulate the priests and Levites when someone stands in need of help."

He tiptoed up the steps and pushed the pearl button by the open door.

Somewhere inside the house a bell shrilled stridently, called again as he pressed on the button, and repeated its demand once more as he gave a last impatient jab. But no footsteps on the polished floor told us that our summons had been heard.

"Humph, looks as if we were mistaken, after all," I murmured. "Maybe the cry came from another house—"

"*Sang du diable!* Look well, my friend, and tell me if you see what I see!" Low and imperative, his whispered command came. Through the open door he pointed toward the end of the wide hall where an elaborately carved balustrade marked the ascent of a flight of winding stairs.

Just below the stair-bend stood a Florentine gilt chair and in it, hunched forward as though the victim of a sudden case of cramps, sat a man in house-servant's livery, green trousers and swallowtail coat corded with red braid, yellow-and-black waistcoat striped horizontally, and stiff-bosomed shirt.

I took the major details of the costume in subconsciously, for though his shirtfront was one of the least conspicuous items of his regalia, it seized and held my gaze. Across its left side, widening slowly to the waistcoat's V, was a dull reddish stain which profaned the linen's whiteness as a sudden shriek might violate a quiet night. And like a shriek the stain screamed out one single scarlet word — Murder!

De Grandin let his breath out in a suppressed "*ha!*" as he

stepped across the threshold and advanced upon the seated man.

“Is he — he’s—” I began, knowing all the time the answer which his nod confirmed.

“*Mais oui*, like a herring,” he replied as he felt the fellow’s pulse a moment, then let the lifeless hand fall back. “Unless I err more greatly than I think, he died *comme ça*” — he snapped his fingers softly; then:

“Come, let us see what else there is to see, but have the caution, *mon vieux*, it may be we are not alone.”

I reached the door which let off from the rear of the hall first and laid my hand upon the knob, but before I had a chance to turn it he had jerked me back. “*Mais non*,” he cautioned “not that way, my friend; do this.”

Touching the handle lightly he sprang the latch, then drew back his foot and drove a vicious kick against the polished panels, sending the door crashing back against the wall.

Poised on his toes he waited for an instant, then grasped the handle of his cane as if it were a sword-hilt and the lower part as though it were a scabbard and pressed soundlessly through the doorway. “*Bien*,” he whispered as he looked back with a nod, “the way seems clear.” As I joined him at the threshold:

“Never open doors that way, my friend, when you are in a house whose shadows may conceal a murderer. Not long ago, to judge by the condition of that poor one yonder, someone did a bloody killing; for all we know he is still here and not at all averse to sending us to join his other victim. Had he lurked behind this door he could have shot you like a dog, or slit your gizzard with a knife as you came through, for you were coming from a lighted room into the dark, and would have made the perfect mark. *Hé*, but the naughty one who would assassinate de Grandin needs to rise before the sun. I am not to be caught napping. By no means. Had a wicked one been standing in concealment by that door, his head would surely have been soundly knocked against the wall when I kicked it, much of the fight would have been banded from him, and the advantage would be mine. You apprehend?”

I nodded appreciation of his wisdom as we stepped from the dim light of the hall into the faint gloom of the room beyond.

It was a dining-room, a long, high-ceilinged dining-room appointed with the equipment of gracious living. A long oval mahogany table of pure Sheraton design occupied the center of the floor, its polished surface giving back dim mirrorings of the pieces with which it had been set. In the center a silver girandole held a flat bouquet of early summer roses, a silver bowl of fruit — grapes, pomegranates and apricots — stood near the farther end, while a Sheffield coffee service graced the end near us. A demi-tasse of eggshell lusterware stood

near the table edge; another lay upon its side, its spilled contents disfiguring the polished wood. A pair of diminutive liqueur glasses, not entirely drained, stood near the coffee cups, their facets reflecting the flickering light of two tall candles burning in high silver standards at each end of the table. A chair had been pushed back as though its occupant had risen hastily; another lay upon its side on the floor. To me it seemed as if the well-bred silence of the room was holding its breath in shocked surprise at some scene of violence lately witnessed.

“Nobody’s here,” I whispered, unconsciously and instinctively lowering my voice as one does in church or at a funeral. “Maybe they ran out when—”

“You say so?” he broke in. “*Regardez, s’il vous plaît*.”

He had seized one of the candles from the table and lifted it above his head, driving the shadows farther back into the corners of the room. As the light strengthened he pointed toward a high three-paneled Japanese screen which marked the entrance to the service-pantry.

Something hot and hard seemed forming in my throat as my eyes came to rest at the point toward which his pointing stick was aimed. Protruding from behind the screen an inch or so into the beam of candlelight was something which picked up the rays and threw them back in dichromatic reflections, a woman’s silver-kid evening sandal and the ox-blood lacquer of her carefully kept toenails.

He strode across the room and folded back the screen.

She lay upon her side, a rather small, plump woman with a mass of tawny hair. One delicately tinted cheek was cradled in the curve of her bent elbow, and her mane of bronze-brown hair was swirling unconfined about her face like a cascade of molten copper. Her white-crêpe evening gown, cut in the severe lines which proclaimed the art of a master dressmaker, displayed a rent where the high heel of her sandal had caught in its hem, her corded girdle had come unfastened and trailed beside her on the floor, and on the low-cut bodice of her frock was a hand-wide soil of red — such a stain as marked the shirtfront of the dead servant in the hall.

One glance at her face, the startled, suffering expression, the half-closed eyes, the partly opened lips, told us it was needless to inquire further. She too was dead.

“*Eh bien*,” de Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his mustache, “he was no retailer, this one. When he went in for murder he did it in the grand manner, *n’est-ce-pas?* Put the screen back, if you please, exactly as we found it. We must leave things intact for the police and the coroner.”

He led the way into the wide, bay-windowed drawing-room at the front of the house, raised his candle a moment; then: “*Nom d’un nom d’un nom d’un nom*, another!” he

exclaimed.

He had not exaggerated. Lying on the low ottoman beside the door communicating with the hall was a man in dinner clothes, dark-skinned, sleek, well groomed, hands folded peacefully upon his breast, silk-stockinged ankles crossed, and on the white surface of his dress shirt was the same ghastly stain which we had found upon the servant in the hall and the murdered woman in the dining-room.

De Grandin eyed the oddly composed corpse in baffled speculation, as if he added up a column of figures and was puzzled at the unexpected answer. "*Que extraordinaire!*" he murmured, then, amazingly, gave vent to a low chuckle. "*Comme le temps de la prohibition, n'est-ce-pas?*"

His Gallic humor failed to register with me. "I don't see anything so droll about it," I scowled, "and what had Prohibition to do with—"

"*Tenez*, ever literal as a sausage, are you not, my old one? Cannot you see the connection? Observe him closely, if you please. No one ever died like that, not even in his bed. No, certainly. He was carried here and arranged thus, much in the way the gangsters of the Prohibition era laid their victims out when they had placed them on the spot.

"But yes, this business is clear as water from a spring. It fairly leaps to meet the eye. This was no robbery, no casual crime. It was carefully premeditated, planned and executed in accordance with a previously-agreed-upon program, as pitilessly as the heartlessness of Hell. The servant might have been, and doubtless was, killed to stop his mouth, the woman looks as if she might have died in flight, but this one? *Non*. He was killed, then dragged or carried here, then carefully arranged as if to fit into his casket."

Something evil and soft-footed seemed to stalk into that quiet room. There was no seeing it or hearing it, only the feeling, sudden and oppressive, as if the mid-June heat evaporated and in its place had come a leering, clammy coldness. Small red ants seemed crawling on my scalp; there was an oddly eery prickling in the hollows of my legs behind the knees. "Let's get out of here," I pleaded. "The police—"

He seemed to waken from a reverie. "But yes, of course," he assented, "the police must be notified. Will not you call them, *mon vieux*? Ask for the good Costello; we need his wisdom and experience in such a case."

I scurried back into the entranceway, picked up the receiver, and dialed police headquarters. No buzzing answered as I spun the dial. The rubber instrument might have been a spool of wood for all the life it showed. Again and again I snapped the hook down, but without result.

"You have them — he is coming, the good sergeant?" de Grandin asked, emerging from the dining-room with the candle in one hand, his sword-stick in the other.

"No, I can't seem to get any response," I answered.

"U'm?" He pressed the instrument against his ear a moment. "One is not surprised. The wires have been cut."

He put the phone back on its tabouret and his small, keen face, flushed with heat and excitement, was more like that of an eager tomcat than ever.

"My friend," he told me earnestly, "I damn think we have put our feet into a case which will bear scrutinizing."

"But I thought you'd given up criminal investigation—"
 "*En vérité*, I have so; but this is something more. Tell me, what does ritualistic murder suggest to your mind?"

"One of two things, a malevolent secret society or a cult of some sort."

He nodded. "You have right, my friend. Murder as such is criminal, though sometimes I think it fully justified; but the killing of a man with ritual and deliberation is an affront not only to the law, but to the Lord. It is the devil's business, and as such it interests me. Come, let us go."

We hurried to the cross street, walked a block down Myrtle Avenue and found an all-night pharmacy.

"*Holà, mon vieux*," I heard him call as his connection with headquarters was established, "I have a case for you. *Non*, great stupid one, not a case of beer, a case of murder. Three of them, *par la barbe d'un corbeau rouge!*"

Then he closed the phone booth door to shut the traffic noises out, and his animated conversation came to me only as an unintelligible hum.

"The sergeant tells me that the owners of the house have been living on the Riviera since last year," he told me as we started toward the murder mansion. "They rented it furnished to a family of Spaniards some eight months ago. That is all he knows at present, but he is having an investigation made. As soon as he has viewed the scene he'll take us to headquarters, where we may find—"

"Look out!" I warned, seizing his elbow and dragging him back to the curb as he stepped down into the street. A long, black, shiny, low-slung car had swung around the corner, driven at a furious pace and missing him by inches.

"*Bête, miserable!*" he glared at the retreating vehicle. "Must you rush him to his grave so quickly?"

I stared at him, astonished. "What—"

"It was a hearse," he explained. "One of those new vehicles designed to simulate a limousine. *Eh bien*, one wonders if it fools the dead man as he rides in it and makes him think he is alive and going for a pleasure trip?" He set a cigarette alight, then muttered angrily: "I saw his number. I shall report him to the good Costello."

The big police car, driven like the wind and turning out for no one, drew alongside the curb just as we reached the house, and Costello ran across the sidewalk to shake hands.

"There musta been some doin's here, from what you tell

me, sor," he greeted.

"There were, indeed, my friend. Three of them there were, one in the entranceway, one in the dining-room, one in the — *mon Dieu*, Friend Trowbridge, look!"

I glanced past him into the hall, steeling my nerves against the sight of the dead houseman keeping silent vigil over his dead employers, then gasped in sheer astonishment. Everything was as we'd left it; the hall lamp still glowed warmly in its shade of bronze fretwork, the big gilt chair still stood below the curve of the stairway, but — the murdered man had disappeared.

Costello mopped his streaming forehead with a sopping handkerchief. "Where's this here now dead guy, sor?" he asked.

De Grandin muttered something unintelligible as he led us through the hall, across the darkened dining-room, and pushed back the carved screen. Nothing but the smudge of shadow where our bodies blocked the candlelight was there.

"*Parbleu!*" de Grandin muttered, tugged the tip of his mustache, and turned upon his heel to lead us to the drawing-room. The low ottoman, upholstered in brocaded satin, stood in the same position against the damask-draped wall, but on it was no sign or trace of the dead man we'd seen ten minutes earlier.

Costello drew a stogie from his pocket and bit its end off carefully, blowing wisps of tobacco from his mouth as he struck a match against his trousers. "There doesn't seem to be much doin' in th' line o' murder here right now, sor," he announced, keeping eyes resolutely fixed upon the match-flame as he drew a few quick puffs on his cigar. "Ye're sure ye seen them dead folk here — in this house? These buildin's look enough alike to be all five o' th' Dionne quints. Besides, it's a hot night. We're apt to see things that ain't there. Maybe—"

"Maybe' be double-broiled upon the grates of blazing hell!" de Grandin almost shrieked. "Am I a fool, a simpleton, a zany? Have I been a physician for thirty years, yet not be able to know when I see a dead corpse? *Ah bah*, I tell you—"

Upstairs, apparently from the room immediately above us, there came a sudden wail, deep, long-drawn, rising with swift-tightening tension till it vanished in the thinness of an overstrained crescendo.

"Howly Mither!" cried Costello.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated. "What the—"

"*Avec moi, mes enfants!*" de Grandin shouted. "Come with me. Corpses come and corpses go, but there is one who needs our help!"

With cat-like swiftness he rushed up the steps, paused a moment at the stairhead, then turned sharply to the left.

I was close behind him as he scuttled down the hall and

kicked against the door that led into the chamber just above the drawing-room. Panting with the labor of the hurried climb, Costello stood at my elbow as the door flew back with a bang and we almost fell into the room.

Sitting in the middle of the floor, stockinged feet straight out before her, like a little girl at play, was a young woman — twenty-one or -two, I judged — dressed in a charming dinner frock of pastel blue georgette, a satin sandal in each hand. As we entered she shook back the strands of her almost iridescent black hair from before her face and beat against the floor with her slippers, like the trap-drummer of a band striking his instruments, then fell to laughing — a high-pitched, eery laugh; the laugh of utter, irresponsible idiocy.

"*¡Sí, sí, sí, sí!*" she cried, then fell into a sort of lilting, rhythmic song. "*Escolopendra! La escolopendra! La escolopendra muy inhumana;*" She drummed a sort of syncopated accompaniment to the words against the floor with her sandals, then raised the tempo of her blows until the spool-heels beat a sustained *rat-tat* on the boards as though she were attempting to crush some vile crawling thing that crept invisible around her on the floor.

"*Escolopendra, escolopendra!*" The words rose to a shriek that thinned out to a squeaking wail as she leaped unsteadily to her silk-cased feet and her wisp of frock swirled round her slender graceful legs when she bounded to the center of the bed and gathered her skirts round her, for all the world like a woman in deadly terror of a mouse.

"*Esto que es? — what is this?*" Costello asked as he stepped forward. "What talk is this of *una escolopendra* — a centipede — *chiquita?*"

"*Ohé, caballero,*" the girl cried tremulously, "have pity on poor Constancia and save her from the centipedes. They are all about, scores of them, hundreds, thousands! Help, oh, help me, I implore you!" She held her little hands beseechingly to him, and her voice rose to a thin and rasping scream as she repeated the dread word, "*escolopendra — escolopendra!*"

"Whist, mavourneen, if 'tis centipedes as scares ye, ye can set yerself aisy. Sure, it's Jerry Costello as won't let one of 'em come near ye."

Reaching up, he gathered her into his arms as if she were a child. "Come on, sors," he suggested, "let's git goin'. This pore gur-rl's real enough, 'spite of all th' gallopin' corpses that ye've seen around here."

De Grandin in the lead, we hastened down the hall, and were almost at the stairs when he halted us with upraised hand. "*A silence;*" he commanded, "*écoutez!*"

Very faintly it came to us, more a whimper than a moan; low, frightened, weak. "*Morbleu,*" de Grandin exclaimed as he turned the handle, kicked the door, and disappeared into

the bedroom like a diving duck.

I followed, and Costello, with the girl still in his arms, came after me. In a wicker chair beside the chamber's window sat a young man, the mad girl's brother, judging by their strong resemblance to each other, gently rocking to and fro and moaning softly to himself. He was dressed in dinner clothes, but they were woefully disheveled.

His collar had been torn half from his shirt; his tie, unknotted, hung limply round his neck; the bosom of his shirt had been wrenched from its studs and bellied out from his chest like the sail of a full-rigged ship standing before the wind.

"Howly Moses!" Costello tilted his straw hat down on his nose, then pushed it back upon his head. "Another of 'em?"

"Gregorio, *hermano mio!*" the girl Costello carried cried. "Gregorio — *las escolo pendras*—"

But the young man paid no heed. He bent forward in his chair, eyes riveted upon his shoe-tips, and hummed a sort of tuneless song to himself, pausing now and then to utter a low moan, then smile foolishly like a man fuddled with liquor.

"Hey, Clancy," Costello hurried to the stairhead and called down, "come up here on th' run; we got a couple o' nuts!"

The burly uniformed patrolman came up the stairs three at a time, joined us in the bedroom and drew the drooling youth up from his chair. "Up ye come, young felly me lad," he ordered. "Come on out o' this, an' mind ye don't make anny fuss."

The boy was docile enough. Tottering and staggering as though three-quarters drunk, but otherwise quite tractable, he went with Clancy down the stairs and made no effort at resistance as they thrust him into the police car.

Costello placed the girl in the back seat beside her brother and turned uncertainly to de Grandin. "Well, sor, now we got 'em, what're we goin' to do wid 'em, I dunno?" he asked.

"Do with them?" the little Frenchman echoed acidly. "How should I know that? What does one usually do with lunatics? Take them riding in the park, take them to dinner and the theatre, buy them lollipops and ice cream — if all else fails, you might convey them to the City Hospital. Me, I go to research that never-quite-sufficiently-to-be-anathematized house. I tell you that I saw three corpses there, as dead as mutton and as real as taxes. I shall not rest till I have found them. Can they play hide-and-seek with me? Shall three cadavers make the monkey out of me? I tell you no!"

"O.K., sor, I'll go wid ye," agreed Costello, but to me he whispered, "Stay wid 'im, Doctor Trowbridge, sor. I'm feared th' heat has touched 'im in th' head."

With the little Frenchman in the lead we marched into the hall again and, following the line of our first search, paused

before the screen that masked the entrance to the service-pantry.

"See, look, observe," he ordered as he found the light switch and snapped the current on. "I tell you that a woman's body lay right here, and — *a-ah?*" He dropped upon his knees and pointed to a globular black button on the polished hardwood floor.

"U'm?" Costello grunted noncommittally, bending forward to inspect the globule. "What is it, sor, a bit o' jet?"

"Jet?" de Grandin echoed in disgust. "*Grand Dieu des porcs*, where are your eyes? Touch it!"

The sergeant put a tentative forefinger on the gleaming orb, then drew back suddenly, his heat-flushed face a thought paler. Where his finger had pressed it the button had gone flat, lost its rotundity and become a tiny pool of viscous liquid. What he had mistaken for a solid substance was a great drop of partly congealed blood.

"Bedad!" he wiped his finger on his trousers, then scrubbed it with his handkerchief. "What wuz it, sor? It looks like—"

"*Précisément*. It is," the Frenchman told him in a level, toneless voice. "That is exactly what it is, my friend. The heart's blood from the poor dead woman whom neither I nor good Friend Trowbridge saw here before we called you."

"Well, I'll be—" Costello began, and:

"One can almost find it in his heart to hope you will," cut in de Grandin. "You have made me the insult, you have intimated that I did not know a corpse when I beheld one, that I had hallucinations in the head — *ah bah*, at times you do annoy me past endurance!"

Grinning half maliciously, half derisively, he straightened from his knees and nodded toward the stairs.

"Let us go up and see what else it was Friend Trowbridge and I imagined when we first came to this house of the three corpses," he ordered.

We climbed the winding stairs, every sense alert for token of the unseen murderers or their victims, and walked down to the room where we had found the mad girl raving of the centipedes.

"Now," de Grandin cast a quick, stock-taking glance around the chamber, "one wonders why she babbled of '*las escolopendras*.' Even the insane do not harp upon one string without some provocation. It might have been that — stand back, my friends; beware!"

We stared at him in open-mouthed amazement, wondering if the room's influence had affected him, but he paid us no more heed than if we had been bits of lifeless furniture. Slowly, stepping softly on his toes, silent-footed as a cat that stalks a mouse, he was creeping toward the chintz-draped bedstead in the center of the room. And as he advanced noiselessly I heard a faint, queer, clattering sound, as though

some mechanical toy, almost run down, were scratching on the bare, bright polished floor beyond the shadow of the bed.

Chin thrust forward, lips drawn back in a half snarl, mustache aquiver, the little Frenchman advanced some three feet or so, then quickly slipped the rapier blade from his sword-stick and stood poised, one foot forward, one drawn back, knees slightly bent, his bright blade slanting down in the beam of the electric light.

“*Sa-ha!*” He stabbed swiftly at the shadows and whipped his blade back. As he held the steel aloft for our inspection we saw a thing that writhed and twisted on its point, an unclean thing—six inches or so long; a many-jointed, horn-armed bit of obscenity which doubled convulsively into a sharp horseshoe-curve, then bent itself into a U, and waved a score or more of crooked, claw-armed legs in pain and fury as it writhed.

“Observe her very carefully,” he ordered. “Medusa on a hundred legs, *‘la escolopendra.’* I have seen her kind in Africa and Asia and South America, but never of this size. One does not wonder that the poor young *mademoiselle* was frightened into idiocy by the knowledge that this lurked among the shadows of the room. It is a lucky thing I heard her clawing on the floor a moment since and recognized her footsteps; had she gotten up a trouser-leg and sunk her venomed mandibles in one of us — *tiens*, that one would soon have found himself immersed in flowers, but unable to enjoy their scent. Yes, certainly.”

“Ye said a mouthful there, sor,” Costello agreed. “I’ve seen ’em in th’ Fillypines — ’twas there I learnt th’ Spanish lingo so’s I understood th’ pore gur-rl’s ravin’s — an’ no one needs to tell me about ’em. Shtep careful, sors; perhaps there’s more of ’em about. They hate th’ light like Satan hates th’ Mass, an’ our pants would make a fine place for their hidin’. It’s glad I am ye seen th’ poison little divil first, Doctor de Grandin, sor.”

“Calling all cars; attention all cars,” a voice was droning through the police car’s radio as we left the house. “Be on the lookout for a funeral car — a limousine hearse — license number F373-471. Reported stolen from in front of 723 Westmorland Street. License number F373-471. That is all.”

“*Ah-ha,*” de Grandin exclaimed. “*Ah-ha-ha?*”

“What is it, sor?” Costello asked.

“The joke has been on me, but now I think that we shall turn the laugh on them. One sees it all. But of course!”

“What—” I began, but he motioned me to silence.

“The hearse which almost ran me down, whence did it come, Friend Trowbridge?”

“Down this street; it almost clipped you as we started to cross at—”

“*Précisément, exactement;* quite so. You have very right,

my friend. And the address whence the stolen car was pilfered, where is it, *mon sergent?*”

“Right round th’ corner, sor. ’Bout halfway between this street an’ Myrtle Avenoo—”

“Perfectly. It fits together like a picture-puzzle. Consider, if you please: Three bodies lie here, a hearse is stolen just around the corner; the bodies disappear, so does the hearse. Find one and you shall find the others, I damn think.”

“Thank you kindly, gentlemen; all contributions to our stock of assorted nuts are gratefully received.” Doctor Donovan, in charge of H-3, the psychopathic ward at City Hospital, grinned amiably at us. “You say you found ’em babbling in a house in Tuscarora Avenue? Pair o’ howlin’ swells, eh? Well, we’ll try to make ’em comfortable, though they can’t have caviar for breakfast, and we’re just fresh out o’ *pâté de foie gras*. Still—”

“Doctor Donovan” — an interne pushed the superintendent’s office door four inches open and nodded to our host.

“Yes, Ridgway?” asked Donovan.

“It’s about the man and woman just brought in. It looks to me as if they had been drugged.”

“Eh? The devil! What makes you think so?”

“Doctor Amlie took the girl and I examined the man. He seemed half drunk to me, and as I was preparing the test for alcoholism an urgent message came from Doctor Amlie.

“I left my patient with a male nurse and hurried over to the women’s section. Amlie was all hot and bothered. ‘What d’ye think o’ this?’ she asked me as she pointed to a spot of ecchymosis bigger than a silver dollar on her patient’s arm. It was just above the common tendon of the triceps, and surrounded the pit of a big needle wound. Looked to me as if she’d had a hypo awkwardly administered. She couldn’t ’a’ given it to herself.

“Amlie wanted to test for morphine or cocaine, but I talked her out of it. Cocaine’s hardly ever injected except for surgery, and morphine makes ’em lethargic. This girl was almost hysterical, jabbering Spanish or Italian, I don’t know which, and stopping every other moment to giggle. Then she’d seem about to fall asleep, and suddenly wake up and go through the whole turn again.

“I’d just finished reading Smith’s *Forensic Medicine in the East*, and had a hunch.”

“Uh-huh?” Donovan encouraged.

“Well, sir, I withdrew one-point-fifty-four cc’s of blood from her arm, directly in the ecchymosed area, and gave it the Beam test, using ethyl chloride instead of alcoholic potash—”

“Talk English, son; I’m rusty on my toxicology,” Donovan broke in. “What’d you find?”

“Galenical cannabis indica, sir.”

“U’ m? Any objective symptoms?”

“Yes, sir. Her reflexes were practically nil, the heart action was markedly accelerated and the pupils dilated. Just now she seems about to drop off to sleep, but there are periods of hysteria recurring at gradually increasing intervals.”

“Uh-huh. How about your patient?”

“Doctor Amlie came over to the male section with me and we put my man through the same tests. Everything checked, but his symptoms are more marked. I’d say he had a heavier dose, but both of ’em have been doped with cannabis indica injected intravenously.”

“How long d’ye think this condition’ll last?”

“According to the text books not much longer than an ordinary drunk. They should sleep it off in eight to ten hours, at most.”

“Pardon,” de Grandin interrupted, “but is there not some way that we can hold these persons *incomunicado*? In France it would be easy, but here—”

“Sure, there is,” Costello broke in. “You an’ Doctor Trowbridge say you seen three corpses in that house, an’ ye believe that they wuz murdered. These kids wuz found there, an’ might know sumpin’ ’bout it. We can hold ’em as material witnesses any reasonable time.”

“Very good, take the necessary steps to keep them in restraint, and when they are recovered from their drugged sleep let me see them.”

“Say, Trowbridge,” Doctor Donovan’s voice came to me on the telephone next morning, “who wants to break in to see a nut?”

“Who wants to what?” I answered, mystified.

“You heard me right, feller. There was some monkey business down here last night, and one of those kids you and de Grandin and Costello brought here is mixed up in it. Can you and de Grandin come down here?”

Dawkins, the night chief orderly of the psychopathic ward, was waiting for us in the superintendent’s office when we reached the City Hospital, and launched upon his story without preface.

“I was sittin’ just inside the safety door — the grating, you know — and it was just ten minutes after one when the funny business started,” he told us.

“How do you place the time with such exactitude?” de Grandin asked.

Dawkins grinned. “I went on duty at eleven, and wouldn’t be relieved till seven in the morning. About one o’clock I began to get pretty sleepy, so I sent Hosmer to the kitchen for a pot o’ coffee and some sandwiches. It seemed to me he took a little longer than he should, and I’d just looked up at the electric clock on the wall just opposite my chair when I

heard a funny-sounding noise.

“It wasn’t quite like anything I’d ever heard before, for while it was a sort of whistling, like a sudden wind, it was also something like the humming of a monster bee, perhaps an airplane.”

De Grandin tweaked his mustache ends. “You say it combined a hum and whistle?”

“That’s just about the way to describe it, sir.”

“Very good, and then?”

“Then I saw the shadow, sir. You know, there’s a ceiling light in the main corridor — the one connecting the ambulance entrance with the emergency ward — just around the corner from the hallway leading to H-3. Anybody standing around the corner of the junction of the two corridors, but between that light and the angle made by our hallway branching off, casts a shadow down our hall. Many a time I’ve spotted nurses and orderlies standing to talk there when they should have been about their duties. Well, when I heard this funny noise I got up, and as I did I saw this shadow. It wasn’t any of the hospital employees. It was someone with a derby hat on, and it looked to me as if he had a club or something in his hand. I didn’t like his looks too much.”

“You were suspicious? Why?”

“Well, we haven’t had anything of the kind happen for some years, but in the old days when the gangs were running liquor, two-three times gunmen broke into the hospital and shot up fellers we had in here. Once they rubbed out an orderly because he tried to stop ’em.

“So I started down to the other end of the ward. Dennis was on duty there, and he’s a pretty good one to have with you in a scrap. O’ course, we aren’t allowed to carry weapons — not even billies — in H-3. Too much chance of some lunatic’s getting hold of ’em and going on a rampage. But I wanted Dennis to take a gander at this guy’s shadow, and if he thought what I did, we could call up the main office and have someone with a gun come round and grab him from behind while we went out to tackle him in front. So I started down to get Dennis.”

“Yes, and then?”

“Well, sir, just as I got abreast of 34, the room they’d put Doctor Ridgway’s patient in, I heard a sound that seemed to cut through the queer noise I’ve been telling you about, like someone filing a piece of metal.

“The patient was asleep and I thought he might be snoring — some of ’em make mighty funny noises-but when I looked through the peep-hole in the door I saw a feller on the outside, cutting through the window grating.

“You know how our windows are. There’s a strong steel netting on the outside, then the glass, then another grating on the inside. This feller was working on the outside grating with a saw of some sort, and had already cut a hole two

inches long.

“D’ye know what I think?”

“Nothing would delight us more than hearing it, my friend.”

“Well, sir, I think that funny noise I heard was made to cover up the noise the saw made as it cut that grating.”

“Your theory does great credit to your perspicacity. Did you see the one who sought to cut the grating?”

“Not very good, sir. He seen me about the same time that I spotted him, and ducked down out o’ sight. Funny thing about him, though. I’d say he was a foreigner. Anyhow, he was mighty dark and had black hair and a large nose.”

Donovan took up the story: “Dawkins turned in the alarm, and we rushed around to see about it. Of course, we found no one in the main corridor, but that’s not strange. There’s no guard at the ambulance entrance, and anyone can come or go that way at will. If we hadn’t found the cut screen we’d have thought he dreamed it.

“Now, what I want to know is this: Who’d want to help those kids escape? As I understand it, they’re being held as witnesses to a murder—”

“*Excusez-moi!*” de Grandin cut in; then, to Dawkins: “Will you take me to the window this one tried to cut through, if you please?”

They were back in less than three minutes, and a grim look set upon the little Frenchman’s face as he opened his folded handkerchief and spread it out on Donovan’s desk. “*Regardez!*” he directed.

Upon the linen lay some particles of glass, evidently portions of a smashed test-tube, and the crushed but clearly recognizable body of a four-inch centipede.

“There is a black dog running through my brain,” he complained as we sat waiting in the study after dinner the next evening. “This case puzzles me. Why should it not be one thing or the other? Why should it be a hybrid? Somewhere” — he spread his hands as if to reach for something — “just beyond my fingertips the answer lies, but I cannot touch it.”

“What puzzles you particularly?” I asked. “What they’ve done with the missing bodies?”

“*Ah, non.* That is comparatively simple. When the police find the stolen hearse, as they are sure to do in time, they will find the bodies in it. It is the half-caste nature of the case which causes me confusion. Consider him, if you please.” He spread his fingers out fanwise and checked the items on them:

“We come on three dead corpses. There is nothing strange in death. It has been a scientific fact since Eve and Adam first sinned. All indications are that they were murdered. Murder, in and of itself, is no novelty. It has been going on

since Cain slew Abel; but surrounding circumstances are unusual. Oh, yes, very. The servant and the woman had been left as they had died, one in his chair, the other on the floor; but the man is carried to the drawing-room and laid out carefully. Is it that the killers first arranged him, and were about to do the same for their two other victims when we were attracted by the young girl’s scream, and interrupted them? There is a thought there.

“Then about the young man and his sister. Both had been drugged with hashish and left in their respective rooms to be killed by poison centipedes. Why? one wonders. Why were they not killed out of hand, like the three others; why were they drugged instead of being bound and gagged when they were left as prey for the vile myriapods?

“And why should they be Spaniards, as they obviously are?”

Despite myself I grinned. “Why, for the same reason that you’re French and I’m American,” I answered. “There’s nothing strange about a Spaniard being Spanish, is there?”

“In this case, yes,” he countered. “If they had been Orientals I could understand some phases of the puzzle — the hashish and the so vile piping heard about the hospital when the attempt to drop the centipede into the young man’s room was made. But their being Spanish upsets all my theories.

“Hashish is a drug peculiar to the East. They eat it, smoke it; sometimes, though not often, they inject it. *Alors*, we may assume that he who used it on these children was an Eastern, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“As for the so peculiar music — the ‘funny sound’ — which the good Dawkins heard, I know her. She is a very high, shrill sound produced by blowing on a specially prepared reed, and has a tendency to shock the sensory-motor nerves to a paralysis; something like the shrieking of the Chinese screaming boys, whose high, thin, piercing wail so disorganizes the hearer’s nervous system that his marksmanship is impaired and often he is rendered all but helpless in a fight. Our agents in the Lebanon mountains report this music has been used by — *mon Dieu*, I am the monumental stupid-head! Why did I not consider it before?”

“What in the world—” I began, but before I had a chance to frame my question Nora McGinnis announced from the study entrance:

“Sergeant Costello an’ a young lady an’ man, sors, if yez plaze.”

“Good evenin’, gentlemen,” the big detective greeted. “I brought ’em, as ye asked. These are Señorita and Señor Gutierrez y del Gado de Jerez.”

Though the youngsters had been confined in the hospital it was evident that access to their wardrobe had not been de-

nied them, and their appearance was far different from that of the babbling imbeciles we'd found in Tuscarora Avenue. The lad was positively seal-sleek; if anything, a thought too perfect in his grooming. He wore more jewelry than good taste required and smelled unnecessarily of lilac perfume.

As for Constancia, only the knowledge that she'd been in custody continuously, and so could not have sent a substitute, enabled me to recognize the wild-haired, panic-ridden girl of the previous night in the self-contained and assured young woman who occupied the chair opposite me. I'd forgotten how intensely black her hair was when we'd rescued her. Now it seemed even blacker. Drawn severely back in a French roll and parted low on the left side, it glistened like a grackle's throat in the lamplight. Dressed with pomade, two curls like inverted question marks were plastered close against her cheeks where a man's sideburns would be, and were rendered more noticeable by the long pendants of green jade that hung nearly to her creamy shoulders from her ear-lobes. Her backless, strapless evening gown of shimmering black satin fitted almost as tightly as a stocking, covering to some extent but by no means concealing any of her narrow, lissome figure. Her ear-pendants and the emerald clasps of her stilt-heeled sandals were her only jewelry and the only spots of color in her costume. The vivid carmine of her painted lips glowed like a red rose fallen in the snow, for her face, throat, shoulders and tapering arms and hands were dead-white in their pallor as the petals of a gardenia. Despite her immaturity of figure and youthfulness of face — she seemed much younger than on the night we'd first seen her — there was a strange allure about her, and I caught myself comparing her to Carmen in a Paris frock or Francesca da Rimini with Rue de la Paix accessories.

Ankles crossed demurely, hands folded in her lap, she cast a glance from burnished-onyx eyes on Jules de Grandin. “*Señor,*” she murmured in a throaty rich contralto, very different from her reedy ravings of the other night, “they tell me that our parents are — have been killed. Is it truly so?” Her English was without accent, save for a shortening of the *i*'s and a slight rolling of the *r*'s.

“Alas, I fear that it is true, *señorita,*” de Grandin answered. “Can you tell me any reason anyone should wish them harm?”

Her sultry eyes came up to his beneath their curling fringe of long black lashes, and if it had been possible, I'd have said their darkness deepened. “I cannot tell you who wished evil to them,” she replied, “but I know they lived in fear of someone or some thing. I am seventeen years old, and never in my life have I lived long enough in any place to know it well or call it home or make a lasting friendship. Always we have been upon the move, like gypsies or an army. London,

Paris, the Riviera, Zurich, Rome, California, New York — we have flown from one to another like birds pursued by hawks that will not let them rest in any tree. Never have we owned a home — no, not so much as the beds we slept on. I grew up in villas rented ready furnished, in *pensions* and hotels. We were like the orchid that draws sustenance from the air and never sinks its roots into the soil beneath it. The nearest to a home I ever had was the three years that I was at convent school near Cologne. I think if they had let me stay there I should have found that I had the vocation, but” — her narrow naked shoulders came up in a shrug — “it was like the rest. No sooner had I learned to love it — found peace and contentment there — than they took me away.”

“One sympathizes with you, *señorita.* You have no idea who or what it was your parents fled?”

“No, *caballero.* I only know they feared it greatly. We would come to rest in some new place, perhaps a little *pension* in Paris or Berlin, perhaps a furnished cottage in some English village, or a hotel in Switzerland, when one day *Mama* or the *Padre* would come in with fear upon his face, looking backward as he walked, as though an *asesino* dogged his steps, and, ‘They are here,’ or ‘I have seen them,’ one would tell the other. Then in hot haste we packed our clothing and effects — always we lived with *porte-manteux* in readiness — and off we rushed in secrecy, like criminals fleeing from the law.

“But I do not think the *Padre* ever was a criminal, for everywhere we went he was most friendly with the police. Always when we came to live in some new place the *cuartel general de policia* — the police headquarters — was one of the first places which he visited. Is that the way a fugitive from justice acts?”

“That's right, sor,” Costello confirmed. “Colonel Gutierrez came to headquarters when he first moved here nine months ago, an' asked 'em to give orders to th' man on his bate to give special attention to his house. Told 'em he'd been burglarized three times in his last residence, an' his wife wuz on th' verge of a breakdown.”

De Grandin nodded as he turned back to the girl. “The sergeant called your father Colonel Gutierrez, *señorita.* Do you know what army he served in?”

“No, *señor,* he had quit the military service before I was born. I never heard him mention it, nor did I ever see a picture of him in his uniform.”

The Frenchman nodded understandingly. Apparently this conversation, so meaningless to me, confirmed some theory he had formed. “What of the night we found you?” he asked. “Precisely what occurred, *señorita?*”

Young Gutierrez leaped up and advanced a step toward Jules de Grandin. “*Señor,*” he exclaimed, as he clasped his

slender, ring-laden hands in a perfect ecstasy of entreaty, “we — my sister and I — are in the dreadful trouble. These scoundrels have put the slight upon us. They have slain our parents. Blood calls for blood. It is the *rifa*, the *contienda* — the blood-feud — we have with them. We call on you to help us get revenge!”

“Gregorio! *Hermanito mio!*” the girl called softly as she rose and laid a hand upon her brother’s arm. “*Silencio, corazonito pequeño!*” To us she added rapidly in English:

“Forgive him, *señores*. He lives in a small world of his own. He is, alas, *un necio dulce* — one of God’s little ones.”

There seemed magic in her touch, for the young man quieted immediately, and sat silently with her hand clasped in his as she responded to de Grandin’s query.

“We had finished dinner, and Gregorio and I had been excused while *Mama* and the *Padre* had their coffee and liqueur. He — my brother — and I were going to the cinema and were changing from our dinner clothes when I heard a sudden cry downstairs. It was my mother’s voice, pitched high and thin, as if she suffered or were very frightened.”

“*A-a-ah?*” de Grandin cut in on a rising note. “And then, if you please?”

“I heard no more, but as I ran to see if I could be of help a hand was laid upon my doorknob and two men rushed into my room. One held a cane or stick of some sort in his hand and as I shrank back from him he thrust it at me. There must have been a pin or steel point on it, for it pierced my arm and hurt me dreadfully, but only for a moment.”

“A moment, *señorita*? How do you mean?”

She looked at him and managed a wan smile. “There was the oddest feeling spreading through me — like a sudden deathly fatigue, or, perhaps, a sort of numbness. I still stood upon my feet, but I had no idea how I kept on them. I seemed to have grown to a giant’s height, the floor seemed far away and unreal, as the earth does when you look at it from the top of a high tower; and I knew that in a moment I should fall upon my face, but even as I realized it I knew that I’d not feel it. I felt as if I never should feel anything again.

“Then I was on the floor, with the cool boards pressing on my cheek. I had fallen, I knew, but I had not felt the impact. One moment I was standing; the next I lay upon the floor, with no recollection how I got there.

“One of the men had a small cage of woven willow, something like the little straw cages that the Japanese keep crickets in, and suddenly he upset it and shook it. Something — several things — came tumbling, squirming, out of it, and I recognized them as great centipedes — the deadly poisonous *escolopendras* whose bite is terrible as that of a tarantula. Then they laughed at me and left.

“The centipedes were writhing toward the corners of the room as I tried to rise and run, but I could not. The numb,

half-paralyzed sensation was gone, but in its stead I seemed to suffer from a sudden overpowering dizziness. And my eyes were playing tricks on me. The lamplight seemed to glow and glitter with prismatic colors, and the edges of the room began to curl in on me, like the petals of a folding flower. I was in deadly terror of the centipedes, but somehow it seemed I was too tired to move.

“Then one of them came running at me from the shadow of the bed. Its eyes looked bigger than the headlights of a motor car and seemed to glow with fire-red flashes. Somehow I managed to sit up and tear the sandals off my feet and beat the floor with them. I couldn’t reach to strike the centipede, for if I leaned this way or that I knew that I would topple over, and then my face would be down on the floor where it was! But when I pounded on the floor with my shoes it seemed to be afraid and ran back to the shadows.

“I have no idea how long I sat there and drummed upon the floor, but presently I heard a woman scream and scream, as though she’d never stop. After a little while I realized it was I who screamed, but I was powerless to stop it. It might have been five minutes or an hour that I sat and screamed and drummed on the floor with my shoes; I could not say. But presently my door was opened and you gentlemen came in. To God and you I owe my life, *señores*.” The smile with which she swept us was positively ravishing;

“*Eh bien, señorita*, we are indebted to you for a very lucid exposition of that so trying night’s occurrences,” de Grandin said. “We need not trouble to interrogate your brother. From all that we have seen we may assume that his experiences were substantially the same as yours.

“You have heard about the attempt on his life at the hospital?”

“But yes,” she answered tremulously. “Is there no safety for us anywhere? What have we done to anyone? Why should anybody wish to harm poor us?”

“Please understand me, *señorita*,” he returned. “It is for your own safety, not because we think of you as criminals, that we have arranged to lodge you in the city prison. Even in the hospital you are not safe, but in the prison with its fast-locked doors and many guards your safety is assured. As for who it was that orphaned you and then administered a drug and tried to kill you with the poison centipedes, I do not know, but I shall find out, never fear. I am Jules de Grandin, and Jules de Grandin is a very clever fellow.”

“Be th’ way, sor,” Costello whispered “as he prepared to escort the young people to the safety of the prison, “they’ve found th’ missin’ hearse. It wuz in th’ bay, where it’d been run off Whitman’s Dock. The plates wuz missin’, but Joe Valenti, th’ Eyetalian undertaker, identified it.”

“Ah, that is good. The bodies were in it, of course?”

“No, sor, they weren’t. Th’ Harbor Squad’s draggin’ th’ bay on th’ off chance they mighta dropped out, but I don’t think they’ll find ’em. Th’ hearse doors wuz all shut when it wuz fished up, an’ hardly any water had seeped in. ’Tain’t likely th’ bodies fell out of it.”

The sergeant came to dinner three nights later, and did full justice to the *ragout irlandais* which Nora had prepared for his especial benefit. Not until the meal was over and we had adjourned to the study would de Grandin speak about the case; then, as he took his stance before the empty fireplace: “My friends,” he announced as he drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket, “I damn think I have the answer to our puzzle. You will remember *Señorita* Gutierrez knew her father had resigned his commission before her birth, and had never spoken of his military service in her hearing. Perhaps you wondered at it. We old soldiers are not wont to minimize the tales of our adventures. Yet there was good reason for his reticence.

“I have his record here. I have cabled to the *Surêté* and the *Ministère de la Guerre*, and they replied at length by air mail via South America.

“Constantino Cristóbal José Gutierrez y del Gado de Jerez was, we knew, a Spaniard; we did not know he quit his country in extraordinary haste with the *guardia civil* upon his heels. When the Barcelona riots broke out in 1909 he was a young subaltern fresh from military school at Toledo, where he had been educated in the traditions of Pizarro and Cortez. You recall what happened after that uprising? How Francisco Ferrer the great educator was tried by a court-martial? *Tiens*, when a military court tries a soldier it metes out substantial justice. When it tries a civilian one may wager safely that it was convoked to find him guilty of all charges.

“Our young *sous-lieutenant* was among the prosecution’s witnesses and when the trial was completed the sentence sent the defendants to the firing-party.

“The whole world shuddered at the outrage, and the pressure of mankind’s opinion was so great that three years later another military court revoked the first one’s findings, and branded testimony given against Ferrer and his co-defendants as perjury.

“Gutierrez, now a captain, took offense at this supposed reflection on his veracity, challenged one of the court to a duel and killed him at the first pass. His opponent was a major, partly crippled by a wound he had received in Cuba, very wealthy and of an influential family. Captain Gutierrez killed his own career in the Spanish army when he killed his adversary, and had to flee in greatest haste to avoid arrest.

“*Eh bien*, he landed where so many disappointed soldiers land, in the Foreign Legion. He had the blood of the

Conquistadores in him, that one. Embittered, bold and reckless, he was the *légionnaire par excellence*. By the end of the Great War he was a colonel.

“Then, as now and always, the Riffs and Druses were in revolt, actual or prospective, and Colonel Gutierrez when assigned to the Intelligence proved successful in obtaining military information from the captured rebels. The Spaniard has a flair for torture, my friends. Cruelty is as native to him as delicacy is to a Frenchman. Some few of Colonel Gutierrez’ prisoners escaped, some he released when they had served their turn. All went back home crippled and deformed, and his popularity with the hillmen waned in inverse ratio to the number of their tribesmen he disfigured.

“*Tenez*, at length an elderly Druse gentleman named Abnel-Kader fell into our brave colonel’s none too gentle hands, and with him was captured his daughter Jahanara, called *lalla aziza*, the beautiful lady. She was indeed a lovely creature, just turned thirteen, which in the East meant budding into womanhood, with copper-red hair rolling low upon her snowy forehead and passionate, dreamy, wistful eyes into which a man looked once, then never cared to look away again.

“*Eh bien*, he was stubborn, that one. He was not at all talkative. Rather than disclose his tribesmen’s plans he chose to die, which he did in circumstances of elaborate discomfort, and Jahanara was not only a prisoner, but an orphan as well.

“*Corbleu*, my friends, romance is much like history in that the more it changes the more it is the same wherever it is found. Race, religion and the custom of blood-feud as old as the Lebanon Hills stood between them, but the captor had become the captive, and *Monsieur le Colonel* was eyebrow-deep in love with Lalla Aziza Jahanara. One wonders if she loved or hated him the more when they first kissed, whether she would not rather have drunk his heart’s blood than his eager, panting breath as he took her in his arms. *Tiens*, love conquers all, as Ovid says. In a little while she wed the man at whose command her father died in torment.

“But though the prince had wed his Cinderella it was not to be his lot to live in peaceful happiness with her. Oh, no! The Druses are a prideful, stiff-necked people. Their ancient tribal law forbids their women marrying outside their race. They have a proverb, ‘No Druse girl mates with any but a Druse, and if she does, her father and her brothers track her down and slit her heart, though she be lying in the Sultan’s arms.’ The Druse maids understand this perfectly. Before they come of marriageable age they swear an oath to keep the ancient tribal law on pain of death — death by the knife of vengeance for themselves, and if, they have borne hybrid children — ‘may they be the prey of centipedes.’

“You apprehend, my friends? Cannot you understand why

Colonel Gutierrez quit the Legion and with his Druse bride, and later with his half-blood children, lived a hunted, fugitive existence, seeing a threat in each strange face, starting frightfully at every vagrant shadow, never feeling safe in any one place very long? Yes, certainly.

“Ordinarily only the unfaithful Druse woman and her children are the objects of the tribal Nemesis, but the hillmen had a long score to settle with the colonel. The memory of the missing hands and feet, the burnt-out eyes, the slit and speechless-babbling tongues of their blood brethren festered like a canker-sore in their minds. They owed him a long-standing debt of vengeance. *Tiens*, it seems they paid it.”

“Regard him, if you please,” he ordered me at breakfast two days later, handing me a copy of the morning *Journal*.

“GUTIERREZ CHILDREN RETURN HOME”

the headline read, and under it a short item:

“Senorita Constancia Gutierrez and her brother Gregorio, who have been undergoing treatment at City Hospital for the past few days, are now fully recovered and have returned to their residence, 1502 Tuscarora Avenue, where they will hereafter be at home to their many friends.”

“Is it not magnificent?” he asked.

“I don’t see anything magnificent about it,” I returned. “It doesn’t even seem like good make-up to me. How did they ever come to stick an unimportant little item like that on the first page instead of burying it in the Society column? Who cares whether Constancia and Gregorio have gone home or not?”

“You and I do, by example,” he answered with a grin. “The good Costello does, but, most important of us all, several gentlemen from the Djebel Druse are greatly interested in their movements. As long as they were lodged in City Prison they were safe. Now that they are home again—”

“Good heavens, d’ye mean that you’re deliberately exposing them to—”

“*Mais oui*, my friend. We set the trap, we wait, we spring, *parbleu!* One might recast the old jingle to read:

“‘Will you walk into my parlor?’
Said de Grandin to the Druses.”

The cry came quivering down the hall, shrill, sharp, fright-freighted.

For half an hour we had waited in the darkened room adjoining that in which Constancia and her brother were, ears strained to catch the slightest sound which might betray

arrival of the Druses. Downstairs, patrolmen waited in the drawing-room and kitchen, two others lurked in ambush, in the back yard. Our baited trap seemed escape-proof, yet ...

The scream came once again, then stopped abruptly, like a radio-transmission when the dial is curtly turned.

“*Morbleu*, they have won through!” de Grandin cried as he blew his police whistle and we tumbled through the door and dashed into Constancia’s room.

From downstairs came the police guard, clattering and pounding on the steps. The bedroom fairly boiled with armed men, but nowhere was there any sign of the youngsters.

“No one came through th’ front way,” a policeman told Costello, and:

“Same wid th’ kitchen,” supplemented another. “A mouse couldn’t ’a’ got past us—”

“The screen is out,” de Grandin interrupted, “and a drain pipe runs within a foot of the window. A moderately agile climber might have—”

“Hey, youse down there!” Costello bawled to the patrolmen in the back yard, “seen anybody?”

There was no answer. “*Ah bah*, we waste the time,” de Grandin snapped. “It is probable they knifed the guards as they did the servant when they killed the colonel and his lady. After them!”

“They can’t ’a’ took ’em very far,” Costello panted as we rushed downstairs. “Th’ alley’s too narrow for a car; they’ll have to carry ’em.”

The two patrolmen lay inert as corpses on the lawn, but a hurried glance assured us they were merely stunned, and we left them and rushed out into the alley.

Where the luminance of a street lamp gleamed dully from the alley-head at the cross street we saw a group of hurrying figures, and de Grandin raised his pistol. “*Canaille!*” he rasped, and fired. One of the fugitives fell staggering, but the others hurried on, and as they neared the light we saw they struggled with two shrouded figures.

They had perhaps two hundred feet start of us, and de Grandin did not dare to fire again for fear of injuring the captives. Though we raced at top speed they reached the cross street before we could close the gap sufficiently to fire with safety, and as we emerged from the alley we saw them scrambling into a car waiting at the curb with engine running. Next instant they roared past us and we caught a glimpse of Constancia’s blanched face as she peered through the tonneau window.

Half a dozen blasts on Costello’s whistle brought two squad cars rushing round the corner, and the chase was on.

Perhaps a quarter-mile away, but losing distance with each revolution of the wheels, our quarry sped. De Grandin hung upon our running-board, his pistol raised, waiting opportunity to send a telling shot into the fleeing car.

Eight, ten, a dozen blocks we raced at breakneck speed, our sirens cleaving through the sultry darkness like lightning lances. We were less than half a block behind them when they swerved sharply to the right and darted down a cross street. When we reached the corner they had disappeared.

Like hounds at fault we looked about us. To the left a creek cut through the town, and most streets ended at it, only one in each five being bridged. The two cross streets to the right were torn up for repaving; they could not have fled that way, and no glimmering tail light showed in the street in which we stood.

Most of the houses in the block were deserted, and any of them might afford a refuge for the Druses and their prisoners, but nowhere, look sharply as we would, could we espy a sign of their old motor. From house to darkened house we went, looking in the back yards for some trace of the car. At last:

“My friends, come quickly!” called de Grandin. He was standing at the creek bank, pointing to the shallow muddy water. Nose-foremost in the stream was a decrepit motor, its tail light still aglow. “*Tiens*, it seems to be a habit with them, throwing their equipage into the water,” he remarked; then: “*En avant, mes enfants. A la maison!*”

“No, be of the quietness,” he warned as Costello put his shoulder to the door. “Let me do it.” From his pocket he produced a thin strip of metal, worked at the lock for a moment; then, “*Entrez!*” he invited as the lock snapped back with a soft click.

Down the narrow, dust-strewn hall we crept, tried several doors without result, then began to mount the stairway, treading on the extreme outer edges of the boards to avoid betraying creaks.

An oblong of slate-gray against the darkness told us where a window opened from the upper hall, and toward it we stole silently, halting as de Grandin gave a low hiss. Thin as a honed razor-blade, but not to be mistaken in the gloom, a narrow line of faint light trickled from beneath a tight-closed door.

“You are ready, *mon sergent?*”

“Aye, sor.”

Like twin battering-rams they launched themselves against the door. Its flimsy panels splintered as if they were match-wood, and in the subdued light of a single electric bulb pendant from the ceiling we saw three men facing two figures lashed to chairs.

Constancia Gutierrez sat facing us, and beside her was her brother. Both were gagged with wide strips of adhesive tape across their lips; both had their shoes and stockings stripped away; more wide bands of adhesive tape bound their feet and ankles to the chair legs in such manner that they could not lift them from the floor.

One of the men was emptying a small cage of woven wicker work as we crashed in, and as its little door flapped open we saw three writhing centipedes come tumbling out and strike the dusty floor beside the girl’s bare feet.

A moan of terror — a scream of anguished horror muted by the gag across her lips — came from Constancia as the poisonous insects struck the floor; then her head fell forward as her senses failed.

At the crashing of the door the three men wheeled upon us, and there was something almost military in the singleness of their gesture as they reached beneath their unkempt jackets, ripped out eighteen-inch knives and rushed at us. “*Ya Rabaioiu!* — O foreigners!” one cried, but his words were drowned out by the thunderous roar of pistols.

De Grandin’s little automatic seemed to blaze a single stream of fire, Costello’s big revolver bellowed like a field gun. It was as if the three men walked into a wall. Like troops obeying a command they halted, wavered, stumbled. One hiccupped, gasped and slumped down slowly, bending at the knees. Another spun half around and fell full length upon his face. The third stood goggling at us, empty-eyed and open-mouthed, then stepped back shufflingly, seemed to trip on nothing and fell flat on his back.

“Excellent, superb, magnificent!” de Grandin commented. “We be marksmen, thou and I, *mon sergent.*” With a leap he cleared the foremost body, bounded up into the air and came down heavily, flat-footed. His small feet banged on the bare floor like the metaled shoes of a tap-dancer as he ground the centipedes to unclean pulp beneath his heels.

“Here’s sumpin I can’t figure, sor,” admitted Costello as we proceeded with our search of the house.

A surprising miscellany had turned up in the half-hour we’d been working since we sent Constancia and Gregorio under escort to the hospital. In the room adjoining we had found the Druses’ living-quarters, an evil-smelling, unkempt room with four bed-rolls, some cook-pots and valises filled with none too clean clothing. In the basement was a table like a carpenter’s work bench, two pressure tanks, an airpump, several airbrushes of varying sizes, and, plugged into an electric outlet, a large fan. The table and the floor were mottled with dried spots of what looked like shellac, some white stuff resembling plaster of Paris, and here and there dull-glowing patches like metallic paint.

Now Costello handed us a filled-in printed form. It was a deed entitling José Gutierrez to full rights of burial in a six-grave plot in St. Rose’s Cemetery — “Lot No. 3, Range 37, Section M.”

“St. Rose’s is a Cath’lic cemetery,” Costello reminded us; “what th’ divil were these haythens doin’ wid a deed from it?”

De Grandin scarcely seemed to hear. His little eyes seemed all pupil, like those of a startled cat; his small blond mustache was fairly twitching with excitement. "The fan, the plaster, the blow-guns," he murmured. "One blows the paint and plaster with the airbrush, one dries it quickly with the fan, one then — *mais oui*, it is entirely possible. Come, my friends, let us hasten with all speed to the cemetery of the sainted Rose. I think our trail ends there!"

By no stretch of the imagination could the cemetery superintendent's greeting have been called cordial when, in response to Costello's thunderous banging on his door, he finally let us into his small, cluttered office.

"Sure, I sold a plot to Josie Gooteez," he admitted. "He an' his three brothers come to get it last Thursday. They wuz Mexicans or sumpin, I think. Anyhow, they didn't speak good English."

"And they made immediate interments?" asked de Grandin.

"Naw, they ain't buried nobody yet. But they stuck up a couple o' monuments. Damndest-lookin' things yuh ever seen, too. They come here yesterday wid two statoos in a truck, an' set 'em up theirselves — 'fore th' cement bases wuz quite finished dryin'."

"Indeed? And of what were these so weird statues, if you please?"

"Huh, your guess is good as mine about that. They looked as if they had been meant to represent a man an' woman, but they ain't so hot. Seemed to me as if they'd molded 'em in cement, then painted 'em with bronze paint, like a radiator. We hadn't ought to let such things be put up here, but that plot's in th' cheapest section, an' almost anything goes there. That's where th' haythens and such-like bury."

The superintendent's criticism of the effigies was entirely justified by all artistic canons. Standing on twin concrete bases, some eight feet apart, two statues faced each other. One was of a woman, one a man, and both were execrably executed.

The woman's costume seemed to be some sort of evening gown, but its folds were obscured by the clumsiness with which they had been reproduced. Of her features little could be discerned; the face had been so crudely shaped as to resemble a half-chiseled stone portrait. Only humps and hollows in appropriate places told where eyes and nose and mouth were.

The male figure was as uncouth as the other. Only after looking at it for some time were we able to determine that its clothes were meant to represent a dinner suit. Like the woman's, his face was little more suggestive of a human countenance than a poorly executed plaster mask.

"*Mordieu — quel imparfait!*" muttered Jules de Grandin. "They must have been in hot haste, those ones. Me, I could do a better piece of work myself."

For a moment he stood staring at the concrete atrocities, then walked across the gravelly lawn to a partly opened grave. The diggers had left tools beside the trench when they knocked off working for the day, and he took up a pick-ax, weighed it in his hand a moment, then approached the woman's statue.

"My friends," he announced, "here we end our search. *Regardez!*"

The statue swayed upon its base as he struck it with the flat side of the pick, waited for a moment, then struck a second time.

"Hey, what th' devil do you think you're doin'?" stormed the superintendent. "I'll have th' law on you—"

"Take it aisy, feller," soothed Costello. "I'm the law, an' if he wants to bust that thing to pieces you're not goin' to sthop 'im. Git me?"

The Frenchman drew his pick back once more and launched a battering smash against the statue's knees. This time it shattered like a piece of broken crockery, and where a three-foot flake of cement dropped away there showed a stretch of something pale and almost colorless. No need to tell a doctor what it was. Every first-semester student of anatomy knows dead human flesh at sight.

"Good Lord, sor, is it her?" Costello gasped.

"Indubitably it is she, my friend," de Grandin answered. "It is none other than Señora Gutierrez. And that monstrosity" — he pointed toward the other statue with his pick-ax — "conceals her husband. Call your men, *mon sergent*. Have them take these dreadful things away and break them up, then put the bodies in the city morgue."

"H'm, wonder what they did wid th' other one?" the sergeant asked.

"The servant?" The Frenchman pointed to the disturbed earth between the statues' bases. "I cannot say with certainty, but it is my guess that if you dig there you will find him."

"One reconstructs the crime," he told us sometime later at my house. "I was as much at sea as you when first we went into that house where they had taken Señorita Gutierrez and her brother. Coupled with the disappearance of the bodies from the stolen hearse, the spots of paint and plaster on the cellar floor, the airbrushes and the drying-fan should have told me how the corpses had been hidden, but it was not till you found the burying-deed that I had the idea. Even then I thought that they had bought the burial plot and put the bodies in it after casing them in cement so the earth would not cave in upon them too soon and thus disclose their hiding-place."

“But when the superintendent told us of the statues and we looked upon their dreadful crudity, the whole thing became clear to me.

“*Toutefois*, the credit goes to you, *mon sergent*. It was you who put the riddle’s key into my hands when you showed me that burial-deed. Yes, it is unquestionably so.

“Do not forget to tell them when you make your report to headquarters.”

He helped himself to an enormous drink, and:

“*Quelle facétie monumentale!*” he murmured with a wry face.

“What’s a ‘monumental joke’?” I demanded.

“*Pardieu*, the one those so abominable ones played on Colonel Gutierrez and his lady — to make them stand as monuments above their own graves!”

Stoneman's Memorial

THE ADVENTURES OF THE FAMOUS LITTLE GHOST BREAKER SINCE HIS LAST ESCAPADE IN WEIRD TALES

"In answer to numerous inquiries concerning the whereabouts and activities of Dr. Jules de Grandin and Capt. Sir Haddingway Ingraham Jameson Ingraham (less formally known as Hiji) during the past three years I am happy to be able to supply the following data:

De Grandin went to France immediately upon the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 and was serving in Syria when the truce was made with Germany and the French Republic abolished. The fiery little patriot at once repudiated Vichy and all its works, made his way to Africa and joined the Free French forces of Gen. Charles de Gaulle and became a captain in the *corps de santé*. A severe case of enteritis, contracted during the unsuccessful attack on Dakar, and the tardy realization of his superiors that he was far more valuable as an intelligence and liaison officer than as a military surgeon caused him to be sent to England and later to this country, where he at once went to see Dr. Samuel Trowbridge at Harrisonville, N.J.

Hiji, who was a captain of Houssa policemen in British West Central Africa (and enjoying it hugely) when Poland was invaded, resigned his commission and became a major of infantry in the B.E.F. In the retreat from Dunkerque his right femur was shattered by a shell fragment, and he was invalided out of service and sent as an attaché to the British Consulate General at New York. He can be seen limping down Fifth Avenue or lower Broadway almost any day, and usually has Sunday dinner with Dr. Trowbridge. Lady Ingraham, his wife, is serving at home in the Women's Territorial Auxiliary, and both he and she declare, "When this shindy's over we're goin' to Surrey or America or some nice, quiet place and settle down to raisin' flowers and kids and bulldogs." — S.Q.

THE REUNION had been a huge success. Norah McGinnis, delighted at de Grandin's return, had fairly outdone herself with dinner, and if she had not quite killed the fatted calf for him her oysters with champagne, turtle soup with dry sherry, filet of sole with graves and roast pheasant with burgundy was a more than merely satisfactory substitute. Now with the firelight beating back the shadows with its rosy lashes and casting changing highlights on the drawn curtains, I looked about the study much as a proud father might regard his family at a Thanksgiving homecoming. The room was redolent with a mixture of cigar smoke, the scent of burning apple wood and the bouquet of

old whiskey and older brandy.

Across the hearth from me sat Jules de Grandin, small-boned and delicately built, sensitive and neurotic as a woman, with a few more lines in his forehead, a few more tiny wrinkles round the corners of his eyes, a slightly tensed look in his gaze, but obviously happy as a schoolboy on a holiday. His little, round blue eyes were agleam with pleasure, his small wheat-blond mustache was fairly quivering with ecstatic joy as he passed the fragile, bubble-thin inhaler back and forth beneath his nose before he took a reverent sip of the pale cognac that was old when Andrew Jackson held New Orleans from the British. Hiji, a little thinner than I'd known him in the old days, and with several white hairs showing in the little black mustache that was in such sharp contrast to his pewter-colored hair, seemed to fill the sofa with his broad ruggedness. He had absorbed prodigious quantities of Scotch and water since we came from the table, and with each succeeding drink the tense lines in his face seemed softening. Detective Sergeant Costello, smooth-shaven, ruddy-faced, white-haired and even bigger than Hiji, filled his easy chair completely, and like Hiji took enormous quantities of Scotch, but took it without water. His smooth, pink face and blue, ingenuous Irish eyes were curiously misleading. He had the look, and often the precise manner of a suffragan bishop, plus an emergency vocabulary that would have been the envy of an army mule-skinner.

Ten minutes out of Newark Airport the night plane for the West roared overhead, its motors droning like a swarm of angry hornets. Hiji poured the last four ounces of his drink down in a single gulp and looked up quizzically. "Not long since we'd been duckin' for the cellar when we heard one o' those blokes, eh, Frenchy?" he asked de Grandin.

"*Tu parles, mon vieux,*" the little Frenchman agreed with a smile. "Me, I am — how do you say him? muscle-tied? — from running into rabbit-holes when they appeared. *Parbleu,* but it was execrable, no less. When one has finished dinner, one desires to relax, to feel the pleasant combination of the process of digestion and slow poisoning by alcohol and nicotine. But did *les Boches* think of that? Damn no! They spoiled my after-dinner rest at least a thousand times. *Cochons!* If one were to come to me now and tell me, 'Jules de Grandin, here is fifty thousand francs. It is all yours if you will rise and move from where you sit' — *morbleu,* but I would tweak him by the nose and hurl the proffered bribe

back in his face. I would let nothing interfere with the luxury of this hour—”

“Beg pardon, sor,” Norah came to the study door apologetically, “but there’s a young man askin’ fer th’ Sergeant, Dr. Trowbridge. He says as how—”

“Arrah, Norah darlin’, hold yer whist!” broke in Costello reprovingly. “Did ye not hear Dr. de Grandin say we couldn’t be disturbed th’ now? Tell th’ young felly to come round to Headquarters in th’ mornin’. ’Tis meself’s off duty now, an’—”

“But, Sergeant acushla, ’tis one of yer own lads as wants ter see ye,” she persisted. “He says as how his name is Dennie Flannigan, an’—”

“Does he, now, bad cess to th’ young omadhaun? Well—” he looked at us apologetically, then, to de Grandin:

“Would ye be afther listinin’ to th’ lad, Dr. de Grandin, sor? He’s in bad trouble, so he is, and likely to be in worse before all’s said an’ done. Ye see, his father, Dennie Flannigan — God rest ’is soul! — wuz me buddy when I wuz first appointed to th’ force, an’ many a night we walked th’ same beat together. Killed in th’ line o’ duty, he wuz, too, an’ I’m responsible for young Dennie’s appointment.

“There’s been some trouble round about th’ town these last few weeks, sor. A killer’s on th’ loose, and devil a hand can we lay on ’im, so th’ newspapers is givin’ us a goin’ over. Well, sor, ’twas Dennie’s hard luck to be walkin’ down th’ street th’ other night when th’ killer wuz out. He heard a woman scream an’ ran to help her, an’ caught th’ murderer almost red-handed.”

“Eh?” Jules de Grandin raised slim black brows. “Since when has it been a misfortune to catch a criminal at his crimes, *mon brave*?”

“That’s just it, sor. I said he almost caught ’im. But not quite. Th’ killer’s on th’ lam, ye see, an’ Dennie orders ’im, to halt, an’ when he doesn’t he lets fly wid everything he has. Pumps five shots into him, an’ still he keeps on runnin’.

“Well, anyone can miss a shot or two sor, I’ve done it meself, but five shots in succession at almost point-blank range, that ain’t so good. An’ th’ alibi he turned in didn’t help his case much, either.”

“*Qu’est-ce donc?* What was his excuse?”

Costello’s eyes were wide and serious, not mocking or ironical, as he looked in de Grandin’s face. “He said it wuz a stone man, sor.”

“*Que diable?* My ears have played me false. I thought I heard you say he said it was a man of stone, my Sergeant.”

“That’s right, sor. He said it was a stone man — a statue that ran like it wuz livin’. He says his bullets had no more effect on it than they’d have had on a stone wall. He knows he didn’t miss, an’ I believe him, for he’s a good shot,

but—”

”Drunk, that’s what he was,” commented Hiji, helping himself to a fresh drink. “Drunk as a goat, seein’ livin’ statues and pink elephants. That’s what’s the matter.”

Costello nodded gloomily. “That’s what th’ assistant commissioner says, too, but I’ve got me doubts about it. Dennie’s a member o’ th’ Cath’lic Total Abstinence Society, an’ if he’d had a drink ’twa sumpin new for ’im.”

“Always has to be a first time, you know, old son.”

“*Taisez-vous!* Be silent, species of camel!” de Grandin ordered sharply “Who art thou to point the finger of derision at a drunkard?” Then, to Costello:

“And you believe this, *mon sergent*?”

“Well, sor,” Costello was embarrassed but deadly serious, “I wouldn’t go that far but I don’t think th’ lad wuz lyin’. Not knowingly, anyhow.”

“A Frenchman and an Irishman,” commented Hiji sadly to his almost-empty glass, “tell either of ’em that the moon’s made o’ green cheese, and they’ll believe you—”

“Attend me, if you please, my friend,” de Grandin interrupted as he leaned toward Hiji, two little wrinkles deepening suddenly between his brows, “shake off your drunkenness a moment, if you will be so kind. To refuse to deny is not to affirm. Me, I have the open mind, so has the good sergeant. So have you up to a certain point, but no further. If I tell you that a listener to the radio can hear a speaker’s words a thousand miles away before those in the same room hear it you say, ‘Very likely, that is scientific.’ But when you hear an honest policeman encountered what he thought was a stone statue running down the street you scoff and say that he was drunk. Yet fifty years ago one statement would have seemed as absurd as the other, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

Hiji grinned at him and smothered back a hiccough. “You’ve definitely got something there, Frenchy. I apologize. Have Costello bring his stone-man-seein’ copper in and let’s hear what he’s got to say. I’ll suspend judgment till his story’s told, but it had better be good. I can’t afford to take time from my drinkin’ to listen to old wives’ tales.”

Patrolman Dennis Flannigan was a fine, honest-looking youngster. “Black Irish” — smooth, clear skin, black curly hair and eyes so dark a brown that they seemed black.

“Have a seat, Dennie lad,” commanded Costello when introductions were completed, and:

“Have a drink?” asked Hiji as the young policeman settled in a chair.

“No, thank you, sir, I never use it,” he refused, and Costello shot a glance of triumph at the Englishman.

De Grandin nodded affably. “Quite right, *mon enfant*. You have as much right not to drink as I have to do so.” Then with one of his quick, elfin smiles, “The Sergeant tells us

you had an unique experience the other night; that you met a miscreant in armor that defied your bullets as a tin roof turns the rain aside. It must have been a great surprise to you, *n'est-ce-pas?*?"

A stubborn look came in the youngster's face. "It wasn't armor, sir," he contradicted. "The man — the thing — was solid stone, and turned my bullets as if they'd been made o' putty."

"Eh, how is it that you say? A man of stone? You seriously expect us to believe that?"

"No, sir, I don't. I don't expect anyone to believe me. If someone told me the same thing I'd say he was drunk or crazy or both, but it's the truth, sir, just the same.

"It was last Sat'day night, or Sunday morning, about ten minutes after twelve. I can fix the time pretty well, for the clock in St. Dominic's tower had just finished striking midnight when I turned in my call from the box at Bay and Tunnell Streets. My next call was from Fox and Pettibone, and I'd covered almost half the distance to it when I heard a woman screaming bloody murder somewhere down the block where Blake Street crosses Tunnell.

"There's all sorts o' cries, sir, and pretty soon a cop gets so he knows 'em. At first I thought this woman had a case o' jim-jams — it's a rough neighborhood, with lots o' drinkin' and the like o' that goin' on all night — but when she screamed the second time I knew the fear o' death was on her, so I took out down the block as fast as I could leg it.

"Blake Street ain't so well lighted, and some of the tough kids in the neighborhood are almost always breaking the few lights they have, but there was a street light burnin' almost in the middle of the block, and I could see almost as well as if it had been daytime. Something white was bending down above what seemed to be a woman, shaking her like a bulldog would a cat, and I knew there was a murder being done, so I let out a yell and drew me gun.

"Just as I came up with 'em the white thing dropped the woman — no sir, that ain't quite right — it didn't drop her, it threw her half across the street, like a man could throw a bundle of old clothes, sir, and then, without even turning round went down Blake Street toward the waterfront. That's when I saw it plain, sir, for it passed right under the street light. It was a marble statue, sir; a marble statue, bone-white and just about a man's size, maybe a little smaller, but heavier. Lots heavier. I could hear its stone feet clumpin' on the sidewalk as it walked away, and when it broke into a run it sounded like a steam-hammer that's been stepped up to about a hundred an' eighty strokes a minute."

"U'm?" de Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache. "One sees. And what transpired then, if you please?"

"Well, sir, I'd seen these here now livin' statues in the theatre — you know, the kind they have when actors put on white tights and smear white powder on their hands and hair and faces, then pose against a black background? I thought at first this guy was in some sort o' costume like that, with maybe metal bottoms on his shoes, so I shouted to him to halt, and when he kept on goin' I fired at him. My first shot must have missed, so I let him have four others, and while he had a good head-start o' me I don't think that I missed him all four times. In fact, I know I didn't."

"*Comment?* What makes you so positive?"

A flush washed up the young man's cheeks and brow as he thrust a hand inside his blouse and drew a twist of paper from an inner pocket. "This, sir," he answered as he tore the paper open and dropped its contents into Jules de Grandin's hand. "I saw that fly from it as it ran down the street. I know my bullet knocked it off when it struck and ricocheted."

De Grandin outlined his chin with the thumb and forefinger of one hand while he balanced the white marble splinter in the hollow of the other. "U'm?" he commented, and again, "U'm?" Then, abruptly, "How was he dressed, this naughty stone person?"

"He wasn't, sir."

"Eh, how is it you say?"

"He was necked, sir. Stripped bare as your hand, and I could see the light shone on his back and shoulders as he ran, but — it's funny how you notice little things without even realizin' you're looking at 'em — there was no play of muscles underneath his skin as he ran. He was all smooth and white and shiny, just like any other statue, and when I saw the chip fly off of him I reached down and picked it up whilst I was runnin' after him. He lost me, though, sir. Turned the corner of James and Blake about a dozen — maybe twenty — yards ahead of me, and when I got there he was gone. I hunted for him for awhile, then went back to the woman."

"She was dead, sir, and all broken up. It was as if she'd been a rag doll that some spoiled brat had torn up. Her face was all crushed in, her neck was limp as rope and it seemed to me like both her shoulders had been broken."

"Yes? And then?"

"There wasn't anything to do but call the precinct, sir, so I put in a call and waited by her till the wagon came from the morgue. Then I filed my report, sayin' just what I've told you, and when the assistant commissioner read it he went wild. Told me I was crazy, or had been drinkin' while on duty, and gave me half an hour to draw a new report or stand charges. I wouldn't do it, sir. It was a stone thing, not a man, that killed that woman, whether anybody believes it or not. So now I'm relieved of duty and if I can't prove it was a livin' statue that committed that murder I guess I'll have to

turn me badge in.”

“Ah-ha. You showed this bit of stone to *Monsieur le Commissaire*?”

“Yes, sir,” grimly, “I showed it to him.”

“And what did he say to it?”

“Applesauce.”

“*Comment?* He said sauce of the apple, no more? He made no move to investigate—”

“He was drunk, I’m tellin’ you,” asserted Hiji gravely. “Drunk as an owl. Too tellingly intoxicated to take the proper steps. Blasted inefficiency, that’s what it is. If one of my Houssas told me he’d seen a ju-ju runnin’ through the forest and showed me where he’d chipped a piece of it away with his rifle, d’ye think I’d talk about applesauce, or marmalade or jam? You know ol’ Hiji better’n that! No, sir, drunk or sober, I’d investigate. That’s what I’d do.”

The shadow of a smile lurked underneath the tightly waxed ends of de Grandin’s small blond mustache. “I am like Balaam’s ass, all ears, my friend,” he declared. “How, by example, would you investigate this case?”

Hiji looked at him with the long, earnest stare of one far gone in liquor. “Oh, so you think I wouldn’t know what to do, eh? Think I’m too drunk to know my business? Listen, my small French friend, once a policeman always a policeman. The constable says the bloke was naked, doesn’t he? That ain’t particularly shockin’, but it’s interestin’. There’s lots o’ statuary around this town, but not much of it’s nude, ’specially the male figures. Who the devil wants to look at a nude man? Think customers would go to burlesque houses to see some cove march up an down the stage an’ strip his shorts and singlet off? You know they wouldn’t. All right, then, the hunt’s considerably narrowed down. So I’d check up every statuary group containin’ nude male figures, and look at ’em all closely to see if they showed bullet marks or had a piece chipped off ’em. Then, when I found one answerin’ the prescription I’d know I had the murderer, and I’d hang him. Yes, sir, hang him higher than I hanged old Mebili the witch-doctor when he started monkey-shines up in the Luabala Country—”

“*Nom d’un porc d’un nom d’un porc!*” de Grandin interrupted in delight. “It may be that it is the whiskey and not you who speaks, my old, my priceless one, but whether it be you or alcohol that speaks, you talk the good, hard sense. But yes!

“Go home and have no further fear of discharge, *mon enfant*,” he told Dennis Flannigan. “I, Jules de Grandin, will assist you, and though we have a case of utmost difficulty, we shall win, for Jules de Grandin is one devilish clever fellow. Assuredly.”

When Flannigan had gone he turned once more to Hiji with the pleased expression of a cat that contemplates a bowl

of cream. “Come, *brave compagnon*,” he invited as he poured a fresh supply of liquor into their glasses, “it has been long since we were satisfactorily drunk together. For why are we waiting?”

Despite the often-quoted copybook axiom to the effect that wine is a mocker and strong drink an abomination they were both as fresh as the proverbial daisy when they came down to the dining room next morning and did more than ample justice to a breakfast of orange juice, cereal, pancakes and sausage and broiled mackerel. Hiji, who must report at the consulate at ten, limped off to catch the nine-fifteen train for New York and, his seventh cup of well-creamed coffee disposed of, de Grandin grinned at me across the empty table.

“What time are office hours today, *mon vieux*?” he asked, lighting a vile-smelling French cigarette.

“No office hours this morning,” I answered. “I’ve a patient to look in on at Mercy Hospital and two more at the Consolidated. After that I’m free till five this afternoon.”

“*Bien*,” he nodded, “and you will kindly chauffeur me around the town, as in the good old days?”

“Be glad to. Where shall we go first?”

“U’m,” he considered a moment. “To the police headquarters, if you will be so kind. I would have a word with *Monsieur l’Inférieur Commissaire*. *Ah bah*, a fool he must be, that one!”

Wendell Winterbotham, first assistant police commissioner, sat behind his glass-topped wide desk decorated with twin fountain pens, a telephone, brass-bound desk blotter and an amber glass bud-vase in which stood a single crimson rose and smirked at Jules de Grandin with the deprecating, irritating smile of a man who was not born yesterday. “And you seriously expect me to put credence in this absurd story, Dr. de Grandin?” he asked.

“I seriously do, *Monsieur le Commissaire*. I do not say, or even think, it was a stone man who committed this murder, but I do believe the young policeman thinks it was, and the marble splinter which he shot from it — and which I hear he showed to you in support of his story — gives some weight to his belief. It may well be the miscreant wore some fantastic sort of disguise—”

“Bosh! Who’d go around in such a get-up to commit a murder? It just doesn’t make sense—”

“Assuredly, *M’sieur*. Nor does it make sense that he beat his victim almost to a pulp when one blow would have killed her. When Sergeant Bertram disinterred the bodies of the dead from Paris cemeteries and bashed them with a gravedigger’s spade, that made no sense, either; when Jack the Ripper killed his victims in the London slums and mutilated

their corpses, that made no sense to normal men, but—” he gestured the ending with a wave of his hand — “there are strange things buried in the secret mausoleums of the mind, *Monsieur le Commissaire*. Lust for power, lust for cruelty, lust for murder — savage urges to deface and rend and tear and slay our fellow being, they are all there. And while we keep them under lock and key they are still there, lying like the vampires to arise and walk from their coffins when the opportunity arises. But certainly. This murderer, this killer, he may be eminently respectable by day, an honored lawyer or doctor, perhaps a businessman or even clergyman. That is when he plays the rôle of Dr. Jekyll. But when the ghost of Mr. Hyde comes forth to prowl, what power of deepest hell may not be loosed?”

“H’m.” The commissioner grew thoughtful. He was not a stupid man, only opinionated and “practical.” Before becoming assistant commissioner he had been director of a mail order house, and prided himself on having brought hard-headed business efficiency to public service. “You think we may be dealing with a homicidal maniac?”

De Grandin raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug that no one but a Frenchman can achieve. “*Comme qui dirait?* The ear-marks of the killing point to it. If, as we may assume, this is a second Sergeant Bertram we deal with — he was a mellow-mannered, lovable young man when not gripped by his mania — it may well be that he puts on the disguise of a statue when he goes upon his killing quests. It may be that he has devised a sort of armor that will defy bullets—”

“A crazy man?” scoffed Winterbotham.

“As you say, *M’sieur*, a crazy man. But a crazy man who is brilliant and talented in normal times and uses his great talents to assist him in the crimes he commits when his second, evil personality is uppermost. It could be so, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Why, yes, I suppose so. Wait a minute—” Winterbotham pressed a button underneath his desk, and, to the clerk who answered the summons, “Bring me the files in the Jukes, Mahoney and Ebbert cases, please.”

He ruffled through the papers, then: “I hadn’t thought of it, Doctor,” he confessed, “but what you say puts a new light on this case. Here’s Sally Jukes, a woman of no lawful occupation, arrested several times for vagrancy and half a dozen times for soliciting. She was killed in Deal Street shortly after midnight three weeks ago. Her—”

“One moment, if you please, *Monsieur le Commissaire*,” de Grandin interrupted. “The other two, the Mahoney and Ebbert women, what were their occupations, if you know?”

The commissioner gave a slight start. “No known — or, rather, too well known means of support—”

De Grandin nodded. “There was no question, then, I take

it, concerning their morals, which, *hélas*, were all on the wrong side of the question mark?”

“That’s right, Doctor. All three were—”

“*Exactement*. And how, if you please, did *la* Jukes meet her end?”

“The coroner’s report shows death was due to dislocation of the spinal column between the second and third cervical vertebrae. There was also a fracture of the right occiput, and the frontal bone, both shoulders—”

“*Précisément, M’sieur*. And were not the two other women similarly broken?”

“Ye-es,” the commissioner thumbed through the records of the other cases. “You’re right, Doctor. The coroner’s physician’s findings in all three cases are almost identical. We don’t know that all three were killed by the same person, of course, but the technique of the murders—”

“Was the calling card of the assassin, by blue! Did not I say it?”

Winterbotham’s somber eyes showed traces of amusement. “What do you want me to do, Doctor? Accept young Flannigan’s report? Give out to the newspapers that an animated statue’s running amok, that the police can’t catch it, that their bullets can’t hurt it, and that no man’s life is safe?”

“By no means, *M’sieur*. Tell the press you have a clue, a dozen of them, if you wish, and that you’re satisfied the killings have no connection with each other and were perpetrated by different persons. That will pique the murderer’s vanity, and will also lull him into feeling safe. Make no mistake, he reads the papers, this one. He gloats in secret at the thought that he has foiled the police, that he can murder with impunity. Yes, certainly. *Bien*. Let him gloat. Soon comes our turn. Meantime, I pray you, do not be too hard on the young Flannigan. He is an honest boy, else he would not stick to his story so stubbornly.”

“All right, Doctor. I think your advice is sound, and I’ll not press charges against Flannigan. May we count on your cooperation?”

“A hundred and forty-five percent, *M’sieur!*”

We shook hands all around at parting, and for a moment I was fearful that de Grandin would implant a kiss on Winterbotham’s cheeks for promising to restore Dennis Flannigan to duty.

“*Non, merci*,” he denied when I suggested that I drive him on his other errands. “I shall do very nicely afoot, my friend. I have important missions to perform, and you are due at the hospitals. Go call upon your patients, but bid Madame Nora to wait dinner for me. Unless I am more mistaken than I think, I shall have the appetite of the ostrich when I return.”

He was home in time to mix the cocktails, and as I sipped

the pale gold fluid from the beaded glass I realized with a pang that not since he had left for France when war broke out had I tasted a perfect Martini. These were pluperfect, with the vermouth cutting the flavor of the gin just enough to leave the dryness intact, the Angostura blending faultlessly with both. "Was it a successful day?" I asked as I helped myself to a second portion from the frost-encrusted shaker.

"Eminently, my friend," he assured me. "I have found that which I sought; now I desire to hear that—"

"Dinner is served, if ye plaze, sor," announced Nora from the doorway, and de Grandin who would no more think of keeping dinner waiting than of whistling in church was silent till the soup was served. Then, as Nora put the plate of steaming mulligatawny before him, "Tell me, Friend Trowbridge, do you know the Spring of Temperance?"

"The Spring—" I countered, wondering if he were being facetious, then as recollection dawned, "you mean the fountain in Dunellan Park? Why, yes, I've seen it, but I don't believe I ever really noticed it. Why do you ask?"

He spread a dab of butter on his hot roll and give me a quick, level glance. "Me, I saw her today. I examined her most carefully, and—"

"You mean—" the look in his eyes gave me the clue, but it seemed so utterly fantastic — "there were bullet marks on it"

"Four," he replied sententiously. "The young Flannigan did not lie to us, or to the *commissaire de police*. But no. Also, I matched the little marble splinter which he left with me into a little, so small notch knocked from the arm of the standing male figure."

Nora set the joint before me, a rolled beef-roast, brown and crisp on the outside with glazed potatoes turned in its juice, and for a moment there was silence as I carved, then, when she'd left us to ourselves once more: "You will recall the group of statuary, perhaps? A child and young woman bend above the basin of the fountain, back of them, and leaning toward the spring, is a male figure, nude as are the other two, and slightly less than full life-size."

"Yes, I remember now. It caused considerable scandal when it was unveiled. Some of our ladies' organizations thought its undraped figures might corrupt youth. That's why they put it in Dunellan Park instead of—"

"One comprehends," he cut in. "The female mind, especially in America, is something which no one can understand — or perhaps which one understands entirely too well if he is versed in psychology. But it is of the statues that I speak, not of their aesthetic qualities. I searched the city with the comb of the fine teeth, and was all but despairing when at last I came upon that group. 'Jules de Grandin,' I then said to me, 'it is here your quest ends, either in success

or failure.' 'You are entirely correct, as usual, Jules de Grandin,' I reply to me, and forthwith I examined every square inch of those *sacré* statues' marble hide.

"And what did I discover? *Morbleu*, upon the back of the male standing figure I found three small, shallow, flattened pits with gray discolorations which indubitably were the marks of soft-nosed leaden bullets. But certainly. And on the triceps of the figure's left arm was a little notch, also discolored as from a lead missile, and into it I set the marble splinter left with me by the young Flannigan. *Parbleu*, it fitted perfectly, like the slipper on the little, dainty foot of *Cendrillon*. Yes. Certainly. Of course."

"You're certain they were bullet marks? Children, especially boys, are everlastingly committing acts of vandalism—"

"*Ah bah!* You ask me if I know the tell-tale mark of the bullet on stone? Me, Jules de Grandin, the soldier? My friend, I know him as I know the lines of my own hand. Have I not seen him on the walls where military executions have been carried out? Of course. I tell you, good Friend Trowbridge, there is no doubt about it. Fantastic and incredible as it may seem, it was that statue which repelled the bullets of young Flannigan, that very marble image that killed Lucy Ebbert, and by almost inescapable inference Sally Jukes and Mae Mahoney also."

"Well," I forced a smile that did not go much below the surface, for despite the absurdity of his statement his deadly earnest manner made me feel uncomfortable, "if that's the case we're in a bad fix. As Winterbotham said this morning, a marble statue is running amok and the police are powerless against it. If a marble image can come to life and go on a rampage, what is to prevent those bronze colossi in Military Park from taking the warpath?"

"Jules de Grandin," he returned smiling. He did not make the statement boastfully, but simply, as an existing fact. "I shall take measures to insure their tranquility, my friend."

"What measures?"

He drew his shoulders upward in a shrug of complete eloquence. "How should I know? The time is not yet ripe, my friend. When it has come, *pardieu*, Jules de Grandin will be there also!"

"You certainly think highly of yourself," I admitted, "but it seems to me you've taken on a job that's worthy of your best this time. If bullets won't stop this stone murderer, the only thing left to do is smash it with a sledge hammer, and you'd find yourself involved with the police if you tried that. I doubt if even your persuasiveness could convince the Park Department that one of their prize groups of statuary has developed homicidal tendencies. Besides, if one statue has come alive to commit murder, what's to stop the rest? You can't tear down or break up every piece of sculpture in the

city. Why, counting the monuments in the cemeteries, there must be at least—”

“You are informing me?” he broke in with a slightly worried frown. “No, my friend, as you say, we cannot embark on a course of wholesale image-smashing. Besides, this business of the monkey, if I interpret it correctly, is more a symptom than a disease. One does not treat a case of ache, by example, by local applications, one treats the gastrointestinal disturbance which is the etiological factor. So it must be in this case. We must reach the underlying cause of all this nonsense, and remove it — or him.”

I nodded and, irrelevantly, it seemed to me, he asked abruptly: “This Monsieur Joseph Stoneman, who was he, if you please? A plaque set in the fountain’s base informs the beholder that he bestowed it on the city as a memorial to his son who was, one takes it, killed in the war.”

“No, he wasn’t killed in battle,” I rejoined. “He met his death in a speakeasy brawl. Joe Stoneman was a manufacturer of carbonated beverages and made a fortune out of them. His Jingerade and Kolatonik were famous at one time, but since repeal of prohibition they’ve lost popularity.”

“Ah? The public ceased insulting its collective stomach with his nostrums when once more it had a chance to drink light wines and beer?”

“Not quite. Stoneman was almost fanatically opposed to alcohol in every and any form. He was one of our foremost dry crusaders, and almost succeeded in getting a bill through the legislature prohibiting the use of alcohol as a solvent in medicines. It took the combined efforts of the Medical Society and Pharmacists’ Association to defeat it. He was credited with donating almost fantastic sums to finance the dry cause, too.”

“One sees completely. It was an excellent advertisement for his own non-intoxicating beverages.”

“No one believed that. He seemed so utterly sincere, but when repeal became operative one of the first things he did was to set up a huge brewery and advertise his beer almost as extensively as he had his soft drinks. His advertising campaign announced that as long as people were to be allowed to drink intoxicants anyway he felt it his duty to make a good beer which they would drink in preference to hard liquor. Nobody believed him. His former associates in the dry cause turned against him as a traitor and saloon proprietors and tavern keepers, remembering how he’d led the prosecutions for infraction of the prohibition laws refused to handle his beer, so both his soft drink and beer businesses fell flat and he sold his brewery and factories and retired.”

He frowned thoughtfully. “One sees. And what of his son’s death? You said it occurred in a speakeasy? Strange

the son of such a father should die so.”

I nodded. “It was something of a scandal. The youngster was a harum-scarum sort of lad, and while his father sought to dry up liquor at the source, he worked industriously to cut down the supply from the consumer’s angle. One evening there was a brawl in a speakeasy, and when the police came they found young Stoneman lying in the street outside the place with his head staved in and his neck broken—”

“*Morbleu*, can such things be?” he almost shouted.

“Eh?” I jerked back. “What d’ye mean?”

“His injuries, my friend. He had his head staved in; he had his neck broken — so did the three women killed by the statue. Do not you see some connection?”

“I don’t quite see what you’re driving at,” I confessed.

The smile he flashed at me was infectious as a yawn. “I am not sure that I do, either,” he admitted. “It is a puzzle picture that we work on, my friend. As yet we have but a few pieces, and the pattern is obscure, but presently we shall have more, and then we shall see order emerging from this apparent chaos. Meantime, why distress ourselves unduly? Shall not we go to the study for coffee?”

He came bustling in next afternoon and thrust a copy of the journal into my hand. “We must surely go to this, my friend,” he informed me, indicating an item on the third page with the tip of a well manicured finger. “It will be of the interest.”

The paragraph announced that Dr. Bradley-Stoker of the Universities of Edinburgh and Dublin would lecture on the secret writings of Cornelius Agrippa that night at Sawyer Hall.

“I don’t think I’d be interested,” I told him. “Why don’t you go alone? I’ve had a rather trying day and — what’s the matter with you?” He was grinning like a small boy who observes a portly gentleman in a high hat coming toward him on a snowy day.

“Me, I promise you will not be bored,” he assured me. “It may be possible the learned doctor will not show up for his lecture, but I am certain that another will.”

“Who?”

“Wait and see, my friend. If all goes as I think that all will go I shall explain to you completely. I have been busy as a hive of bees today. I have made investigation of the death of young Monsieur Stoneman, and some of the things I found out give me furiously to think. The speakeasy where he was done to death was in Tunnell Street, that most unsavory thoroughfare where Sally Jukes came to her end, and near which both the Ebbert and Mahoney women were murdered. Moreover, all three of them had been among those present when he was killed. There was another there also, one Nellie Cook, and this afternoon I saw and talked with her.”

“Yes?” I asked, puzzled. “And what is the connection—”

“She is, according to the popular phrase, down on her luck at present, having been but recently released from jail. Once she was a singer, a night club entertainer, and specifically a *chanteuse* in the Hard-Boiled Owl, the speakeasy where the young Stoneman met his finish. *Tiens*, he was the devil of a fellow, that young man. He thought that he could best professional gamblers at their own craft, and on the night that he was killed had been engaged in a crap game with three young gangsters, boy friends of the girls, who had, in every probability, inveigled him into playing. *Tenez*, a blind man could foresee the outcome. He lost and lost again, then finally decided he had been cheated and made demand for his money, threatening to expose the dive and have his father prosecute it and all its inmates.

“Thereupon the three young gentlemen who rejoiced in the names of Handsome Harry, Gentleman Jim and Lefty Louis set upon him with brass knuckles and blackjacks. When they were finished with him he was entirely wrecked.”

“Did the girl tell you this? I never heard anyone was prosecuted for his murder.”

“But no. The gentlemen involved made themselves scarce, and either through loyalty or fear of reprisal the girls refused to implicate them. Their story was that they and the young Stoneman had been innocently drinking when three strange hoodlums rushed in and assaulted him, apparently for no reason.”

“I should think she’d be afraid to tell you this, even now,- I objected. “Gangland has a way of dealing with informers.”

“Quite yes, but in this instance there is little fear. Gentleman Jim and Handsome Harry met their several deaths some years ago in a gang battle; Lefty Louis recently went to his reward in the tuberculosis ward of a state prison. So of all those witnessing or taking part in *l’affaire* Stoneman only this Cook woman remains. You will see her tonight at the lecture.”

I laughed outright. “A discourse on the secret charms and spells of Cornelius Agrippa seems the least likely place to meet a superannuated trull.”

Nevertheless, she will be there. I have made sure of it. Today I took her to the shops and bought her everything that she needed, including several drinks, a manicure and a fresh hair-bleach. She was pathetically grateful, and will be more grateful still for the fee I have promised her if she acts and speaks exactly as I have instructed her.”

A neat placard announced the lecture when we arrived at Sawyer Hall, but it appeared that Dr. Bradley-Stoker would not have a large house. The ticket seller yawned in his booth and the doorman had no duties to perform. When we went in we found we had the little auditorium to ourselves except for

a fat man and a woman muffled to the ears in a fur-collared coat. For half an hour we sat there, then an usher stepped out on the stage and announced Dr. Bradley-Stoker had been called out of town on urgent business. Accordingly there would be no lecture, and our money would be refunded to us at the box office.

The fat man was before us at the window, and what little of him I could see I disliked instinctively. When he turned his face it seemed to me his puffy red cheeks threatened to engulf his little eyes completely. It was a face like that of some sleek, sleepy cat, more animal than human.

The woman crowded on our heels, and indignation fairly exuded from her. “It’s an imposition,” she told no one in particular in a sharp, strident voice, “bringing us out on a night like this for nothing!”

As she voiced her protest Jules de Grandin gave a start of surprise and then turned toward her. “Why, Mademoiselle Nellie!” he exclaimed. “This is indeed a pleasure. May I present my friend Dr. Trowbridge? Friend Trowbridge, this is Mademoiselle Nellie Cook.”

With the quick suspicion of a wink at me he continued, keeping his voice up, “I did not know that you were interested in Cornelius Agrippa, *Mademoiselle*.” The quick flick of his eyes bade me take notice of the fat man at the ticket seller’s window.

I turned my head a little and was aware of a sharp feeling of revulsion. The man was regarding us with a cold, steady look, the sort of look a cat might have before a mouse-hole, and at the woman’s reply I could see a sudden gleam in his dull eyes, as if their lead had been scratched to malicious brightness.

“I surely am interested,” she was assuring de Grandin, and she, too, spoke much louder than seemed necessary. “Why, they say he had some sort of charm by which he could make stone images come to life and do whatever he commanded them. That’s what I wanted to hear about particularly tonight. You know—” there was a sharp catch in her voice, as though her breath had halted momentarily — “I can’t get it out of my head that poor Sally and Mae and Lucy were not killed by some fiend as the papers seem to think, but—” her voice sank to a sharp whisper that could have been heard in a boiler shop — “but by *an animated statue*, Doctor!”

We drove a block or two in silence, then: “Well, did I put it over all right, sir?” she asked de Grandin. “I gave the act all I had.”

“You did it excellently, *Mademoiselle*,” he replied. “Here is your promised reward.” A bill changed hands, and, “Where can we put you down?” he asked.

“Any place where I can get a drink. Ugh! When I think of how that little fat guy looked at me I feel cold right down to

my toes and need a good, stiff snifter.”

The little Frenchman nodded sympathetically. “I quite agree, *Mademoiselle*. And I suggest that you stay indoors till the new moon appears, also.”

“I’ll think about it,” she returned with a laugh as she climbed down from the car, “but after a girl’s just finished a college course she wants to get out under the bright lights, you know. G’night, sir, and thanks.”

“Now what the deuce is all this nonsense?” I demanded as we turned toward home. “I don’t believe there was a lecture scheduled for tonight at all, and—”

“My perspicacious, good Friend Trowbridge,” he broke in with a chuckle. “Of course there was not! The learned Dr. Bradley-Stoker exists in my mind and nowhere else. I hired the hall, I put the notice in *le Journal*, I hired the usher to make the announcement—”

“Of all the silly, childish charades!” I exclaimed. “Whatever were you thinking of to play a prank like that?”

“It was no prank, my friend,” he answered soberly. “It was a stratagem of war, and it was most successful. We know now who our foeman is, and we can make plans for his defeat.”

“I’m hanged if I understand.”

“Very well. Consider: The things which *Mademoiselle* Nellie told me today gave me the clue. Perhaps it was not likely, but it was entirely possible that these women’s deaths had some connection with the killing of the young Stoneman. The fountain was unveiled a year ago, I understand. At that time the Jukes girl and her three companions were ‘in college’ as they call it. That is to say, they were in jail for vagrancy, shoplifting and similar petty crimes. Very well. A month ago the Jukes woman was released. True to the customs of her kind, she went at once to her old neighborhood and — *voilà*, she was killed. By all accounts she did not die pleasantly.”

“Then the Mahoney baggage comes from the jail. She, too, went back to her old haunts and — you have read the coroner’s report in her case.”

“The Ebbert girl was discharged from prison two weeks ago. Like the other two she goes back to her old associates, like the other two she dies, but this time someone sees the killer at his work. You comprehend?”

“I certainly do not.”

He breathed a sigh of exasperation, then, patiently: “Four women are suspected of complicity in the killing of a young man. The young man’s father has a statuary group erected as a memorial — in a low, unfashionable part of town, by the way — and as the women, then incarcerated, are released they meet a death much like that of the young man.

“Our young Policeman Flannigan swears he saw a marble statue kill the Ebbert girl.

“Now, arranging for the lecture by the mythical Dr. Bradley-Stoker was not all I did this afternoon. By no means. I read and reread certain of Cornelius Agrippa’s charms and spells. By the use of certain magic formulae the magus claimed to be able to vivify marble statues, and make them do his will for good or ill, but only at the dark or in the waning of the moon, and only at the midnight hour between Saturday — the old Sabbath — and Sunday, the new day of worship.

“So I arrange this wholly false lecture, and arrange to have the Cook woman come to it, and to say certain things in the hearing of one I am convinced will also be there. It all transpired as I planned, my friend.”

“See here,” I demanded as we turned in my driveway, “was that evil-looking little fat man just ahead of us at the box office—”

“Of course,” he anticipated my question. “Who else could it be but Monsieur Joseph Stoneman, father of the killed young man and donor of that statuary group to this fair city?”

The night was cold with a cruel, penetrating chill that gnawed at our bones like a starved wolf. A gray rain slashed against the flat fronts of the grimy tenements in Tunnell Street, as halfway down the slattern row of shabby houses a door opened for a moment on the storm, showed a fuzzy square of faint light, then closed with a bang.

Muffled to the ears in a raincoat, Nellie Cook slipped from the house, paused a moment on the worn doorstep, then stepped out into the flooding street. For a moment she pressed close against the house front, seeming to hold her breath and listen. She cast a quick glance up and down the street and, keeping to the shadows, crept down the sidewalk. Frightened though she obviously was, I noticed that she walked with shortened, gliding steps and provocatively swaying hips.

For several days de Grandin had been coaching her, schooling her in her entrance, directing where she was to walk, regulating the speed of her movements. Now she was letter-perfect in the rôle, and, the dress rehearsals having been concluded, we were ready for the performance. Since we had met her in the lobby of the lecture hall the new moon had gone through its phases, and we had reached another dark period. The storm had kept the usual crowd of Saturday night revelers indoors, and as the girl emerged from the house the gong in the clock tower of St. Dominic’s Church, six blocks away, boomed the first deep, resounding stroke of midnight.

Beside me in the doorway huddled Jules de Grandin. His face seemed pinched with cold, but the twitching of his little blond mustache and the intermittent quiver of his lips was purely the result of nervous tension, I knew.

He and Hiji had been deep in consultation all afternoon, and shortly before dinner the Englishman had made a hurried trip to New York, returning somewhere about nine with a small paper parcel which he handled with extreme tenderness. Now he and Costello were ensconced in a doorway at the far end of the block, and all of us watched Nellie as she walked slowly through the pelting rain.

A street light's haze revealed the pale blur of her face as she passed under it. I knew that it was sharp and unintelligent, with hard, malicious eyes and only feeble traces of the common prettiness it once had, but in the distance, softened by the rain-filtered lamp rays, it looked fragile and appealing, and clearly terror-ridden.

She paused a moment underneath the light, looked backward fearfully, then went on toward the farther corner.

"This is so utterly inane!" I grumbled as a drop of water from the doorway's lintel fell like an icicle down the upturned collar of my raincoat. "We'll get nothing but pneumonia for our pains, and—"

"Zut! Quiet, my friend," warned de Grandin in a sharp whisper. "We are not here for pleasure, I assure you, and — ah, *barbe d'un bouc vert*, behold him!"

Something sounded on the flagstone walk almost beside us, dully, heavily, like stone striking stone. *Clump — thump, thump — clump!* and walking like a robot, yet with speed almost equal to a run, a white shape passed us.

A cold as hard and dull as death itself seemed added to the chill of the rain-drenched night air, and I felt the breath catch in my throat like a hard, solid ball.

A gleam with rain, and moving with a stride as purposeful as Fate, yet with no play of flexing muscles showing under its white surface, a graven image — a white marble statue — passed us in the wake of the retreating girl.

"*Hola!*" shouted de Grandin, leaping out into the rain and struggling with some object in his trench coat pocket. "*Hola, M'sieur le Statuaire! Halte la!*"

The moving marble horror gave no sign of hearing, but heavily, yet swiftly, with the surety of inexorable Nemesis, made toward the woman.

Now we saw it fully revealed in the fuzzy glow of the street lamp. There was no expression in its carven features. Calm and composed and utterly oblivious of everything around them, its marble eyes stared straight ahead.

The woman heard the pounding of the marble feet and turned for a swift glance across her shoulder. Her scream was something horrible to hear. A bubbling, frothing, mounting geyser of sheer terror, winding upward, growing shrill and shriller till it seemed to pierce our eardrums like a probing needle.

She reeled blindly in midstep, clutching at the rain-

flogged empty air with fingers gone as stiff as rigor mortis, then, seeming to realize that if she fainted she was lost, she gathered skirts and raincoat up above her knees and darted like an arrow from a bow toward the cross street.

The stone pursuer broke into a run. Not the heavy, clumsy jog-trot that might have been expected from an automaton, but the lithe, swift racing of a trained athlete, every step instinct with grace and only the hard thudding of its stone feet on the stone sidewalk to make us know it was an animated rock, not flesh and blood, that rushed through the downpouring tempest.

There was no doubt of the result. Before she'd traversed fifty steps the terror-stricken woman stumbled and fell to her knees, and for a moment as she turned toward her pursuer we saw her face like one of those old Grecian horror masks, mouth squared in agony of terror, eyes almost forcing from their sockets, cheeks gone a sort of dreadful, deathly gray despite the daubs of paint on them.

Costello's burly form came cannoning from the doorway where he hid. "Stand back, ye murderin' haythin!" he roared, raised his service pistol and let fly a stream of bullets at the charging marble horror.

The thing paid no more heed to them than it did to the pelting rain drops. We heard the spat of lead on stone, the screaming whine of a bullet as it ricocheted, but on the statue ran, its carved feet drumming on the flagstones of the walk.

"Duck, Sergeant!" we heard Hiji shout as he leaped past Costello, shoved him aside and faced the onrushing stone monster.

We saw him balance on his sound foot, raise his maimed leg almost waist-high, press something hard against his thigh, then bend forward as he hurled a missile, putting every ounce of weight and strength behind it.

The roar was utterly deafening, and the burst of sudden fire that came with it was blinding as the dazzling blaze of a flashbulb. I could feel the force of detonation beating on me like a dozen fists as it was echoed back from the house fronts.

For a long moment everything was dark, then as my eyes regained their vision, I saw a heap of marble debris on the sidewalk forty feet or so away, smashed white stone that seemed strangely like a corpse dismembered by some hideous force, here a marble hand, and there a bit of what had been an arm or leg or torso. Almost at my feet a calm, serene white marble face stared up into the pelting rain, and I had a quick qualm of wonder that it did not close its lids against the battering drops.

"Bingo!" I heard Hiji call. "Got him square amidships with the first throw, Frenchy. Jolly lucky that I did, too, or you and Trowbridge would be in the happy huntin' grounds

by now.”

“*Mon brave, mon superb*, my infinitely splendid Hiji!” de Grandin cried delightedly. “You are, as you have said, a marvel!”

“Who said that? Not I. You do all the boastin’ around here, you little devil!”

“No matter, there is glory enough for all,” the little Frenchman returned. “What though it was the agile brain of Jules de Grandin that conceived the plan of shattering him to pieces with a hand grenade because he could not be stopped with bullets? It was the fine, strong arm and fine, true, accurate aim of Hiji that gave him the *coup de grâce*. But certainly!

“Now,” practically, he added, “let us see to these ones.”

Costello had been knocked unconscious by the detonation of the bomb, but his loss of consciousness was short-lived, for even as we bent above him he shook himself like a dog emerging from the water. “Howly Mither!” he exclaimed. “What wuz it? Wuz I kilt entirely?”

“*Mais non, mon sergent*, you are very much alive,” denied de Grandin with a laugh. “You were struck senseless for a little so short time, but now you are all right. Of course. Give him to drink from your flask, Hiji,” he added as he ran to help me with the swooning woman.

As far as I could find she had no injury of any kind. No broken bones, no cuts, no wounds. Apparently unconsciousness had been induced by fright alone.

I took her head in the bend of my elbow and held my flask beneath her nose, letting the fumes of the brandy act as a restorative. In the weak light from the street lamp, with the rain upon her face, she looked almost pretty. The long, dark, heavily mascaraed lashes lay in half moons on her cheeks, the wilful, childish mouth was relaxed and robbed of its petulance and cynicism. The tendrils of bright hair that slipped beneath the brim of her storm hat seemed really golden, not the result of a skillful bleaching.

“Gimme!” she roused as the scent of the brandy reached through her unconsciousness, grasped the flask in both hands and drank greedily. “Gosh!” she let her breath out with a gulping sigh and drank again, then drew her hand across her mouth, leaving a bright stain of carmine lipstick on it. “That was sumpin, wasn’t it?”

“It was, indeed, *ma belle*,” de Grandin agreed as he rose from his knees beside her. “It was indubitably something.”

He looked at her a long minute, then: “What is it you would want, my little one? If you will say the word I shall be glad to find employment for you, or defray expenses of your schooling while you prepare yourself for a position. You have courage and resourcefulness, and could go far—”

“Yeah, far as the nearest gin-mill,” she interrupted. “It’s no dice, Doc. You can comb an’ brush her all you want, an’

tie a ribbon round her neck an’ call her all the pet names that you know, but an alley cat is still an alley cat, an’ sooner or later she’ll go back to her alley. I’m no good an’ never was. I know it an’ you know it. Me take a job? That’s a big laugh! You know I couldn’t hold one twenty minutes.”

The look he gave her was direct and level, but not at all censorious. “*Tu parles, ma petite*,” he agreed with a quick smile. “Here is something for your services to Jules de Grandin,” he pressed a roll of bills into her hand, “and here is something for yourself alone.” Taking her cheeks between his palms he bent her face back and kissed her upon the mouth.

“Gosh, Doc,” she gave him a look in which surprise and pleasure were mingled, “you ain’t such a cold number yourself. Why don’t—” she slurred her voice in imitation of Mae West — “why don’t you come up an’ see me some time?”

“Should I require the service of a brave and loyal woman again you may be sure that I shall call on you, *Mademoiselle*,” he answered with a friendly smile.

“Okay, Doc, be seein’ you in the pictures.” She gave him a nod of farewell and turned toward her house.

“Too bad,” I murmured as I watched her walk off slowly through the rain. “She has the makings of something fine—”

“*Ah bah*, my friend, you sentimentalize!” he chuckled. “Did not you hear her? She understands herself perfectly, and was most just in her estimate. None but a fool would try to make a silk purse of a sow’s ear, or force a different way of life on women such as that. It is her destiny to be a waster, so she will go through life a petty criminal, harried by the police, picked up on trifling charges, serving short terms in jail, then, as she put it so concisely, ‘returning to her alley.’ The pity is not that she is what she is, but that she was born in our time. In ancient Greece, or the Alexandria of the Ptolemies, or even in medieval Europe, there was a niche and place for such as she, a sort of honorable dishonor. *Eh bien*, they had more religion and less morals in those days, I damn think.”

He shrugged as only a Frenchman can when he wishes to disclaim responsibility. The fault was Fate’s, not his. And: “Hiji, thou species of an elephant,” he added, “have you forgotten we have other duties to perform? Come, let us be upon our errand. *Allez vous promener!*”

“Right you are, my diminutive frog-eatin’ friend,” agreed the Englishman. “Carry on.”

The big old house in Albemarle Road looked gaunt and lonely. Built of gray stone with a wide porch across the front and sides, it had the jigsaw ornaments of the Victorian period set in the angles of its gables, and iron urns on high stone

pedestals on its front lawn. Now, huddled in the fringe of evergreens planted almost at its foundations, it had the look of an old man who wraps his cloak about him and withdraws from life. Rain lashed against its windows, flattening on the pines, rain sluiced down its gutters, wind-driven rain washed across its porch floor like waves that sweep across the decks of a ship in a storm.

De Grandin seized the heavy iron knocker hanging on the solid Flemish oak front door and beat a devil's tattoo with its ring. No answer came to his first summons, but at the third insistent drumming a glow showed in the fanlight above the door, and the heavy panel swung back a few inches. "Who is it?" came the challenge in a rather high-pitched voice.

The little Frenchman put his foot in the crack of the door before he replied: "Those who wish to talk with you about the memorial you erected to your son in the park, *M'sieur*."

The exclamation answering him was almost like a squeak. The door swung nearly shut, then, wedged against his foot, came to a halt, and: "Hiji, my friend, I think I need your shoulder's weight," he told the big Englishman.

The door crashed back before the mighty push that Hiji gave it, and we were in the hallway of the old house. I looked around me with amazement. The place was a litter of bad taste. Heavy furniture of the kind fashionable in the "awful eighties" stood about the walls, bronze statuary worthy of the worst the cemeteries have to offer loomed on onyx pedestals, the pictures in their heavy gilt frames showed impossible landscapes. The only light in the room came from an old gas chandelier which, dripping colored prisms, hung from the center of the ceiling. There was a musty smell about the house, a taint of dried leather, of dust and mildewed fabrics. "*Tudieu*, my friends," de Grandin remarked, "I damn think we have come into the Castle of Despair."

He looked at the short, fat man in the flowered silk dressing gown, and: "You wish to tell us of that memorial, *M'sieur*?" he asked. "Or shall we tell you?"

"I—I don't know what you mean!" the other stammered, and the little, thin, high-piping voice that came from that great mass of fat struck me as being nothing less than shocking.

Joseph Stoneman was not an impressive figure, but he was sinister. Despite his moon face and pot belly there was none of the traditional jollity of the fat man about him, and the little eyes that looked out from the folds of fat that framed them were absolutely terrible.

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin's voice was flat and level and he kept his sharp gaze on the fat face of the other, "since you will not tell us, let me tell you of that memorial. Six weeks ago it left its pedestal and walked by night through Tunnell Street. There it encountered Sally Jukes, and what it did to

her was most unpleasant.

"A week later it waylaid Mae Mahoney, and when its work was done there was another case for the coroner. Then Lucy Ebbert met him as she walked the street, and—"

A quick and dreadful change came over Stoneman's face. Gone was the childish, sullen, stupid look, gone the dullness from his eyes. His fat jaws quivered like the dewlaps of a hound that works its teeth, his little, puffy mouth began to twist convulsively. "Yes, yes!" he squeaked. "I know it; I sent him — I tracked them down like rats, the sluts that lured my poor boy to his ruin. One by one I tracked them down, and had them killed the way their gangster lovers killed him. All, all are gone, now — Jukes, Mahoney, Ebbert, Cook!"

"There you make the mistake, *M'sieur*. Mademoiselle Cook is very much alive, as we can testify, and your statue he is — *pouf!* — eliminated."

"You lie," the other told him. "You can't hurt him. He's proof against your bullets—"

"But not against my dynamite, *M'sieur*."

"Dynamite?" the other echoed unbelievably. "You dared to dynamite my lovely statue — my executioner?"

"Quite yes, *M'sieur*. Your statue is a heap of rubble, nothing more, and we are here to make you answer for your crimes."

A sly, triumphant look came into Stoneman's little eyes. "You can't" he jeered. "Who'd believe the truth when you told it? What sober-minded jury would convict me on your testimony — or fail to send you to a madhouse?"

"They'll put you safely away, and I shall be free to impose my will on the world. I'll recite the magic spell not once, but fifty or a hundred times. Think of it, I'll have a company — a regiment — of marble executioners to do my bidding, and all who offend me shall meet death. I'll wipe out alcohol and vice and sin, and I shall be the sole judge of what's right and what is wrong. I shall be like God. I shall—"

"You shall be nothing at all, *M'sieur*," de Grandin interrupted in a low, hard voice. "You are the only man alive who knows the secret spell of the magus to bring the dead, cold stone to life, and knowing that, you know too much for the good of mankind."

"Trowbridge, Costello," he turned to us, "will you accommodate me by retiring to the porch for a moment? I shall not keep you waiting longer than our work requires."

The Sergeant cast a meaning look at me, and, "Yis, sor," he agreed. "It'll be a pleasure, so it will."

We closed the door behind us and turned up our collars to the storm. Costello drew me to an angle of the wall, "We don't know nothin', do we, Dr. Trowbridge, sor?" he asked softly.

* * *

It was not long before they joined us, locking the door carefully after them. "*Hélas*, I bring you the sad news, as the

papers in the morning will report. Monsieur Joseph Stoneman, the eminent philanthropist, committed suicide tonight. It appears that he hanged himself with the belt of his dressing gown."

"The Beasts of Barsac" by ROBERT BLOCH

JULY

Weird Tales

15¢

**DERLETH
WELLMAN
BRADBURY**

"DEATH'S BOOKKEEPER"

**A Jules de Grandin story
by Seabury Quinn**



Death's Bookkeeper

JULES DE GRANDIN, looking even more diminutive and dapper in his uniform of major in the *Service des Rensiegments* than in civilian attire, regarded the highly polished tip of his tan boot with every sign of approval as he exhaled two columns of smoke through narrow nostrils. Dinner had been something of a function that evening, for at a little place in East Fifty-Third Street he had found that afternoon a half-case of Nuits St. Georges which he had borne home triumphantly just in time to grace the capon which Nora McGinnis had been simmering in claret for our evening meal. Now, fed to repletion, with coffee on the stand at his elbow and something like a thimbleful of green Chartreuse left in the *pousse café* beside his cup, he seemed utterly at peace with all the world. "The day has been a trying one at the *Bureau des Rensiegments*, my friend," he confided as he took a half-swallow of Chartreuse and followed it with a sip of black coffee. "I am tired like twenty dogs and half as many so small puppies. I would not budge from this chair if—"

The shrilling of the telephone sawed through his statement and with a nod of apology I picked up the instrument. "Yes?" I inquired.

"This is Michaelson, Doctor," the woman's voice came to me from the other end of the wire.

"Yes!" I repeated. Miss Michaelson was night supervisor of the maternity floor at Mercy Hospital, and when she called I knew what impended.

"Mrs. Morrissey in Fifty-Eight—"

"How long?" I interrupted.

"Not more than half an hour, sir. Maybe less. If I were in your place—"

"If you were in my place, I should be in yours, and not have to drive thirty blocks through zero weather," I broke in somewhat rudely. "Have them make the delivery room ready, if you please, and give her half a grain of morphine if the pain becomes too great. I'm starting right away."

To de Grandin I explained: "Just one of those things that keep life from becoming too dull for the doctor. The population of New Jersey is due for an addition in the next half hour, and I have to be there as part of the welcoming committee—"

"Will you permit that I go with you to assist?" he asked.

"Me, I have so long been busily engaged in reducing the sum total of humanity that it will be a novelty to take part in its increase. Besides, my hand grows awkward for the lack of practice."

"I'll be delighted," I assured him as I hunted up my case of instruments and got into my greatcoat. "But I thought you were too tired—"

"*Ah bah!*" The little laughter-wrinkles deepened at the outer corners of his eyes "That Jules de Grandin, he is what you call? — the cramper-in-the-stomach? He is always complaining, that one. You must not put too much credence in his lamentations."

It was an ordinary case. Miranda Morrissey was young and strong, and de Grandin's obstetrical skill was amazing. "So — now — my small sinner," he spanked the small, red infant's small, red posterior with a wet towel, "weep and wail, and breathe the breath of life in the process. What?" as the baby refused to respond to his command. "You will not? By blue, I say you shall! You are too young to defy your elders. Take that, *petit diabolotin!*" He struck a second, sharper blow, and a piping, outraged wail answered the assault. "Ah, that is better — much better!" He wrapped the now-wriggling small, wrinkled bundle of humanity in a warmed turkish towel and bore it toward the bed where Miranda rested with all the pride of a cook carrying a *chef-d'oeuvre*. "Behold your man-child, mother," he announced as he laid the baby on her bosom. "He is not happy now, but in your arms he will find happiness. *Le bon Dieu* grant the world in which he has been born may be a better one than that into which we came!"

As we walked down the corridor he drew his hand across his eyes wearily. "There is something more solemn in a birth than a death," he confided. "For the dead one all is over, his troubles are behind him, he is quits with life and fate. But for the one who is beginning life — *hèlas*, who can say what he has stepped into? A quarter-century ago when little boys came into the world we thought they were inheritors of peace and safety and security; that we had won the war to end all war. Today?" He spread his hands and raised his shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can attain, "Who can prophesy, who can predict what — *barbe d'un bouc vert*, who in Satan's name is that?" he broke off sharply.

I looked at him in amazement. His small, pointed chin was thrust forward and in his little round blue eyes there was the flash of sudden anger, while his delicate, slim nostrils twitched like those of a hound scenting danger or quarry. "Who? Where?" I asked.

"Yonder by the elevator, my friend. Do not you see him? *Parbleu*, if the Iscariot had descendants, I make no doubt

that he is one of them!”

I looked where his glance indicated and gave a shrug of disgust. “That’s Coiquitt,” I answered. “Dr. Henri Coiquitt.”
“Hein?”

“I don’t know much about him, and the little that I do know is not good. He came here since you went away. You never heard of him.”

“Thank God for that,” he answered piously. “But something tells me I shall hear more of him in the future, and that he shall hear of Jules de Grandin.”

The object of our colloquy turned toward us as the elevator stopped in answer to his ring, and in the light that flowed from the car we saw him outlined clearly as an actor in a spotlight on a darkened stage. He was a big man, six feet tall, at least, and his height seemed greater because of his extreme slenderness. He was in black throughout, a long loose cape like a naval officer’s boat-cloak hung from his shoulders, his broad-brimmed hat was black velour; his clothes, too, seemed to be of a peculiar shade of black that caught and pocketed the light. The only highlight in his costume was the band of white that marked his collar above his wide, flowing black cravat, and in complement to the somberness of his attire his skin was pale olive and his lips intensely red. As we stepped into the car beside him we caught the scent of perfumed soap and bath powder, but underneath the more agreeable odor, it seemed to me, there was a faint, repulsive smell of decay and corruption.

Coiquitt bowed gracefully as we joined him, and de Grandin, not to be outdone in courtesy, returned the bow punctiliously, but for a moment, as their glances crossed, both men seemed poised and alert, like duelists who seek an opening in each others’ guards. I felt a shiver of something like awe run through me. It seemed to me as if I sat in a box seat and watched a drama staged by Fate unfold. These men had never heard of each other, never before set eyes on each other, yet in the glance of each there shone a sudden hatred, cold and deadly as a bared knife. They were like two chemicals that waited only for a catalyst to explode them.

Traveling so smoothly we were scarcely aware of its motion, the elevator drew to a stop at the ground floor, and Coiquitt stepped soundlessly across the corridor to the reception room. At the door Camilla Castevens rushed to meet him. “How is he, Doctor?” we heard her ask in a trembling whisper. “Is he — is there any improvement?”

He bowed to her with a superb gentility, yet the gesture had a hint of mockery in it, I thought. “Of course, Miss Castevens. Did I not promise you—” He turned and cast a glance half quizzical, half mocking, at de Grandin and me, and with a guilty start I realized we had halted almost at his elbow, drinking in each word he and Camilla said to each

other.

“Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge,” Camilla nodded coldly as she recognized me, and with an answering bow I took de Grandin’s elbow and guided him toward the door, feeling like a naughty little boy who had been caught eavesdropping on his elders’ conversation.

“Now, what in Satan’s name is it all about?” the little Frenchman demanded as we stepped into the stinging cold of the February night.

I laughed without humor. “I wish I knew. Dr. Coiquitt is a newcomer to Harrisonville, as I told you. Where he came from goodness only knows. We know only that he had credentials from half a dozen European universities, and had no difficulty in obtaining a license to practice. Since he set up shop in Dahlonga Road he’s raised the very devil with the medical profession.”

“Ah? How is that, is he a quack?”

“I only wish I knew. He’s certainly not orthodox. The first case I have real knowledge of is one he took from Perry. I think you know Perry. First-rate heart man. He’d been treating Mrs. Delarue for angina pectoris, and having no more luck with her than was to be expected in the circumstances. Then somehow Delarue met Coiquitt and took the case from Perry. Within two months his wife was completely cured as if she’d never had a moment’s illness. That started it. Case after case the rest of us had given up as hopeless was taken to Coiquitt, and in every instance he effected a complete cure, even with Bernice Stevens, who was so far gone with carcinoma hysteria that none of us would operate, because there wouldn’t have been enough left of her to bury when we’d cut the morbid growth away.

“U’m?” he pursed his lips. “I take it there is something more here than mere professional jealousy, my friend?”

I shook my head hopelessly. “Of course, there is. We’d have been chagrined to have a stranger take our cases and effect cures when we’d abandoned all hope, but that could have happened. Only—” I paused, at loss for words to continue, and he prompted softly. “Yes, only—”

“Well, — oh, this sounds utterly absurd, I know — I’d never think of mentioning it to anybody else, but — hang it all, man, it seems to me there’s something like black magic in his cures.”

“Ah-ha? How do you say?”

“In every instance where a cure has been effected someone in the patient’s family has taken ill and died within a year. Sometimes sooner, but never later.”

He was silent for a moment, then, “Perhaps,” he admitted thoughtfully. “The Greeks knew of such things—”

“How’s that?”

“I cannot say, at least not now, *mon vieux*. I did but think aloud, and not to any great effect, I fear.”

It might have been a week later, perhaps ten days, when Camilla Castevens called on me. She was a tall young woman with copper hair and steady blue eyes, past the first flush of her youth — some thirty-two or -three — but with the added attractiveness that early maturity gives to a woman. In the light of the consulting-room lamp her face looked sad, her cheeks seemed hollow, and her red lips dipped in a pathetic downward curve. "I'm frightened, Dr. Trowbridge," she confessed.

I found it hard not to be sarcastic. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her why she did not take her fears to Dr. Coiquitt, but better sense prevailed, and instead I looked at her inquiringly. Like the priest, the doctor has to be long-suffering and patient.

"I—I'm terribly afraid," she went on as I said nothing to help her. "I don't want to die."

"Few of us do, my dear."

"But I shall have to if" — she paused a long, agonized moment, then with a burst of something like hysteria — "if Richard is to get well. He says I must!"

"He? Who?"

"Dr. Coiquitt, sir. Don't you know, haven't you noticed? He was treating Mrs. Delarue for an incurable ailment. She got well — yes, well, when all the other doctors said she hadn't a chance! — but her son Donald who was her idol died just as he was about to receive his commission in the Air Corps when his plane crashed in his final practice flight. Oh, I know you'll say it was coincidence; that his plane would have cracked up just the same if his mother had died instead of getting well. But it didn't. She got well and he died. Then there was Bernice Stevens. Nobody thought she had an earthly chance, and she herself prayed daily for death to release her from her dreadful suffering; but he took her case and cured her — and Bert Stevens died within ten months. Of cancer, too. Perhaps that was coincidence, also. How many coincidences do we have to have to make a certainty, Doctor?"

"I'll tell you—" She leaned forward, and in the light of my desk lamp her eyes seemed hard and expressionless as blue gems inlaid in an ivory face. "I have proof! The man's a wizard; just as much a wizard as those dreadful men they hanged and burned in mediæval days. He is — he *is*!" Her voice rose almost to a shriek, and as I smiled incredulously, "Listen:

"You know that Richard Bream and I have been in love for years. We went in grade school together, and to high school, and afterwards to college. We'd planned to be married just after commencement, but the depression came along just then, and Richard couldn't get a start in his law practice. They took his furniture for debt, and evicted him from his office, and he couldn't get even a clerkship

anywhere; finally he was forced to take a place as a soda dispenser in a drug store — Richard Bream, Esquire, bachelor and master of laws, Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Nu Tau, a soda-jerker at ten dollars a week, and glad to get that much! I had twelve dollars weekly from my work as a stenographer, but two people can't live on twenty-two dollars a week, and besides, I had mother to look after. Then finally Rick secured a place as law clerk with Addleman and Sinclair, and just as we were planning to get married his father died, and he had his mother to support. It was just one thing after another, Doctor. Every time we thought our period of waiting was over something came up to destroy our hopes. I've heard the Indians sometimes tormenting their prisoners by tying them to stakes and lighting fires around them, then, when the torture had become unbearable, offering the poor wretches bowls of cool water, only to dash them from their lips as they were about to drink. That's the way its been with Rick and me for nearly twelve years, Doctor. We've starved and thirsted for each other, and time and again it seemed our period of waiting had come to a close when" — she raised her hands in a gesture of futility — "something else happened to postpone our marriage. At last the war came, and Rick got his commission. There seemed nothing that could halt us now, and then — this unsuspected heart ailment appeared; Rick was discharged from the Army on a medical certificate and went to Dr. Dahlgren and half a dozen other specialists. All told him the same thing. He might live one year, maybe two — he might drop dead any minute.

"I wanted to get married right away. I'm making fifty dollars a week now, and that would keep us. I could love and cherish him for whatever time remained to us, and — oh, Doctor, I love him so!" She broke down utterly and bowed her head upon her clasped hands, crying almost silently with body-shaking sobs. At last: "I was desperate, Dr. Trowbridge. I'd heard about the wonderful cures Dr. Coiquitt had made, and went to see him." A shudder, more of horror than of fear, it seemed to me, ran through her. "I tell you, the man is a wizard, sir.

"His office is more like a necromancer's den than a physician's place. No daylight penetrates it; everything about the place is black — black floors, black walls, black ceiling; black furniture upholstered in black silk brocade. The only light in the place is from a black-shaded lamp on the desk where he sits and waits like a — like a great spider, sir! He wasn't kind and sympathetic as a doctor ought to be; he wasn't glad to see me; he didn't even seem surprised that I had come. It was as if he knew I'd have to come to him, and had been waiting with the patience of a great cat sitting at a rat-hole.

"When I told him about Rick's case he seemed scarcely

interested; but when I'd finished talking he said in that heavy foreign accent of his: 'These matters have to be adjusted, Miss Castevens. I can cure your lover, but the risk to you is great. Do you love him more than you love life?'

"Of course I vowed I did, that I would gladly die if Rick could live, and he smiled at me — I think that Satan must smile like that when a new damned soul is brought to him.

"For every one who leaves the world another comes into it,' he told me. 'For every one who cheats Death, Death must have another victim. I have pondered long upon this matter; I have learned the wisdom of the ancients and of people you Americans in your ignorance call savage. I know whereof I speak. I do not prescribe for the ailing. I give my medicine — and thought — to the well, and they, by sympathy, affect the suffering. If you will agree to do just as I say I can cure your lover, but it may be that your life will be the forfeit demanded for his. You must understand this clearly; I would not have you embark on the case unknowingly.'

"Well, it sounded utterly absurd, but I was desperate, so I agreed. He went into a back room and I heard him clinking glass on glass, then presently he came out with a syringe which he thrust into my arm and drew blood from it. Then he disappeared again for a short time, and finally came back with a tall glass in which some black liquor steamed and boiled. 'Drink this,' he ordered, and as you drink it pronounce after me, "Of my own free will and accord I agree to give myself in his stead, whatever may betide." I took the glass into both hands and drained it at a gulp as I pronounced the words he told me, and instead of being boiling hot the liquid seemed as cold as ice — so cold it seemed to send a chill through every vein and artery in my body, to make my toes and fingers almost ache with sudden chill, and freeze my heart and lungs until I breathed with difficulty.

"Before I left he gave me another bottle filled with black liquor and told me, 'Take this three times a day, once before each meal and once before you say your prayers at night. You do pray, don't you?'

"Yes, sir,' I answered. 'Every night and morning.'

"So much the better. Take an extra dose of this before your morning prayer, then, and I shall call on Mr. Bream in the morning, make a careful note of his condition. and report to you. In three days he should begin to improve. In two months he should be completely recovered.' That was all, and I left that queer, black-walled den of his feeling foolish as if I'd been to consult a fortune-teller.

"But the next day when I called the hospital to inquire after Richard they told me he was showing marked improvement and his improvement has been constant ever since."

"That's wonderful," I commented, and she caught me up abruptly, sarcastically:

"Yes, isn't it? It's wonderful, too, that as Richard gained in strength I've lost weight steadily, and for the past two weeks have suffered agonizing pain in my right breast and arm, and have these dreadful smothering fits when it seems that a pillow has been clamped across my nose and mouth. I tell you, Doctor Trowbridge, I am dying; dying surely as if I had been sentenced to death by a court. Rick's getting well, and, of course, I want that; but I'm afraid, sir, terribly afraid. Besides, if I die, what shall we have gained? Rick will have life, but not me, and I — I shall have nothing at all!" Her voice rose to a wail of pure despair.

"Camilla!" I admonished sharply. "Such things don't happen. They can't—"

"By blue, my friend, I think they do and can," de Grandin's sharp denial came as he stepped into the consulting room. "You must excuse me, *Mademoiselle*," he bowed to Camilla, "but I could not help hearing something of the things you said to Doctor Trowbridge as I came in. You need have no fear your confidence will be violated. I too, am a physician, and whatever I have heard is under the protection of my oath of confidence. However," he lifted brows and shoulders in the faint suggestion of a shrug, "if you will consent that I try, I think perhaps that I can help you, for I am Jules de Grandin, and a very clever person, I assure you."

Reminded by his announcement that the amenities had not been observed. I introduced them formally, and he dropped into a seat facing her. "Now, if you please," he ordered, "tell me all that you have told Friend Trowbridge, and leave out nothing. In cases such as this there are no little things; all is of the importance, and I would know all that I may be of assistance to you. Begin at the beginning, *Mademoiselle*, if you please."

She rehearsed the story she had told me, and he nodded emphatic agreement as she finished. "I do not know how he does it, *Mademoiselle*," he admitted as she brought her recital to a close, "but I am as convinced as you that there is something unholy about this business. What it is remains for us to find out. Meantime, if you will oblige us by submitting to a physical examination" — he rose and nodded toward the examination room — "we should like to assure ourselves of your condition; perhaps to prescribe treatment."

There was no doubt in either of our minds when we had finished our inspection. There was a widespread area of dullness round her heart, the pulmonary second sound was sharply accented, and a murmur was discernible in the second interspace to the left of the sternum at the level of the third rib, so harsh as to be audible over the entire pericardium. Camilla Castevens was undoubtedly a victim of myocarditis, and in an advanced, almost hopeless stage.

"I shall not hold the truth from you, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin told her gravely when she returned to the consultation room. "You are a very ill person, and in utmost danger. These" — he scribbled a prescription for some three-grain amyl nitrite capsules — "will ease the pain when it comes on. Crush one in your handkerchief and inhale the fumes freely. For the rest," his slender fingers tapped a fuguelike rhythm on the edge of the desk, "we shall have to seek the cause of your illness, and it is not in you, I assure you. Do not hesitate to call on us if you feel the need of our assistance."

"And I should dismiss Dr. Coiquitt?"

"Not at all; by no means. Desist from taking his nostrums, if you have not already done so, but permit him to attend your fiancé by all means—"

"But look here," I protested, "if your theory is correct he's already done Camilla immeasurable harm. If we permit him to stay in the case—"

"We shall know where he is and what he's up to, *parbleu*," de Grandin returned.

"He will be within the orbit of our observation. When the hunter stalks the tiger, he tethers a goat to a stake in a clearing, and waits in concealment till the striped one makes his appearance. Then, when the moment is propitious, he fires, and there is one more handsome rug to decorate a floor. So it is in this case. *Mademoiselle* and *Monsieur* her fiancé are the bait which we leave for this debased species of a charlatan. Do keep up your courage, *Mademoiselle*," he cast a smile of reassurance at Camilla, "and we shall do the rest. Be brave; we shall not fail you."

"The pair of you are crazy as a brace of loons," I fumed when she had taken her departure. "I can understand Camilla. It's the power of suggestion working on her. There's a book about that sort of thing in the library, written by a man named Manly Wade Wellman. He's made a study of the matter and decided that if belief in illness is induced in someone who firmly believes what is told him, he will become ill — even die — of the disease he has been told he has. It may be that Camilla had a tendency toward a weak heart. Now, if Coiquitt induced her to believe she would develop myocarditis, and administered some evil-tasting drug to be taken regularly and so keep her attention fixed on the suggestion, it might easily be that her constant worry and the fear of impending sickness and death have combined to make that latent heart-weakness active. But as for your believing such rubbish—"

"*Ah, bah*, my friend," he patted back a yawn, "you bore me. Always you must rationalize a thing you do not understand, taking the long route around the barn of Monsieur Robin Hood in order to arrive at a false conclusion.

"It was the power of suggestion, you say? Let us for the sake of argument admit that suggestion could induce such an organic condition as that we found in *Mademoiselle* Camille. *Très bien*. So much for her. But was it also suggestion that caused Madame Stevens to recover from advanced carcinoma — and her husband to develop it and die almost as she regained health? Was it the power of suggestion that pulled the young man's plane out of the sky and dashed him to his death against the earth? Coincidence, you say. Perhaps in one case, and possibly in two, but in the three of which we know, and in the many which we damn suspect coincidence has ceased to take a great part. *Parbleu*, to say otherwise would be to pull the long arm of coincidence clear out of joint! *Non*, my friend. There is something more sinister in this business-of-the-monkey we are dealing with. Just what it is I do not know, but I shall make it my affair to secure the necessary information, you may be assured."

"How'll you go about it?" I demanded, nettled by his air of assurance.

He spread his hands and raised his shoulders. "How should I know? The case requires thought, and thought requires food. There is an excellent dinner awaiting us. Let us give it our attention and dismiss this never-quite-sufficiently-to-be-anathematized Coiquitt person from our thoughts a little while."

He was rather late to dinner the next evening, and Nora McGinnis was calling on high heaven to witness that the *coq au vin blanc* she had prepared especially for him would be entirely ruined when he bustled in with that peculiar smile that told he was much pleased with himself on his face.

"Me, I have done research at the city hall this afternoon," he told me. "At the bureau of *statistiques vitales* I delved into the records. This Coiquitt person is the very devil of a fellow. A hundred cases he has had since he began the malpractice of medicine in the city, and I find he has prolonged a hundred lives for a greater or less time, but at the cost of an equal number. He is not righteous, my friend. He has no business to do such things. He annoys me excessively, *par les cornes d'un crapaud!*"

Despite myself I could not forbear a grin. "What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

He tweaked the waxed ends of his small mustache alternately, teasing them to needle-sharpness. "I do not quite know," he confessed. "At times I think perhaps it would be best if I went — *mon Dieu*, is it that we are attacked?"

The front doorbell had given a quick, anguished peal, almost as if it wailed in pain, and as the shrilling of the gong ceased someone beat upon the panels with a frenzied knock.

I hurried to answer the summons, and Camilla Castevens almost fell into my arms. "Oh, Dr. Trowbridge," she gasped

as I steadied her, “he’s found out that I came to you! I don’t know how he did it, but he called me on the ’phone a little while ago and told me that my time is up. Rick will get well — he seemed positively gloating when he told me that — but I must die tonight—” Her voice trailed off in a gasp and if I had not held her she would have slumped to the floor in a swoon.

I carried her into the study and stretched her on the sofa while de Grandin bathed her temples with cologne and held a glass of brandy to her lips when she revived a little.

She was pitiable in her terror. Her lower lip began to quiver and she caught it savagely between her teeth to steady it. Her fingers twisted and untwisted themselves, and at the base of her throat we could see the pulsing of an artery as her tortured heart jumped like a frightened rabbit with each beat. “Be calm, *ma pauvre*,” de Grandin ordered gently. “You will do yourself an injury if you give way. Now, tell us just what happened. You say he threatened you?”

“No, sir. I wouldn’t call it a threat so much as a statement — like a judge pronouncing sentence. He told me I should never see another sunrise—”

“*Nom d’un bouc vert!* Did he, indeed? And who in Satan’s stinking name is he to pass judgment of life and death upon his fellow creatures, and especially on the patients of Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge, both reputable physicians? Do you rest quietly beside the fire, *Mademoiselle*. If you should have a fit of oppression use the amyl nitrite capsules we gave you. If you desire it, a little brandy cannot do you harm. Meanwhile — come, Friend Trowbridge,” he turned to me imperatively, “we have important duties to perform.”

“Duties? Where?”

“At Dr. Coiquitt’s, in the street of the funny name, *pardieu!* We shall talk with that one, and in no uncertain words—”

“We can’t go barging in on a man like that—”

“Can we not, indeed? Observe Jules de Grandin, if you please, my friend, and you shall see the finest instance of barging ever barged, or I am one infernal, not-to-be-believed liar. Come, *alons; allez-vous-en!*”

Dr. Coiquitt’s house in Dahlonga Road loomed dark as Dolorous Garde against the smalt blue of the winter sky. In keeping with his bizarre personality its owner had had the place painted black, with no relieving spot of color, save for the silver nameplate on the door that bore the single word COIQUITT. No chink showed in the tightly drawn shutters, no ray or spot of light came from the house, but not to be deterred by the tomblike air of the place de Grandin beat a tattoo on the panels with the handle of his military swagger stick. “*Nom d’un nom d’un nom d’un artichaut,*” he

promised savagely, “I shall stand here hammering until I bring the filthy place down on his ears, or till he answers me!”

At last his persistence was rewarded. A shuffling step sounded beyond the portal and the door drew back on a crack, not swinging on hinges, but sliding in a groove on oiled bearings. It would have taken a battering-ram to force the place, I thought, as I noted the strong steel of the track in which the heavy oak door traveled.

A Negro, heavy-set and obviously powerful, but dreadfully hunchbacked, peered at us through the aperture. “The doctaire is not seeing patients now,” he announced in an accent I could not quite place, but which sounded vaguely French.

“Nevertheless, he will see us, *mon vieux*,” de Grandin promised, and launched into a torrent of words, speaking in a patois I could not make out, but which the other understood instantly.

“One moment, if you please, *M’sieu*,” he begged as he drew back the door and stood aside for us to enter. “I shall be pleased to tell the doctaire—”

“*Non*, by no means,” de Grandin denied. “Do not disturb him at his lucubrations. We shall go to him all quietly. I know that he will see us gladly.”

“*Bien, M’sieu*. You will find him at the head of the stairway,” the servant answered as we stepped across a long hall carpeted in black, with black, lack-luster walls and ceilings.

“He is a Haitian, that one,” de Grandin confided as we crept up the black-carpeted stairway. “He thinks that I am an initiate of voodoo, a *papaloi*. I did not tell him that I was — in just so many words — but neither did I deny it. And now” — he halted, braced himself as for a physical encounter, and struck the black-enameled door before us with his knuckles.

“*Entrez,*” a deep voice answered, and we stepped across the threshold.

The room was positively bewildering. It ran across the full width of the house, some thirty feet or more, and the floor above had been removed so that the vaulted ceiling was at least eight yards above us. The floor was of some black and shining composition, strewn with rugs of leopard skin with the heads and claws left on, and the glass eyes set in the beasts’ stuffed heads blazed at us with a threatening fury. The walls were dull black and emblazoned with a great gold dragon that seemed marching round and round the room, while across the farther end was built a divan upholstered in black silk and strewn with red and cloth-of-gold pillows. Here and there against the walls were cabinets of ebony or buhl containing large and strangely-bound books, scientific paraphernalia and bits of curiosa such as skeletons of small animals, stuffed gila monsters and serpents coiled as if

forever in the act of striking, and baby crocodiles. A human skeleton, fully articulated, swung from a frame of ebony like a gallows, and in a tiled fireplace there stood a retort hissing over a great bunsen burner. Incongruously, on a book-strewn table in the center of the room, there was a massive silver vase containing a great bouquet of orchids.

The man who sat at the table raised his eyes as we entered, and as I met his gaze I felt a sudden tingling in my spine — the sort of feeling one has when in the reptile house at the zoo he looks down into a pit filled with lizards and nameless crawling things.

Coiquitt's eyes were black as polished obsidian and strangely shiny, yet unchanging in their stare as those of one newly dead, and almost idly, as one takes minute note of such trifles at such times, I noticed that the lids above the odd, unchanging eyes had a faint greenish tinge and a luster like that of old silk. For a moment he raked us with a glance of cold, ophidian malignancy, then abruptly lowered his lids, as if he drew a curtain between us and his thoughts.

"Good evening, gentlemen — dare I say colleagues?" There was suave mockery that threatened to become stark savagery at any moment in his voice. "To what am I indebted for the honor of this wholly unexpected and I'm sure quite undeserved visit?"

The anger that had shown in Jules de Grandin's face had given way to a puzzled frown, and beneath his sharply waxed, diminutive mustache his lips were pursed as if he were about to whistle. For a long moment he made no reply, and his silence seemed to goad the other into sudden fury. "*Quoi?*" he demanded almost shrilly. "Is it that you come to see a marvel, and are stricken speechless at the sight? I am not on display, my simple ones. Speak up and state your business and be off!"

"*Morbleu!*" Surprise seemed to have forced the word from de Grandin.

"What is it that you—" began the other, but de Grandin ignored him completely.

"Not Coiquitt!" he almost shouted at me. "Not Coiquitt, Trowbridge, *pour l'amour d'un porc louche!* It is Dessiles, Pierre Dessiles, the apostate, false alike to his country and his Aesculapian oath as a physician! Dessiles the necromancer, the *sale espion*, dismissed from the *faculté de médecine*, convicted of conniving with the filthy *Boche* to sell his country's secrets, and condemned to penal servitude for life on Devil's Island!" He leveled his small swagger stick at the other as if it were a weapon and continued his denunciation: "I had heard he had escaped from confinement and made his way to Haiti and become a member of the voodooists, and when I first saw him at the hospital I was almost sure I recognized him, though when he turned to face me I was just as certain that I was mistaken, for in the olden days

his eyes were gray, now they are black. I do not know how he has done it, but I know beyond a doubt now that he is Dessiles, despite the changed color of his eyes. I cannot be mistaken in that voice, that monstrous egotism of the ass who struts about in a lion's skin. However much the leopard has succeeded in effacing his spots or Dessiles in changing his eye-color, the leopard still is but an overgrown, great pussy-cat and Dessiles remains a stinking charlatan and traitor!"

"*Touché!*" the man behind the table laughed with a low hard raucousness like the crackling of crushed paper. "You are right on every count, my little droll one, and since your knowledge goes no farther than yourself, and you shall go no farther than this room, you might as well know all." With an almost incredibly quick motion he flung open a drawer in the table and snatched a heavy automatic pistol from it, swinging it in a quick arc between de Grandin and me, steady as a pendulum and deadly as a serpent poised to strike. "Be seated, gentlemen," he ordered rather than invited. "When the time has come to say *au 'voir* you may stand, if you wish, but until then I must insist that you sit — and keep your hands in plain sight."

I collapsed into the nearest chair, but de Grandin looked about him deliberately, chose a comfortable divan, and dropped on it, resting his short swagger stick across his knees and beating a tattoo on it with lean, nervous fingers. "And now," he prompted, heedless alike of the menacing, blank stare in Coiquitt's glassy eyes and the threat of the pointed pistol, "you were about to regale us with the story of your adventures, were you not, *Monsieur?*"

"I was about to say that I survived the green hell of the *Île du Diable*. They penned me in like a brute beast, stabled me on stinking straw in a sty no pig with *amour propre* would consent to live in, made me drag a ball and chain behind me, starved me, beat me — but I survived. And I escaped. Through swamps that swarmed with crocodiles and poison snakes and reeked with pestilence and fever, I escaped. Through shark-infested waters and shores that swarmed with gendarmes on the watch for me, I escaped, and found safe sanctuary in the *houmforts* of the *vouidois*.

"They welcomed me for my learning, but, *pardieu*, they had much to teach me, too! I learned, by example, how to make a *zombi*, how to draw the soul from the body and leave only an automaton that moves and breathes, but has no mind or reason. I learned from them how it is possible to cast the illness out of one and into another — even how to swerve the clutching hand of death from one to another. Poor little fool, do you know that in the mountain fastnesses of Haiti there are men and women still young and strong and virile who were old when Toussaint l'Ouverture and Henri Christophe

raised the banner of revolt against the French? How? Because, *parbleu*, they know the secret I alone of all white men have learned from them — how to turn the hand of death from one man to another. But there must be a willing victim for the sacrifice.

“There must be one who says that he will die in place of the other. Granted this, and granted the such power as I possess, the rest is easy. Life begins at forty, some Yankee has said fatuously. *Pardieu*, it can begin again at seventy or eighty or a hundred, or flow back strong and vibrant into one who lies on death’s doorsill, provided always there is one who will become the substitute of him whose time is almost sped.

“That is the secret of the cures I’ve made, my silly little foolish one. I have not changed the score. Death still collects his forfeit, but he takes a different victim; that is all. Yet I grow rich upon the hope and the credulity of those who see only the credit columns of the ledger Death keeps. They do not realize, the fools! that every credit has its corresponding debit, and when Death finally strikes his balance, ‘Too bad,’ they say, ‘he had so much to live for, yet he died just as she regained health.’ Ha-ha, it is to laugh at human gullibility, *mes enfants*. You, by example, would never stoop of practicing such chicanery, I am certain. Oh, no! If you could not effect a cure you would permit the patient to die peacefully, and raise your hands and eyes to heaven in pious resignation. Me, I am different. As long as there are fools there will be those to prey on them, and I shall keep Death’s books, collect my stipend for my work, and be known as the great doctor who has never lost a case—”

“I fear you have lost this one, *cher savant*,” the ghost of an ironic grin appeared beneath the waxed ends of de Grandin’s small mustache. “We have heard all we desired, and—”

“And now the time has come to say ‘*Adieu pour l’éternité!*’” the other broke in savagely as he leveled the pistol, steadying his elbow on the table. “You think—”

“*Non*, by blue, it is that I damn know!” de Grandin’s voice was hard and sharp as a razor as he raised one knee slightly, pressed his hand against the leather knob of his swagger stick and gave it a sharp half-turn.

The report was no louder than the bursting of an electric light bulb, and there was no smoke from the detonation of the cartridge in the gun-barrel hidden in the cane, but the missile sped to its mark with the accuracy of an iron-filing flying to a magnet, and Coiquitt swayed a little in his chair, as if he had been struck by an unseen fist. Then, between the widow’s peak of the black hair that grew well down on his forehead and the sharply accented black brows above the glassy, unchanging black eyes, there came a spot of red no larger than a dime, but which spread till it reached the size of

a quarter, a half-dollar, and finally splayed out in an irregular red splash that covered almost the entire forehead. There was a look of shocked surprise, almost of reproof, in the cold visage, and the black, lack-luster eyes kept staring fixedly at de Grandin.

Then suddenly, appallingly, the man seemed to melt. The pistol dropped from his unnerved hand with a clatter and his head crashed down upon the table, jarring the great silver bowl of orchids till it nearly overturned, and dislodging a pile of books so they crashed to the floor.

“And that, unless I am much more mistaken than I think, is that, my friend,” de Grandin rose and walked across the room to stand above the dead man slumped across the table. “The English, a most estimable people, have a proverb to the effect that the one who would take supper with the devil would be advised to bring with him a long spoon. *Eh bien*, I took that saying to heart before coming to this place, *mon vieux*. This little harmless-seeming cane, she is a very valuable companion in the tight fix, I do assure you. One never knows when he may find himself in a case where he cannot make use of his pistol, when to make a move to draw a weapon would be to sign one’s own death warrant; but he who would shoot quickly if he saw you reach for a weapon would never give a second thought or glance to this so little, harmless seeming stick of mine. No, certainly. Accordingly, when he had bidden us be seated and threatened us with his pistol, I took great care to seat myself where I could aim my cane at him as I held it across my knees, with nothing intervening to spoil the shot I knew I must take at him sooner or later. *Tiens*, am I not the clever one, *mon vieux*? But certainly, I should say yes.”

“You certainly got us out of a tight fix,” I admitted. “Five minutes ago I shouldn’t have cared to offer a nickel for our chance of getting out of here alive.”

He looked at me reproachfully. “While I was with you, Friend Trowbridge?”

For a moment he bent over the man sprawled across the table, then, “*Ah-ha!*” he cried jubilantly. “*Ah-ha-ha!* Behold his stratagem, my friend!”

I went a little sick as I looked, for it seemed to me he gouged the dead man’s eyes out of their sockets, but as I took a second glance I understood. Over his eyeballs, fitted neatly underneath the lids, Coiquitt had worn a pair of contact lenses that simulated natural eyes so well that only a fixed stare betrayed them, and they were made with black irides, entirely concealing the natural gray of his eyes.

“He had the cunning, that one,” de Grandin grudgingly admitted as he dropped the little hemispheres of glass upon the table. “He made but one great mistake. He underestimated Jules de Grandin. It is not wise to do that, Friend

Trowbridge.”

“How will you explain his death,” I asked. “Of course, you shot in self-defense, but—”

“But be stewed in sulphur and served hot with brimstone for Satan’s breakfast,” he broke in. “The man was an escaped convict, a traitor to France and a former agent of the *Boche*. I am an officer of the Republic, and had the right to apprehend him for the American authorities. He resisted arrest, and” — his shrug was a masterpiece, even for him — “he is no longer present. *C’est tout simple, n’est-ce-pas?*”

The telephone began to ring with a shrill insistence and instinctively I reached for it, but he put out his hand to arrest me. “Let it ring, my friend. He is past all interest in such things, and as for us, we have more important business elsewhere. I would inspect Mademoiselle Camille—”

“You think she may have—”

“I do not know just what to think. I have the hope, but I cannot be sure. Come, hasten, rush, fly; I entreat you!”

Camilla lay upon the study sofa much as we had left her, and smiled wanly at us as he hurried into the room. “You did see him, didn’t you?” she asked with something akin to animation in her voice.

“We did, indeed, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin assured her, “and what was much more to the point, he saw us.”

“I knew you must have talked to him and made him relent, for just a little while ago — it couldn’t have been more than ten or fifteen minutes — I had another dreadful attack, and just when I had given up all hope and knew that I was dying it stopped, and I found I could breathe freely again. Now I feel almost well once more. Perhaps” — hope struggled with fear in her eyes — “perhaps I shall recover?”

“Perhaps you shall, indeed, *Mademoiselle*,” he nodded reassuringly. “Come into the examination room if you will be so kind. It is that we should like to see what we can see.”

It was amazing, but it was true. The most minute examination failed to show a symptom of angina pectoris. There was no area of dullness, no faint suggestion of a heart murmur, and her pulse, though rather light and rapid, was quite steady.

“Accept our most sincere congratulations, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin murmured as he helped her from the table. It seems you are on the highway to complete recovery.”

“Oh!” her exclamation was a small, sad sound, and there was an enmeshed, desperate look in her eyes. “Rick! If I get well, he’ll—”

De Grandin made a little deprecating sound with his tongue against his teeth. “It may be even as you say, *ma chère*. I would not give you the false hope. Again, it may be quite otherwise. Have you courage to go with us to the hospital and see?”

The supervisor of the third floor where young Bream’s room was, met us at the elevator. “It’s really amazing,” she confided as we walked down the corridor. “Mr. Bream has been improving steadily these past six weeks, but shortly after ten o’clock tonight he had a dreadful paroxysm, and we thought it was the end. We had to get Dr. Carver the house physician, for all our efforts to get Dr. Coiquitt on the ’phone were useless. Dr. Carver gave us no hope, but suddenly — almost miraculously, it seemed to me — the spasm passed and Mr. Bream began to breathe freely. In a little while he fell asleep and has been resting ever since. I never knew a patient sick as he was with myocarditis to recover fully, but—”

“Strange things are happening every day, *Madame*,” de Grandin reminded her. “Perhaps this is one of them.”

I had not treated Bream, and so had no basis of comparison between his condition as I found him and his former state, but careful examination revealed nothing alarming.

His pulse was weak and inclined to be thready, and his respiration not quite satisfactory, but there was no evidence of organic affection. With bed-rest and good nursing he should make an excellent prospect for some life insurance salesman in a year or less, I thought. De Grandin agreed with me, and turned to Camilla, eyes agleam with delight. “You may congratulate him on his impending recovery, *Mademoiselle*,” he whispered, “but do it softly — gently. The aching sweetness of a lover’s kiss — *morbleu*, but it can play the very devil with a normal heart, when one is not so strong — have the discretion, *Mademoiselle*.”

“I’m hanged if I can understand it,” I confessed as we left the hospital. “First Bream is dying, then Coiquitt, or Dessiles, seems to cure him, but makes Camilla wilt and wither like a flower on the stem as he improves. Then, when you shoot him, she makes an amazing recovery and Bream seems practically well. If he had retrogressed as she recovered—”

He chuckled delightedly. “He called himself Death’s Bookkeeper. *Très bon*. He was balancing the books of Death when I shot him, and as you say so drolly in America, caught him off his balance. The scales were even. She he had sent the psychic message to, but not in quite enough force. Had he endured five little minutes longer, he might have forced her to her death. As it was I damn think I did not delay one little minute too long in eliminating him. At the same time he endeavored to cause her to die he attempted to undo the work he had done for young Monsieur Bream, but his death cut short that bit of double-dealing, also, and the young man lapsed again into the state of almost-wellness he had attained when the *sale trompeur* tried to kill him to death. Yes, undoubtedly it is so. I can no more explain it than I can say

why a red cow who eats green grass gives white milk. I know only that it is so.

“And in the meantime, if we walk a block in this direction, then turn twenty paces to the left, we shall arrive at a place

where they purvey a species of nectar called an old-fashioned—a lovely drink with quantities of lovely whiskey in it. Why do we delay here, my friend?”

The Green God's Ring

ST. DUNSTAN'S was packed to overflowing. Expectantly smiling ladies in cool crêpe and frilly chiffon crowded against perspiring gentlemen in formal afternoon dress while they craned necks and strained ears. Aisles, chancel, sanctuary, were embowered in July roses and long trailing garlands of southern smilax, the air was heavy with the humid warmth of summer noon, the scent of flowers and the perfume from the women's hair and clothes.

The dean of the Cathedral Chapter, the red of his Cambridge hood in pleasing contrast to the spotless white of linen surplice and sleek black cassock, pronounced the fateful words, his calm clear voice a steady mentor for the bridegroom's faltering echo:

"I, Wade, take thee Melanie to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward—"

"From this day forward," Dean Quincy repeated, smiling with gentle tolerance. In forty years of priesthood he had seen more than one bridegroom go suddenly dumb. "From this day forward, for better, for worse—"

His smile lost something of its amusement, his florid, smooth-shaven face assumed an expression of mingled surprise and consternation which in other circumstances would have seemed comic. Swaying back and forth from toes to heels, from heels to toes, the bridegroom balanced uncertainly a moment, then with a single short, hard, retching cough fell forward like an overturned image, the gilded hilt of his dress sword jangling harshly on the pavement of the chancel.

For what seemed half a minute the bride looked down at the fallen groom with wide, horrified eyes, then, flowing lace veil billowing about her like wind-driven foam, she dropped to her knees, thrust a lace-sheathed arm beneath his neck and raised his head to pillow it against the satin and seed pearls of her bodice. "Wade," she whispered in a passionless, cold little voice that carried to the farthest corner of the death-still church. "Oh, Wade, my beloved!"

Quickly, with the quiet efficiency bred of their training, the young Naval officers attending the fallen bridegroom wheeled in their places and strode down the aisle to shepherd panic-stricken guests from their pews.

"Nothin' serious; nothin' at all," a lad who would not see his twenty-fifth birthday for another two years whispered soothingly through trembling lips as he motioned Jules de Grandin and me from our places. "Lieutenant Hardison is subject to these spells. Quite all right, I assure you. Ceremony will be finished in private — in the vestry room when he's come out of it. See you at the reception in a little

while. Everything's all right. Quite—"

The pupils of de Grandin's little round blue eyes seemed to have expanded like those of an alert tomcat, and his delicate, slim nostrils twitched as though they sought to capture an elusive scent. "*Mais oui, mon brave,*" he nodded approval of the young one-striper's tact. "We understand. *Certainement.* But me, I am a physician, and this is my good friend, Dr. Trowbridge—"

"Oh, are you, sir?" the lad broke in almost beseechingly. "Then for God's sake go take a look at him; we can't imagine—"

"But of course not, *mon enfant.* Diagnosis is not your trade," the small Frenchman whispered. "Do you prevail upon the congregation to depart while we — *attendez-moi,* Friend Trowbridge," he ordered in a low voice as he tiptoed toward the chancel where the stricken bride still knelt and nursed the stricken bridegroom's head against her bosom.

"*Sacré nom!*" he almost barked the exclamation as he came to a halt by the tragic tableau formed by the kneeling bride and supine man. "*C'est cela même.*"

There was no doubting his terse comment. In the glassy-eyed, hang-jawed expression of the bridegroom's face we read the trade mark of the King of Terrors. Doctors, soldiers and morticians recognize death at a glance.

"Come, Melanie," Mrs. Thurmond put a trembling hand upon her daughter's shoulder. "We must get Wade to a doctor, and—"

"A doctor?" the girl's voice was small and still as a night breeze among the branches. "What can a doctor do for my poor murdered darling? Oh, Wade, my dear, my dear," she bent until her lips were at his ear, "I loved you so, and I'm your murderess."

"*Non, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin denied softly. "You must not say so. It may be we can help you—"

"Help? *Ha!*" she almost spit the exclamation at him. "What help can there be for him — or me? Go away — get out — all of you!" she swept the ring of pitying faces with hard bright eyes almost void of all expression. "Get out, I tell you, and leave me with my dead!"

De Grandin drew the slim black brows that were in such sharp contrast to his wheat blond hair down in a sudden frown. "*Mademoiselle,*" his voice was cold as icy spray against her face, "You ask if any one can help you, and I reply they can. I, Jules de Grandin can help you, despite the evil plans of pisacha, bhirta and preta, shahini and rakshasha, I can help—"

The girl cringed from his words as from a whip. "Pisacha,

bhirta and preta,” she repeated in a trembling, terrified whisper. “You know—”

“Not altogether, *Mademoiselle*,” he answered, “but I shall find out, you may be assured.”

“What is it you would have me do?”

“Go hence and leave us to do that which must needs be done. Anon I shall call on you, and if what I have the intuition to suspect is true, *tenez*, who knows?”

She drew a kneeling cushion from the step before the altar rail and eased the dead boy’s head down to it. “Be kind, be gentle with him, won’t you?” she begged. “Good-by, my darling, for a little while,” she laid a light kiss on the pale face pillowed on the crimson cushion. “Good-by—” Tears came at last to her relief and, weeping piteously, she stumbled to her mother’s waiting arms and tottered to the vestry room.

“Heart?” I hazarded as the bridal party left us alone with the dead man.

“I should think not,” he denied with a shake of his head. “He was on the Navy’s active list, that one, and those with cardiac affections do not rate that.”

“Perhaps it was the heat—”

“Not if Jules de Grandin knows his heat prostration symptoms, and he has spent much time near the Equator. The fires of hell would have been cold beside the temperature in here when all those curious ones were assembled to see this poor one and his beloved plight their troth, but did he not seem well enough when he came forth to meet her at the chancel steps? Men who will fall prone on their faces in heat collapse show symptoms of distress beforehand. Yes, of course. Did you see his color? Excellent, was it not? But certainly. Bronzed from the sea and sun, *au teint vermeil de bon santé*. We were not thirty feet away, and could see perfectly. He had none of that pallor that betokens heat stroke. No.”

“Well, then” — I was a little nettled at the cavalier way he dismissed my diagnoses — “what d’ye think it was?”

He lifted narrow shoulders in a shrug that was a masterpiece of disavowal of responsibility. “*Le bon Dieu* knows, and He keeps His own counsel. Perhaps we shall be wiser when the autopsy is done.”

We left the relatively cool shadow of the church and stepped out to the sun-baked noonday street. “If you will be so kind, I think that I should like to call on the good Sergeant Costello,” he told me as we reached my parked car.

“Why Costello?” I asked. “It’s a case of sudden unexplained death, and as such one for the coroner, but as for any criminal element—”

“Perhaps,” he agreed, seeming only half aware of what we talked of. “Perhaps not. At any rate, I think there are some

things about this case in which the Sergeant will be interested.”

We drove a few blocks in silence, then: “What was that gibberish you talked to Melanie?” I asked, my curiosity bettering my pique. “That stuff about your being able to help her despite the evil plans of the thingabobs and whatchamaycallems? It sounded like pure double talk to me, but she seemed to understand it.”

He chuckled softly. “The pisacha, bhirta and preta? The shahini and rakshasha?”

“That sounds like it.”

“That, my friend, was what you call the random shot, the drawing of the bow at venture. I had what you would call the hunch.”

“How d’ye mean?”

“Did you observe the ring upon the index finger of her right hand?”

“You mean the big red gold band set with a green cartouche?”

“*Précisément*.”

“Not particularly. It struck me as an odd sort of ornament to wear to her wedding, more like a piece of costume jewelry than an appropriate bridal decoration, still these modern youngsters—”

“That modern youngster, my friend, did not wear that ring because she wanted to.”

“No? Why, then?”

“Because she had to.”

“Oh, come, now. You can’t mean—”

“I can and do, my friend. Did not you notice the device cut into its setting?”

“Why, no. What was it?”

“It represented a four-faced, eight-armed monstrosity holding a straining woman in unbreakable embrace. The great God Siva—”

“Siva? You mean the Hindu deity?”

“Perfectly. He is a veritable chameleon, that one, and can change his form and color at a whim. Sometimes he is as mild and gentle as a lamb, but mostly he is fierce and passionate as a tiger. Indeed, his lamb-like attributes are generally a disguise, for underneath the softness is the cruelty of his base nature. *Tiens*, I think that he is best described as Bhirta, the Terrible.”

“And those others with outlandish names?”

“The pisacha and preta are a race of most unlovely demons, and like them are the rakshasha and shahini. They attend Siva in his attribute of Bhirta the Terrible as imps attend on Satan, doing his foul bidding and, if such a thing be possible, bettering his instructions.”

“Well?”

“By no means, my friend, not at all. It is not well, but very

bad indeed. A Christian maiden has no business wearing such a talisman, and when I saw it on her finger I assumed that she might know something of its significance. Accordingly I spoke to her of the Four-Faced One, Bhirta and his attendant implings, the shahini, raksash and pischa. *Parbleu*, she understood me well enough. Altogether too well, I damn think."

"She seemed to, but—"

"There are no buts, my friend. She understood me. Anon I shall understand her. Now let us interview the good Costello."

Detective-Sergeant Jeremiah Costello was in the act of putting down the telephone as we walked into his office. "Good afternoon, sors," he greeted as he fastened a wilted collar and began knotting a moist necktie. "'Tis glad I'd be to welcome ye at any other time, but jist now I'm in a terin' hurry. Some swell has bumped himself off at a fashionable wedding, or if he didn't exactly do it, he died in most suspicious circumstances, an'—"

"It would not be Lieutenant Wade Hardison you have reference to?"

"Bedad, sor, it ain't Mickey Mouse!"

"Perhaps, then, we can be of some assistance. We were present when it happened."

"Were ye, indeed, sor? What kilt 'im?"

"I should like to know that very much indeed, my friend. That is why I am here. It does not make the sense. One moment he is hale and hearty, the next he falls down dead before our eyes. I have seen men shot through the brain fall in the same way. Death must have been instantaneous—"

"An' ye've no hunch wot caused it?"

"I have, indeed, *mon vieux*, but it is no more than the *avis indirect* — what you would call the hunch."

"Okay, sor, let's git goin'. Where to first?"

"Will you accompany me to the bride's house? I should like to interview her, but without official sanction it might be difficult."

"Howly Mackerel! Ye're not tellin' me she done it—"

"We have not yet arrived at the telling point, *mon ami*. Just now we ask the questions and collect the answers; later we shall assemble them like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Perhaps when we have completed the mosaic we shall know some things that we do not suspect now."

"I getcha," Costello nodded. "Let's be on our way, sors."

The Thurmond place in Chattahoochee Avenue seemed cloaked in brooding grief as we drove up the wide driveway to the low, pillared front porch. A cemetery quiet filled the air, the hushed, tiptoe silence of the sickroom or the funeral chapel. The festive decorations of the house and grounds

were as incongruous in that atmosphere of tragedy as rouge and paint upon the cheeks and lips of a corpse.

"Miss Melanie is too ill to be seen," the butler informed us in answer to Costello's inquiry. "The doctor has just left, and—"

"Present our compliments to her, if you please," de Grandin interrupted suavely. "She will see us, I make no doubt. Tell her it is the gentleman with whom she talked at the church — the one who promised her protection from Bhirta. Do you understand?"

"Bhirta?" the servant repeated wonderingly.

"Your accent leaves something to be desired, but it will serve. Do not delay, if you please, for I am not a patient person. By no means."

Draped in a sheer convent-made nightrobe that had been part of her trousseau, Melanie Thurmond lay rigid as death upon the big colonial sleigh bed of her chamber, a madeira sheet covering her to the bosom, her long auburn hair spread about her corpse-pale face like a rose gold nimbus framing an ivory ikon. Straight before her, with set, unseeing eyes she gazed, only the faint dilation of her delicate nostrils and the rhythmic rise and fall of her bosom testifying she had not already joined her stricken lover in the place he had gone a short hour before.

The little Frenchman approached the bed silently, bent and took her flaccid hand in his and raised it to his lips. "*Ma pauvre*," he murmured. "It is truly I. I have come to help you, as I promised."

The ghost of a tired little smile touched her pale lips as she turned her head slowly on the pillow and looked at him with wide-set, tearless sepia eyes. "I knew that it would come," she told him in a hopeless little voice. Her words were slow and mechanical, her voice almost expressionless, as though she were rehearsing a half-learned lesson: "It had to be. I should have known it. I'm really Wade's murderess."

"Howly Mither!" Costello ejaculated softly, and de Grandin turned a sudden fierce frown on him.

"*Comment?*" he asked softly. "How do you mean that, *ma petite roitelette?*"

She shook her head wearily from side to side and a small frown gathered between her brows. "Somehow, I can't seem to think clearly. My brain seems seething — boiling like a cauldron—"

"*Précisément, exactement, au juste*," de Grandin agreed with a vigorous nod. "You have right, my little poor one. The brain, she is astew with all this trouble, and when she stews the recrement comes to the surface. Come, let us skim it off together, thou and I" — he made a gesture as if spooning something up and tossing it away. "Thus we shall rid our minds of dross and come at last to the sweet, unadulterated truth. How did it all start, if you please? What

made you know it had to happen, and why do you accuse yourself all falsely of the murder of your *amoureux*?"

A little shudder shook the girl's slim frame, but a hint of color in her pallid cheeks told of a returning interest in life. "It all began with The Light of Asia."

"*Quoi?*" de Grandin's slim brows rose in Saracenic arches. "You have reference to the poem by Sir Edward Arnold?"

"Oh, no. This Light of Asia was an Oriental bazaar in East Fifty-Sixth Street. The girls from Briarly were in the habit of dropping in there for little curios — quaint little gifts for people who already seemed to have everything, you know.

"It was a lovely place. No daylight ever penetrated there. Two great vases stood on ebony stands in the shop windows, and behind them heavy curtains of brocaded cloth of gold shut off the light from outside as effectively as solid doors. The shop — if you could call it that — was illuminated by lamps that burned scented oil and were encased in frames of carved and pierced teakwood. These, and two great green candles as tall as a man, gave all the light there was. The floors were covered with thick, shining Indian rugs, and lustrous embroideries hung against the walls. The stock was not on shelves, but displayed in cabinets of buhl and teak and Indian cedar — all sorts of lovely things: carved ivories and moulded silver, hand-worked gold and tortoise-shell, amethyst and topaz, jade and brass and lovely blue and green enamel, and over everything there hung the scent of incense, curiously and pungently sweet; it lacked the usual cloying, heavy fragrance of the ordinary incense, yet it was wonderfully penetrating, almost hypnotic."

De Grandin nodded. "An interesting place, one gathers. And then—"

"I'd been to The Light of Asia half a dozen times before I saw The Green One."

"The Green One? *Qui diable?*"

"At the back of the shop there was a pair of double doors of bright vermilion lacquer framed by exquisitely embroidered panels. I'd often wondered what lay behind them. Then one day I found out! It was a rainy afternoon and I'd dropped into The Light as much to escape getting wet as to shop. There was no other customer in the place, and no one seemed in attendance, so I just wandered about, admiring the little bits of *virtu* in the cabinets and noting new additions to the stock, and suddenly I found myself at the rear of the shop, before the doors that had intrigued me so. There was no one around, as I told you, and after a hasty glance to make sure I was not observed, I put my hand out to the nearer door. It opened to my touch, as if it needed only a slight pressure to release its catch, and there in a gilded niche sat the ugliest idol I had ever seen.

"It seemed to be carved of some green stone, not like anything I'd ever seen before — almost waxen in its texture — and it had four faces and eight arms."

"*Qu'est-ce-donc?*"

"I said four faces. One looking each way from its head. Two of the faces seemed as calm as death masks, but the one behind the head had a dreadful sneering laugh, and that which faced the front had the most horrible expression — not angry, not menacing, exactly, but — would you understand me if I said it looked inexorable?"

"I should and do, *ma chère*. And the eight arms?"

"Every hand held something different. Swords, and sprays of leafy branches, and daggers — all but two. They were empty and outstretched, not so much seeming to beg as to demand an offering.

"There was something terrible — and terrifying — about that image. It seemed to be demanding something, and suddenly I realized what it was. It wanted me! I seemed to feel a sort of secret, dark thrill emanating from it, like the electric tingle in the air before a thunderstorm. There was some power in this thing, immense and terrifying power that gave the impression of dammed-up forces waiting for release. Not physical power I could understand and combat — or run from, but something far more subtle; something uncanny and indescribable, and it was all the more frightening because I was aware of it, but could not explain nor understand it.

"It seemed as if I were hypnotized. I could feel the room begin to whirl about me slowly, like a carousel when it's just starting, and my legs began to tremble and weaken. In another instant I should have been on my knees before the green idol when the spell was broken by a pleasant voice: 'You are admiring our latest acquisition?'"

"It was a very handsome young man who stood beside me, not more than twenty-two or -three. I judged, with a pale olive complexion, long brown eyes under slightly drooping lids with haughty brows, and hair so sleek and black and glossy it seemed to fit his head like a skullcap of patent leather. He wore a well-cut morning coat and striped trousers, and there was a good pearl in his black poplin ascot tie.

"He must have seen the relief in my face, for he laughed before he spoke again, a friendly, soft laugh that reassured me. 'I am Kabanta Sikra Roy,' he told me. 'My dad owns this place and I help him out occasionally. When I'm not working here I study medicine at N.Y.U.'

"'Is this image — or idol, or whatever you call it — for sale?' I asked him, more to steady my nerves by conversation than anything else.

"The look he gave me was an odd one. I couldn't make

out if he were angry or amused, but in a moment he laughed again, And when he smiled his whole face lighted up. 'Of course, everything in the shop's for sale, including the proprietors — at a price,' he answered, 'but I don't think you'd be interested in buying it.'

"I should say not. But I just wondered. Isn't it some sort of god, or something?"

"Quite so. It is the Great Mahadeva, third, but by far the most important member of the Hindu Triad, sometimes known as Siva the Destroyer."

"I looked at the thing again and it seemed even more repulsive than before. 'I shouldn't think you'd find a quick sale for it,' I suggested.

"We don't expect to. Perhaps we'll not sell it at all. In case we never find a buyer for it, we can put in our spare time worshipping at its shrine."

"The utter cynicism of his reply grated on me, then I remembered having heard that many high caste Hindus have no more real faith in their gods than the educated Greeks and Romans had in theirs. But before I could be rude enough to ask if he really believed such nonsense, he had gently shepherd me away from the niche and was showing me some exquisitely carved amethysts. Before I left we found we had a dozen friends in common and he'd extended and I'd accepted an invitation to see *Life With Father* and go dancing at the Cotillion Room afterward.

"That began the acquaintance that ripened almost overnight into intimacy. Kabanta was a delightful play-fellow. His father must have been enormously rich, for everything that had come to him by inheritance had been given every chance to develop. The final result was this tall, slender olive complexioned man with the sleek hair, handsome features and confident though slightly deferential manner. Before we knew it we were desperately in love.

"No" — her listless manner gathered animation with the recital — "it wasn't what you could call love; it was more like bewitchment. When we met I felt the thrill of it; it seemed almost to lift the hair on my head and make me dizzy, and when we were together it seemed as if we were the only two people in the world, as if we were cut off from everyone and everything. He had the softest, most musical voice I had ever heard, and the things he said were like poetry by Laurence Hope. Besides that, every normal woman has a masochistic streak buried somewhere deep in her nature, and the thought of the mysterious, glamorous East and the guarded, prisoned life of the zenana has an almost irresistible appeal to us when we're in certain moods. So, one night when we were driving home from New York in his sports roadster and he asked me if I cared for him I told him that I loved him with my heart and soul and spirit. I did, too — then. There was a full moon that night, and I

was fairly breathless with the sweet delirium of love when he took me in his arms and kissed me. It was like being hypnotized and conscious at the same time. Then, just before we said good night, he asked me to come to The Light of Asia next evening after closing time and plight our troth in Eastern fashion.

"I had no idea what was coming, but I was fairly palpitant with anticipation when I knocked softly on the door of the closed shop shortly after sunset the next evening.

"Kabanta himself let me in, and I almost swooned at sight of him. Every shred of his Americanism seemed to have fallen away, for he was in full Oriental dress, a long, tight-waisted frock coat of purple satin with a high neck and long, tight sleeves, tight trousers of white satin and bright red leather shoes turned up at the toes and heavily embroidered with gold, and on his head was the most gorgeous piece of silk brocade I'd ever seen wrapped into a turban and decorated with a diamond aigret. About his neck were looped not one nor two but three long strands of pearls — pink-white, green-white and pure-white — and I gasped with amazement at sight of them. There couldn't have been one in the three strands that was worth less than a hundred dollars, and each of the three strands had at least a hundred gems in it. The man wore twenty or thirty thousand dollars worth of pearls as nonchalantly as a shop girl might have worn a string of dime store beads.

"Come in, White Moghra Blossom,' he told me. 'All is Prepared.'

"The shop was in total darkness except for the glow of two silver lamps that burned perfumed oil before the niche in which the Green God crouched. 'You'll find the garments of betrothal in there,' Kabanta whispered as he led me to a door at the rear, 'and there's a picture of a Hindu woman wearing clothes like those laid out for you to serve as a model. Do not be long, O Star of My Delight, O Sweetly Scented Bower of Jasmine. I swoon for the sight of you arrayed to vow love undying.'

"In the little anteroom was a long, three-paneled mirror in which I could see myself from all sides, a dressing-table set with toilet articles and cosmetics, and my costume draped across a chair. On the dressing-table was an exquisite small picture of a Hindu girl in full regalia, and I slipped my Western clothes off and dressed myself in the Eastern garments, copying the pictured bride as closely as I could. There were only three garments — a little sleeveless bodice like a zouave jacket of green silk dotted with bright yellow discs and fastened at the front with a gold clasp, a pair of long, tight plum-colored silk trousers embroidered with pink rosebuds, and a shawl of thin almost transparent purple silk tissue fringed with gold tassels and worked with intricate

designs of lotus buds and flowers in pink and green sequins. When I'd slipped the bodice and trousers on I draped the veil around me, letting it hang down behind like an apron and tying it in front in a bow knot with the ends tucked inside the tight waistband of the trousers. It was astonishing how modest such a scanty costume could be. There was less of me exposed than if I'd been wearing a halter and shorts, and not much more than if I'd worn one of the bare-midriff evening dresses just then becoming fashionable. For my feet there was a pair of bell toe rings, little clusters of silver bells set close together like grapes in a bunch that tinkled with a whirring chime almost like a whistle each time I took a step after I'd slipped them on my little toes, and a pair of heavy silver anklets with a fringe of silver tassels that flowed down from the ankle to the floor and almost hid my feet and jingled every time I moved. On my right wrist I hung a gold slave bracelet with silver chains, each ending in a ball of somber-gleaming garnet, and over my left hand I slipped a heavy sand-moulded bracelet of silver that must have weighed a full half pound. I combed my hair straight back from my forehead, drawing it so tightly that there was not a trace of wave left in it, and then I braided it into a queue, lacing strands of imitation emeralds and garlands of white jasmine in the plait. When this was done I darkened my eyebrows with a cosmetic pencil, raising them and accenting their arch to the 'flying gull' curve so much admired in the East, and rubbed green eye-shadow upon my lids. Over my head I draped a long blue veil sewn thickly with silver sequins and crowned it with a chaplet of yellow rosebuds. Last of all there was a heavy gold circlet like a clip-earring to go into my left nostril, and a single opal screw-earring to fasten in the right, giving the impression that my nose had been pierced for the jewels, and a tiny, star-shaped patch of red court plaster to fix between my brows like a caste mark.

"There is a saying clothes don't make the man, but it's just the opposite with a woman. When I'd put those Oriental garments on I *felt* myself an Eastern woman who had never known and never wished for any other life except that behind the purdah, and all I wished to do was cast myself prostrate before Kabanta, tell him he was my lord, my master and my god, and press my lips against the gold-embroidered tips of his red slippers till he gave me leave to rise. I was shaking as if with chill when I stepped from the little anteroom accompanied by the silvery chiming of my anklets and toe rings.

"Kabanta had set a fire glowing in a silver bowl before the Green God, and when I joined him he put seven sticks of sandalwood into my hands, telling me to walk around the brazier seven times, dropping a stick of the scented wood on the fire each time I made a circuit and repeating Hindu invocations after him. When this was done he poured a little

scented water from a silver pitcher into my cupped hands, and this I sprinkled on the flames, then knelt across the fire from him with outstretched hands palm-upward over the blaze while I swore to love him, and him only, throughout this life and the seven cycles to come. I remember part of the oath I took: 'To be one in body and soul with him as gold and the bracelet or water and the wave are one.'

"When I had sworn this oath he slipped a heavy gold ring — this! — on my finger, and told me I was pledged to him for all time and eternity, that Siva the Destroyer was witness to my pledge and would avenge my falseness if I broke my vow. It was then for the first time I heard of the pisacha, bhirta and preta, shahini and rakshasha. It all seemed horrible and fantastic as he told it, but I believed it implicitly — then." A little rueful smile touched her pale lips. "I'm afraid that I believe it now, too, sir; but for a little while I didn't, and so — so my poor lover is dead."

"*Pauvre enfant,*" de Grandin murmured. "*Ma pauvre belle créature.* And then?"

"Then came the war. You know how little pretense of neutrality there was. Americans were crossing into Canada by droves to join up, and everywhere the question was not 'Will we get into it?' but 'When?' I could fairly see my lover in the gorgeous uniform of a risaldar lieutenant or captain in the Indian Army, leading his troop of wild Patans into battle, but Kabanta made no move. When our own boys were drafted he was deferred as a medical student. At last I couldn't stand it any longer. One evening at the shore I found courage to speak. 'Master and Lord,' I asked him — we used such language to each other in private — 'is it not time that you were belting on your sword to fight for freedom?'

"'Freedom, White Blossom of the Moghra Tree?' he answered with a laugh. 'Who is free? Art thou?'

"'Thou art my lord and I thy slave,' I answered as he had taught me.

"'And are the people of my father's country free? You know that they are not. For generations they have groaned beneath the Western tyrant's lash. Now these European dogs are at each other's throats. Should I take sides in their curs' fight? What difference does it make to me which of them destroys the others?'

"'But you're American,' I protested. 'The Japanese have attacked us. The Germans and Italians have declared war on us—'

"'Be silent!' he commanded, and his voice was no longer the soft voice that I loved. 'Women were made to serve, not to advise their masters of their duty.'

"'But, Kabanta—'

"'I told you to be still!' he nearly shouted. 'Does the slave dare disobey her master's command? Down, creature, down

upon your knees and beg my pardon for your insolence—'

"'You can't be serious!' I gasped as he grasped me by the hair and began forcing my head down. We'd been playing at this game of slave and master — dancing girl and maharajah — and I'd found it amusing, even thrilling after a fashion. But it had only been pretense — like a 'dress-up party' or the ritual of a sorority where you addressed someone you'd known since childhood as Queen or Empress, or by some other high-sounding title, knowing all the while that she was just your next door neighbor or a girl with whom you'd gone to grammar school. Now, suddenly, it dawned on me that it had not been play with him. As thoroughly Americanized as he appeared, he was still an Oriental underneath, with all the Oriental's cynicism about women and all an Eastern man's exalted opinion of his own importance. Besides, he was hurting me terribly as he wound his fingers in my hair. 'Let me go!' I demanded angrily. 'How dare you?'"

"'How dare I? Gracious Mahadeva, hear the brazen Western hussy speak!' he almost choked. He drew my face close to his and asked in a fierce whisper, 'Do you know what you vowed that night at The Light of Asia?'"

"'I vowed I'd always love you, but—'"

"'You'd always love me!' he mocked 'You vowed far more than that, my Scented Bower of Delight. You vowed that from that minute you would be my thing and chattel — vowed yourself to Siva as a voluntary offering, and accepted me —as the God's representative. As Gods are to humanity, so am I to you, O creature lower than the dust. You're mine to do with as I please, and right now it pleases me to chastise you for your insolence.' Deliberately, while he held my head back with one band in my hair, he drew one of his moccasins off and struck me across the mouth with its heel. I could feel a thin trickle of blood between my lips and the scream I was about to utter died in my throat."

"'Down!' he commanded. 'Down on your face and beg for mercy. If you are truly penitent perhaps I shall forgive your insolence.'"

"I might have yielded finally, for flesh and blood can stand only so much, and suddenly I was terribly afraid of him, but when I was almost beyond resistance we heard voices in the distance, and saw a light coming toward us on the beach. 'Don't think that I've forgiven you,' he told me as he pushed me from him. 'Before I take you back you'll have to walk barefoot across hot coals and abase yourself lower than the dust—'"

"Despite the pain of my bruised lips I laughed. 'If you think I'll ever see you again, or let you come within speaking distance—' I began, but his laugh was louder than mine."

"'If you think you can get away, or ever be free from your servitude to me, you'll find that you're mistaken,' he jeered."

'You are Siva's, and mine, for all eternity. My shadow is upon you and my ring is on your finger. Try to escape the one or take the other off.'

"I wrenched at the ring he'd put on my hand. It wouldn't budge. Again and again I tried to get it off. No use. It seemed to have grown fast to the flesh; the more I tried to force it off the tighter it seemed to cling, and all the time Kabanta stood there smiling at me with a look of devilish, goading derision on his dark handsome features. At last I gave up trying and almost fainting with humiliation and the pain from my bruised mouth I turned and ran away. I found my car in the parking lot and drove home at breakneck speed. I suppose Kabanta managed to get a taxi. I don't know. I never saw him again."

"*Très bon,*" de Grandin nodded approval as she completed her story. "That is good. That is very good, indeed, *ma oisillone.*"

"Is it?" the irony of her reply was razor-thin.

"Is it not?"

"It is not."

"*Pourquoi? Nom d'un chameau enfumé!* For why?"

"Because he kept his word, sir. His shadow *is* upon me and his ring immovably upon my finger. Last year I met Wade Hardison, and it was love at first sight. Not fascination nor physical attraction, but love, real love; the good, clean, wholesome love a man and woman ought to have for each other if they expect to spend their lives together. Our engagement was announced at Christmas, and—"

"*Et puis?*" he prompted as her voice broke on a soundless sob.

"Then I heard from Kabanta. It was a post card — just a common penny post card, unsigned and undated, and it carried just eleven words of message: 'When you remove the ring you are absolved from your oath.' He hadn't signed it, as I said, but I knew instantly it was from him."

"I tried desperately to get the ring off, wound my fingers with silk, used soap and olive oil, held my hand in ice cold water — no use. It wouldn't budge. I couldn't even turn it on my finger. It is as if the metal had grown to my flesh and become part of me. I didn't dare tell anyone about it, they wouldn't have believed me, and somehow I didn't have the courage to go to a jeweler's and have it filed off, so ..."

The silence that ensued lasted so long one might have thought the girl had fainted, but the short, irregular, spasmodic swelling of her throat told us she was fighting hard to master her emotion. At last:

"Two days ago," she whispered so low we had to bend to catch her words, "I had another note. 'He shall never call you his,' was all it said. There was no signature, but I knew only too well who the sender was."

“Then I told Wade about it, but he just laughed. Oh, if only I had had the courage to postpone our wedding Wade might be alive now. There’s no use fighting against Fate,” her voice rose to a thin thread of hysteria. “I might as well confess myself defeated, go back to Kabanta and take whatever punishment he cares to inflict. I’m hopelessly enmeshed, entrapped — ensnared! I am Siva’s toy and plaything, and Kabanta is the Green God’s representative!” She roused to a sitting posture, then fell back, burying her face in the pillow and shaking with heart-breaking sobs.

“Kabanta is a species of a cockroach, and Siva but an ape-faced piece of green stone,” de Grandin answered in a hard, sharp voice. “I, Jules de Grandin tell you so, *Mademoiselle*; anon I shall say the same thing to them, but much more forcefully. Yes, certainly, of course.”

“That dame’s as nutty as a fruit cake,” Costello confided as we left the Thurmond house. “She goes an’ gits herself involved with one o’ these here fancy Hindu fellies, an’ he goes an’ tells her a pack o’ nonsense, an’ she falls fer it like a ton o’ brick. As if they wuz anny such things as Shivas an’ shahinnies an’ raytors an’ th’ rest o’ it! Begob, I’d sooner belave in—”

“You and I do not believe, my friend,” de Grandin interrupted seriously, “but there are millions who do, and the power of their believing makes a great force—”

“Oh, come!” I scoffed. “You never mean to tell us that mere cumulative power of belief can create hobgoblins and bugaboos?”

“*Vraiment*,” he nodded soberly. “It is indeed unfortunately so, my friend. Thoughta are things, and sometimes most unpleasant things. Yes, certainly.”

“Nonsense!” I rejoined sharply. “I’m willing to agree that Melanie could have been imposed on. The world is full of otherwise quite sane people who are willing to believe the moon is made of green cheese if they’re told so impressively enough. I’ll even go so far as to concede she thinks she can’t get the ring off. We’ve all seen the cases of strange inhibitions, people who were convinced they couldn’t go past a certain spot — can’t go off the block in which they live, for instance. She’s probably unconsciously crooked her finger when she tried to pull it off. The very fact she found excuses to put off going to a jeweler’s to have it filed off shows she’s laboring under a delusion. Besides, we all know those Hindu are adepts at hypnotism—”

“*Ah, bah!*” he broke in. “You are even more mistaken than usual, Friend Trowbridge. “Have you by any chance read *Darkness Out of the East* by our good friend John Thunstone?”

“No,” I confessed, “but—”

“But be damned and stewed in boiling oil for Satan’s

supper. In his book *Friend Thunstone* points out that the rite of walking barefoot seven times around a living fire and throwing fuel and water on it while sacred *mantras* are recited is the most solemn manner of pronouncing an irrevocable oath. It is thus the neophyte is oath-bound to the service of the temple where she is to wait upon the gods, it is so when the wife binds herself forever to the service and subjection of her lord and husband. When that poor one performed that ceremony she undertook an oath-bound obligation which every Hindu firmly believes the gods themselves cannot break. She is pledged by fire and water for all time and eternity to the man who put the ring of Siva on her finger. While I talked to her I observed the amulet. It bears the device of a woman held in unbreakable embrace by Four-Faced Siva, and under it is written in Hindustani, ‘As the gods are to mankind so is the one to whom I vow myself to me. I have said it.’

“As for her having the ring filed off — she was wiser than she knew when she refrained from that.”

“How d’ye mean?” Costello and I chorused.

“I saw an instance of it once in Goa, Portuguese India. A wealthy Portuguese planter’s *femme de la main gauche* had an *affaire* with a Hindu while her protector was away on business. She was inveigled into taking such a vow as *Mademoiselle Thurmond* took, and into having such a ring slipped on her finger. When she would have broken with her Hindu lover and returned to her *purveyor* she too found the ring immovable, and hastened to a jeweler’s to have it filed off. *Tiens*, the life went out of her as the gold band was sawn asunder.”

“You mean she dropped dead of a stroke?” I asked.

“I mean she died, my friend. I was present at the autopsy, and every symptom pointed to snake bite — except the stubborn fact that there had been no snake. We had the testimony of the jeweler and his two assistants; we had the testimony of a woman friend who went with her to the shop. All were agreed there had been no snake near her. She was not bitten; she merely fell down dead as the gold band came off.”

“O.K., sor; if ye say it, I’ll belave it, even if I know ’t aint so,” Costello agreed. “What’s next?”

“I think we should go to the morgue. The autopsy should be complete by this time, and I am interested in the outcome.”

Dr. Jason Parnell, the coroner’s physician, fanned himself with a sheaf of death certificates, and mopped his streaming brow with a silk handkerchief. “I’m damned if I can make it out,” he confessed irritably. “I’ve checked and rechecked everything, and the answer’s the same each time. Only it doesn’t make sense.”

"*Qu'est-ce donc?*" de Grandin demanded. "How do you say?"

"That youngster has no more business being dead than you or I. There wasn't a God's earthly thing the matter with him from a pathological standpoint. He was perfect. Healthiest specimen I ever worked on. If he'd been shot, stabbed or run down by a motor car I could have understood it; but here he is, as physiologically perfect as an athlete, with positively no signs of trauma of any sort — except that he's as dead as a herring."

"You mean you couldn't find a symptom—" I began, and he caught me up before I had a chance to finish.

"Just that, Trowbridge. You said it. Not a single, solitary one. There is no sign of syncope, asphyxia or coma, no trace of any functional or organic weakness. Dammit man, the fellow didn't die, he just stopped living — and for no apparent reason. What'n hell am I goin' to tell the jury at the inquest?"

"*Tiens, mon ami*, that is your problem, I damn think," de Grandin answered. "We have one of our own to struggle with. There is that to do which needs immediate doing, and how we are to do it only *le bon Dieu* knows. Name of a little blue man, but it is the enigma, I tell you."

Sergeant Costello looked unhappily from Parnell to de Grandin. "Sure, sors, 'tis th' screwiest business I've ever seen entirely," he declared. "First th' pore young felley topples over dead as mutton, then his pore forsaken bride tells us a story as would make th' hair creep on yer neck, an' now you tell us that th' pore lad died o' nothin' a-tall. Mother o' Moses, 'tis Jerry Costello as don't know if he's comin' or goin' or where from an' where to. Can I use yer 'phone, Doc?" he asked Parnell. "Belike th' bhoys at Headquarters would like to know what I'm about."

We waited while he dialed Headquarters, heard him bark a question, and saw a look of utter unbelief spread on his broad perspiring face as some one at the other end answered. "'Tain't so!" he denied. "It couldn't be.

"We wuz just up to see her, an' she's as limp as a wet wash—"

"What is it, *mon sergent?*" de Grandin asked. "Is it that—"

"Ye can bet yer bottom dollar it is, sor," the Sergeant cut in almost savagely. "It sure is, or I'm a monkey's uncle. Miss Thurmond, her we just seen layin' in th' bed so weak she couldn't hold up her head, has taken it on th' lam."

"*Diable!*" de Grandin shot back. "It cannot be."

"That's what I told 'em at Headquarters, sor, but they insist they know what they're a-talkin' about; an' so does her old man. 'Twas him as put the call in to be on th' lookout fer her. It seems she lay in a half stupor when we left her, an' they'd left her alone, thinkin' she might git a bit o' rest,

when zingo! up she bounces, runs to th' garage where her car wuz parked, an' rushes down th' street like th' divil wuz on her trail."

"*Ha!*" de Grandin's hard, dry, barking laugh had nothing whatever to do with amusement. "*Ah-ha-ha!* I am the greatest stupid-head outside of a *maison de fous, mes amis*. I might have damn anticipated it! You say she ran as if the devil were behind her? *Mais non*, it is not so. He was before her. He called her and she answered his summons!"

"Whatever—" I began, but Costello caught the little Frenchman's meaning.

"Then what th' divil are we waitin' fer, sor?" he demanded. "We know where he hangs out. Let's go an' peel th' livin' hide off 'im—"

"*Ma moi, cher sergent*, you take the words out of my mouth," the small Frenchman shot back. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us be upon our way."

"Where to?" I asked.

"Where to? Where in the foul name of Satan but to that so vile shop called The Light of Asia, where unless I am more greatly mistaken than I think the dove goes to a rendezvous with the serpent. Quickly. Let us hasten, let us rush; let us fly, *mes amis!*"

The rain that had been threatening since early afternoon came down in bucketsful as we crept slowly through East Fifty-Sixth Street. It poured in miniature Niagaras from cornices and rolled-up awnings, the gutters were awash, the sidewalks almost ankle-deep with water.

"*Halte la!*" ordered de Grandin, and I edged the car close to the curb. "My friends, we are arrived. Be quiet, if you please, make no move unless I request it, and—" he broke off with a muttered "*nom d'un coq!*" as a wind-whipped awning sluiced a sudden flood of icy water over him, shook himself like a spaniel emerging from a pond, and laid his hand upon the brass knob of the highly varnished door.

Amazingly the door swung open at his touch and we stepped into the dim interior of The Light of Asia.

The place was like a church whose worshipers had gone. The air was redolent of incense, the darkness was relieved by only a dim, ruddy light, and all was silent — no, not quite! At the far end of the long room a voice was singing softly, a woman's voice raised in a trembling, tear-heavy contralto:

"Since I, O Lord, am nothing unto thee,
See here thy sword, I make it keen and bright ..."

"*Alons, mes enfants*, follow!" whispered Jules de Grandin as he tiptoed toward the rear of the shop.

Now the tableau came in view, clear-cut as a scene upon a stage. In an elevated niche like an altar place crouched a green stone image slightly larger than man's-size, the

sightless eyes of its four faces staring out in cold, malevolent obliviousness. Below it, cross-legged on a scarlet cushion, his hands folded palm-upward in his lap, was a remarkably handsome young man dressed in an ornate Oriental costume, but these we passed by at a glance, for in the foreground, kneeling with her forehead pressed against the floor, was Melanie Thurmond dressed as she had been when she took her fateful vow and had the ring of Siva put upon her hand. Her hands were raised above her bowed head, and in them rested a long, curved scimitar, the ruddy lamplight gleaming on its jeweled hilt and bright blade with ominous redness.

“Forgive, forgive!” we heard her sob, and saw her beat her forehead on the floor in utter self-abasement. “Have pity on the worm that creeps upon the dust before thy feet—”

“Forgiveness shall be thine,” the man responded slowly, “when dead kine crop the grass, when the naked rend their clothes and when a shining radiance becomes a void of blackness.”

“Have mercy on the insect crawling at thy feet,” the prostrate woman sobbed. “Have pity on the lowly thing—”

“Have done!” he ordered sharply. “Give me the sword.”

She roused until she crouched upon her knees before him, raised the scimitar and pressed its blade against her lips and brow in turn, then, head bent low, held it out to him. He took it, balancing it between his hands for a moment, then drew a silk handkerchief from his sleeve and slowly began polishing the blade with it. The woman bent forward again to lay her brow against the floor between her outstretched hands, then straightened till she sat upon her crossed feet and bent her head back till her slender flower-like throat was exposed. “I wait the stroke of mercy, Master and Lord,” she whispered as she closed her eyes. “’Twere better far to die at thy hands than to live cut off from the sunshine of thy favor....”

There was something wrong with the green god. I could not tell quite what it was; it might have been a trick of light and shadow, or the whorls of incense spiraling around it, but I could have sworn its arms were moving and its fixed, immobile features changing expression.

There was something wrong with me, too. A feeling of complete inadequacy seemed to spread through me. My self-esteem seemed oozing out of every pore, my legs felt weak, I had an almost irresistible desire to drop upon my knees before the great green idol.

“*Oom, mani padme hong!*” de Grandin cried, his voice a little high and thin with excitement. “*Oom, mani padme hong!*”

Why I did it I had no idea, but suddenly I echoed his invocation, at the top of my voice, “*Oom, mani padme hong!*”

Costello’s rumbling bass took up the chant, and crying the

unfamiliar syllables in chorus we advanced toward the seated man and kneeling woman and the great, green gloating idol. “*Oom, mani padme hong!*”

The man half turned and raised his hands in supplication to the image, but even as he did so something seemed to happen in the niche. The great green statue trembled on its base, swayed backward, forward — rocked as if it had been shaken by a sudden blast of wind, then without warning toppled from its embrasure, crushing the man seated at its feet as a dropped tile might crush a beetle.

For a long moment we stood staring at the havoc, the fallen idol lying athwart the crushed, broken body of the man, the blood that spread in a wide, ever-broadening pool about them, and the girl who wept through lowered lids and beat her little fists against her breast, unmindful of the tragedy.

“Quickly, my friends,” bade de Grandin. “Go to the dressing room and find her clothes, then join me here.

“*Oom, mani padme hong!* The gods are dead, there is no power or potency in them, my little flower,” he told the girl. “*Oom, mani padme hong!*” he bent and took her right hand in his, seizing the great ring that glowed upon her forefinger and drawing it away. “*Oom, mani padme hong!* The olden gods are powerless — they have gone back to that far hell from whence they hailed—” The ring came off as if it had been several sizes too large and he lifted her in his arms gently.

“Make haste, my friends,” he urged. “None saw us enter; none shall see us leave. Tomorrow’s papers will record a mystery, but there will be no mention of this poor one’s name in it. Oh, be quick, I do beseech you!”

“Now,” I demanded as I refilled the glasses, “are you going to explain, or must the Sergeant and I choke it out of you?”

The little laughter wrinkles at the outer corners of his eyes deepened momentarily. “*Non, mes amis,*” he replied, “violence will not be required, I assure you. First of all, I assume you would be interested to know how it was we overcame that green monstrosity and his attendant by your chant?”

“Nothin’ less, sor,” Costello answered. “Bedad, I hadn’t anny idea what it meant, or why we sang it, but I’m here to say it sounded good to me — I got a kick out o’ repeating it wid ye, but why it wuz, I dunno.”

“You know the history of Gautama Buddha, one assumes?”

“I niver heard o’ him before, sor.”

“*Quel dommage!* However” — he paused to take a long sip from his glass, then — “here are the facts: Siddhartha

Gautama Buddha was born in India some five hundred years before the opening of our era. He grew up in a land priest-ridden and god-ridden. There was no hope — no pride of ancestry nor anticipation of immortality — for the great mass of the people, who were forever fixed in miserable existence by the rule of caste and the divine commands of gods whom we should call devils. Buddha saw the wickedness of this, and after years of meditation preached a new and hopeful gospel. He first denied the power of the gods by whose authority the priests held sway, and later denied their very existence. His followers increased by thousands and by tens of thousands; they washed the cursed caste marks from their foreheads, proclaimed themselves emancipated, denied the priests' authority and the existence of the gods by whom they had been terrorized and downtrodden for generations. Guatama Buddha, their leader, they hailed and honored with this chant: '*Oom, mani padme hong!* — Hail, thou Gem of the Lotus!' From the Gulf of Bengal to the Himalayas the thunder of their greeting to their master rolled like a mighty river of emancipation, and the power of it emptied the rock temples of the olden deities, left the priests without offerings on which to fatten. Sometimes it even overthrew the very evil gods themselves. I mean that literally. There are recorded instances where bands of Buddhists entering into heathen temples have by the very repetition of '*Oom, Mani padme hong!*' caused rock-hewn effigies of those evil forces men called Vishnu and Siva to topple from their altars. Yes, it is so.

"*En conséquence* tonight when I saw the poor misguided *mademoiselle* about to make a sacrifice of herself to that four-faced caricature of Satan I called to mind the greeting to the Lord Gautama which in olden days had rocked him and his kind from their high thrones, and raised the ancient battle cry of freedom once more. *Tiens*, he knew his master, that one. The Lord Gautama Buddha had driven him back to whatever hell-pool he and his kind came from in the olden days; his strength and power to drive him back was still potent. Did not you see it with your own four eyes, my friends?"

"U'm," I admitted somewhat grudgingly. "You think it was the power of the Green God that called Melanie back to The Light of Asia tonight?"

"Partly, beyond question. She wore his ring, and material things have great power on things spiritual, just as spiritual things have much influence on the material. Also it might well have been a case of utter frustration. She might have said in effect, 'What is the use?' Her lover had been killed, her hopes of happiness blasted, her whole world knocked to pieces. She might well have reasoned: 'I am powerless to fight against my fate. The strength of the Green God is too great. I am doomed; why not admit it; why struggle hope-

lessly and helplessly? Why not go to Kabanta and admit my utter defeat, the extinction of my personality, and take whatever punishment awaits me, even though it be death? Sooner or later I must yield. Why not sooner than later? To struggle futilely is only to prolong the agony and make his final triumph all the greater.' These things she may have said to herself. Indeed, did she not intimate as much to us when we interviewed her?"

"Yes," he nodded like a china mandarin on a mantelpiece, "it is unquestionably so, my friends, and but for Jules de Grandin — and the Lord Gautama Buddha assisted by my good friends Trowbridge and Costello — it might have been that way. *Eh bien*, I and the Buddha, with your kind assistance, put an end to their fine schemes, did we not?"

"You seriously think it was the force of the Green God that killed Wade Hardison?" I asked.

"I seriously do, my friend. That and naught else. The Green One was a burning glass that focused rays of hatred as a lens does sunlight, and through his power the never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized Kabanta was enabled to destroy the poor young Hardison completely."

He stabbed a small, impressive forefinger at me. "Consider, if you please: What was the situation tonight? Siva had triumphed. He had received a blood-sacrifice in the person of the poor young Hardison; he was about to have another in the so unfortunate Mademoiselle Melanie, then *pouf* comes Jules de Grandin and Friend Trowbridge and Friend Costello to repeat the chant which in the olden days had driven him from power. Before the potency of our chant to the Buddha the Green One felt his power ebbing slowly from him as he retreated to that far place where he had been driven aforetime by the Lord Gautama. And what did he do as he fell back? *Tenez*, he took revenge for his defeat on Kabanta. He cast the statue of himself — a very flattering likeness, no doubt — down from its altar place and utterly crushed the man who had almost but not quite enabled him to triumph. He was like a naughty child that kicks or bites the person who has promised it a sweet, then failed to make good the promise—"

"But that idol was a senseless piece of carved stone," I protested. "How could it—"

"*Ah bah*, you irritate me, my friend. Of course the idol was a senseless piece of stone, but *that for which it stood was neither stone nor senseless*. The idol was but the representation of the evil power lurking in the outer darkness as the tiger lurks in ambush. of let us put it this way: The idol is the material and visible door through which the spiritual and invisible force of evil we call Siva is enabled to penetrate into our human world.

"Through that doorway he came into the world, through

it he was forced to retreat before the power of our denial of his potency. So to speak, he slammed the door as he retreated — and caught Kabanta between door and jamb. *En tout cas*, he is dead, that miserable Kabanta. We are well rid of him, and the door is fast closed on the evil entity which he and the unwitting and unfortunate Mademoiselle Melanie let back into the world for a short time.

“Yes,” he nodded solemnly again. “It is so. I say it. I also say that I should like my glass refilled, if you will be so gracious, Friend Trowbridge.”

"THE PERIPATETIC CORPSE" by HAROLD LAWLOR

MARCH

Weird Tales

15¢

BEDFORD-JONES

WELLMAN

"Lords of the

Ghostlands"

SEABURY QUINN



Lords of the Ghostlands

JULES DE GRANDIN passed the brandy snifter back and forth beneath his nose, savoring the bouquet of the fine champagne with the keen appreciation of a connoisseur. He took a light, preliminary sip, and his expression of delight became positively ecstatic. “*Parbleu*,” he murmured, “as my good friend François Rabelais was wont to say, ‘Good wine is the living soul of the grape, but good brandy is the living spirit of the wine,’ and—”

“The devil!” Dr. Taylor broke in as a nervous movement of his elbow dislodged the bubble-thin inhaler from the tabourette beside his elbow and sent it crashing to the floor.

“*Quel dommage* — what a pity!” consoled de Grandin. “To lose the lovely crystal is a misfortune, *Monsieur*, but the *vieux cognac*, he are priceless, to lose her are a calamity, no less!”

“You’re not just saying that!” Dr. Taylor answered grimly. “That’s the last bottle of Jérôme Napoleon in my cellar, and heaven only knows when I’ll get a replacement. These things always seem to run in threes. This morning at breakfast I upset my coffee cup, this afternoon I nearly dropped a bit of absolutely priceless papyrus in the fire, now” — he broke off with a grimace of self-disgust — “I hope I’ve completed the cycle.”

“One understands, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin nodded commiseratingly. “It is the times — the strain of war, the—”

“We can’t blame this on the war,” Taylor denied. “I hate to confess it, but I’ve been jumpy as a bit of popcorn in a popper for the past few days. My goat’s gone.”

“*Comment?*” de Grandin’s brows went up the barest fraction of an inch. “He was a valuable animal, this goat of yours, *Monsieur?*”

Despite himself our host gave vent to a short laugh. “Very, Dr. de Grandin. Unless I get him back again I shall — oh, I’ll not pull your leg. To lose one’s goat is an American idiom meaning to become utterly demoralized. It’s that dam’ mummy that is driving me almost to distraction.”

This time de Grandin was not to be caught napping. “Translate, if you will be so kind, Friend Trowbridge,” he begged. “Is it another of his idioms — is the mummy to which he refers a genuine *cadavre*, or perhaps a papa’s wife, or a mother—”

“No!” Dr. Taylor held explosive laughter in by main force. “This is no idiom, Dr. de Grandin. I wish it were. The fact is that though I’m not superstitious I’ve had a bad case of the jitters since last week when they brought out a new mummy at the Museum. It had been greatly delayed in

transit due to the war, and when it came it took us all by surprise. Several of our younger men have joined the services, so I took it in charge. I wish I hadn’t now, for unless I’m much mistaken it’s what’s called ‘unlucky,’ and — well, as I’ve said, I’m not superstitious, but ...”

“I should think that any mummy might be called unlucky,” I put in rather fatuously. “To be jerked out of the quiet restfulness of your grave and shipped across four thousand miles of water, then exhibited for people whom you’d call barbarians to gawk at—”

My faint attempt at humor was completely lost on Dr. Taylor. “When an Egyptologist refers to a mummy as unlucky he has reference to its effect on the living, not to its peculiar luck or lack of it,” he cut in almost sharply. “Call it nonsense if you will — and probably you will — but the fact is there seems some substance to the belief that the ancient gods of Egypt have the power to punish those disturbing the mummies of people dying in apostasy. Such mummies are referred to in the trade as ‘unlucky’ — unlucky for the people who find them or have anything to do with them. Tutankhamen is the classic example of this. He was a noted heretic in his day, you know, and had given great offense to the ‘Old Ones’ or their priests, which in the long run amounted to the same thing. So when he died, although they gave him an elaborate funeral, they set no image of Amen-Ra at the prow of the boat that ferried him across the Lake of the Dead, and the plaques of Seb, Tem, Nephtys, Osiris and Isis were not prepared to go with him into the tomb. Notwithstanding his belated efforts to be reconciled with the priesthood, Tutankhamen was little better than an atheist according to contemporary Egyptian theology, and the wrath of gods followed him beyond the grave. It was not their wish that his name be preserved to posterity or that any of his relics be brought to light.

“Now, just consider contemporary happenings: In 1922 Lord Carnavon located the tomb. He had four associates. Carnavon and three of these associates died within a year or so of the opening of the tomb. Colonel Herbert and Dr. Evelyn-White were among the first to enter the tomb. Both died within twelve months. Sir Archibald Douglass was engaged to make X-rays of the mummy. He died almost before the plates could be developed. Six of the seven French journalists who went into the tomb shortly after it was opened died in less than a year, and almost every workman engaged in the excavations died before he had a

chance to spend his pay. Some of these people died one way, some another. The fact is: *They all died.*

“Not only that: Even minor articles taken from Tut’s tomb seem to exercise malign influence. There is proof absolute that attendants at the Cairo Museum whose duties keep them in or even near the room where Tutankhamen’s relics are displayed sicken or die—for no apparent reason. D’ye wonder that they call him an ‘unlucky’ mummy?”

“*Bien, Monsieur. Et puis?*” de Grandin prompted as our host lapsed into moody silence.

“Just this,” responded Dr. Taylor. “This mummy I’ve had wished on me is dam’ peculiar. It’s Eighteenth Dynasty work, that much is plain, but unlike anything I ever saw before. There is no face mask nor funerary statue, either on the mummy or in the coffin, and the case itself is bare of writing. The old Egyptians always wrote the titles and biographies of the dead upon their coffins, you know, but this case is just bare, virgin wood; a beautiful shell of thin hard cedar to which not even varnish has been applied. Most mummy case lids are held in place by four little flanges, two to a side, which sink into mortises cut in the lower section and are held in place by hardwood dowels. This case has eight, three to each side and one at each end. They must have wanted to make sure that whoever was fastened in that coffin wouldn’t break out. Furthermore—and this is more than merely unusual, it’s absolutely unique—the bottom of the coffin is strewn four inches deep with spices.”

“Spices?” echoed Jules de Grandin.

“Spices. Yes. We haven’t analyzed all yet, but so far we’ve identified clove, spikenard, cinnamon, aloes, thyme and ginger, mustard, capsicum and common sodium chloride.”

De Grandin pursed his lips in a soundless whistle. “This are unusual, *vraiment*,” he conceded. “And have you unwrapped him or perhaps X-rayed her?”

“Well, yes and no.”

“*Comment? Oui et non?* Is this perhaps some of the famous double talk of which one hears so much?”

“Not exactly,” our host grinned. “I meant to say that I’ve unwrapped the first layer of bandages, the crust or shell that’s plastered with bitumen, you know, and subjected the mummy wrapped in its inner bandages, to the fluoroscope—”

“Yes? And then, *Monsieur?*” de Grandin prompted as Dr. Taylor paused so long it seemed he had no more to say.

“That’s just it, Dr. de Grandin. It isn’t well at all. What I’ve found confirms my first suspicions that I’ve an ‘unlucky’ mummy on my hands.

“Woeltjin, Dr. Oris Woeltjin, found this mummy in a cleverly hidden tomb between Nagada and Dêr El-Bahri, on the very eastern border of the Lybian Desert, territory given

up as thoroughly worked over years ago. While they were excavating two of his fallaheen were bitten by tomb spiders and died in terrible convulsions. That in itself was unusual, for while the Egyptian tomb spider’s an ugly-looking brute, he’s not particularly venomous; I’ve been bitten by ’em half a dozen times and not suffered half as much as when stung by a scorpion. This must have impressed the rest of his workmen, too, for they deserted in a body, but Woeltjin stuck it out, and with the help of such neighborhood men as he could hire for double wages he finally reached the funerary chamber.

“That was only the beginning. He had the devil’s own time getting down the Nile with it. Half the crew of his dahabeeyah came down with some sort of mysterious fever, several of ’em died and all the rest went overside, so it was almost two weeks before he’d finished a trip which in ordinary circumstances would have taken five days at most. The Egyptian government doesn’t let you take a mummy out these days, but Woeltjin was an old hand at the game. He wheedled where he could and bribed where he had to, and finally smuggled the thing out disguised as a crate of Smyrna sponges; got it as far as Liverpool, and died.

“The mummy knocked around the wharves and warehouses at Liverpool for almost two years, the war kept it there still longer, but finally it arrived, and—believe it or not!—our shipping department actually took it for a lot of sponges and let it lie around our storeroom almost two more years. The curator discovered it purely by accident last week. Well, with that background, what I found yesterday just about confirmed my suspicions that the thing’s unlucky.”

Jules de Grandin leaned forward in his chair. “*Nom d’un million moustiques pestifères, Monsieur*, what was it you discovered?” he demanded. “Me, I am consumed with curiosity.”

Taylor smiled a trifle grimly. “The fluoroscope revealed the bony structure of the chest had been broken. Either she had died from an injury in what corresponded to the modern traffic accident, or”—he paused and took a sip of brandy—“she suffered death by a ritual roughly corresponding to the *peine forte et dure* of the medieval English criminal courts—crushed to death beneath a great pile of rocks, you know.”

“But it might have been an accident,” I objected. “Those two-wheeled chariots of ancient days weren’t very stable vehicles, and it would have been quite possible—”

“Possible, but not probable, in view of what the papyrus says,” Dr. Taylor cut in. “I found the sheet of writing tucked between two layers of bandages—surreptitiously, I’d say—just after I’d completed my fluoroscopic inspection.”

De Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his small wheat-blond mustache. “*Tiens, Monsieur*, why do you torment us

thus, making a long story still longer? What did it say, this twenty-times-accursed papyrus of yours?"

"Plenty," Dr. Taylor answered. "I haven't finished translating it, but even its beginning has an air of eerie mystery. She describes herself as Nefra-Kemmah, servant of the Most High Mother, the Horned One, the Lady of the Moon — in fine, a priestess of the Goddess Isis. You get the implication?"

I shook my head; de Grandin leveled one of his unwinking cat-stares at our host, but made no answer.

"The priestess of Isis, unlike the servants of all other Mother-Goddesses of ancient days — Aphrodite and Tanith, for instance — were vowed to chastity and were as completely celibate as Vestal Virgins or Christian nuns. If one of them forgot her sacred obligations even to the small extent of looking at or speaking to a man outside the priesthood the consequences were decidedly unpleasant. If she, as the saying goes, 'loved not wisely but too well,' death by torture was the penalty. This might take several forms. Burial alive, wrapped and bandaged like a mummy, but with the face exposed to permit breathing, was one form of inflicting the punishment. Another was to crush her erring heart to pulp beneath a great pile of stones...."

"*Parbleu*," de Grandin murmured. "This poor one, then, was one of those unfortunates—"

"All signs point to it. She was a priestess, vowed to chastity on pain of death; her ribs have been crushed in; her coffin bears no inscription, not even so much as a brush mark. It seems not only death, but oblivion had been her portion. Now, perhaps, you understand why I'm inclined to be jumpy. It's all right to say 'stuff and nonsense' when you hear unlucky mummies talked of, but any Egyptologist can cite instance after instance of 'accidents' occurring to those who come in contact with the mummies of those who died under interdict."

"What else did the papyrus say — or have you gotten any farther?" I asked.

"Humph. The farther I get into it the more I'm puzzled. You know something of Egyptian medical ideas?"

"A little," Jules de Grandin admitted, "but I would not presume to discuss them with you, *Monsieur*."

Taylor smiled appreciation of the compliment.

"They had some odd notions. They thought, for instance, that the arteries contained air, that the seat of the emotions was the heart, and that anger generated in the spleen."

"Perfectly," de Grandin nodded.

"But they were far in advance of their contemporaries, and even of the Greeks and Romans, for they had partly grasped the truth that reason resided in the brain. Remember that, for what comes next ties in with it.

"The Egyptians were probably the first great people of antiquity to formulate a definite idea of immortality. That was their reason for mummification of their dead. They believed that when three thousand years had passed the soul returned to claim its body, and without a fleshy tenement to welcome it, it would have to wander bodiless and homeless in Amenti, the realm of the damned. As the Priestess Nefra-Kemmah lived during the XVIIIth Dynasty — roughly somewhere between 1575 and 1359 B.C., she should now be about ready—"

"Ah?" murmured Jules de Grandin. "*Ah-ha?* You think—"

"I don't think anything. I'm only puzzled. Instead of praying to the gods to guide her wandering *ka* or vital principle back to her waiting body, Nefra-Kemmah asserts — states positively — she will rise again with the help of one who lives, and by the power of the brain. That is absolutely unique. Never before, to my knowledge, has such a thing been heard of. Even those who died apostate sought the pity of the gods and begged forgiveness for their sin of unbelief, beseeching divine assistance in attaining resurrection. This little priestess declares categorically she will rise again with the help of a living human being and by the power of the brain." He drew an envelope from his pocket and scribbled a notation on it.

"Repeatedly I found these ideographs," he told us as he held the paper out for our inspection.

"The first one signifies '*arise*,' or, by extension, '*I shall arise*,' and the second means almost, though not quite, the same thing. '*Awake*,' or '*I shall awake to life*.' And always, she repeats that she will do it by the power of the brain, which complicates the message still farther."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Why, if she's a mummy she can have no brain. One of the first steps of Egyptian embalming was to withdraw the brain by means of a metallic hook inserted through the nose."

"She surely must have known that," I began, but before our host could answer we heard laughter on the porch, a key clicked in the front door, and Vella Taylor swept into the drawing room with an unusually good-looking young soldier in her wake. "Hullo, Daddy-Man," she greeted as she planted a quick kiss on Taylor's bald spot. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge — Dr. de Grandin. This is Harrock Hall, my most 'special-particular boy friend. Sorry, I couldn't be here for dinner tonight, but Harrock's ordered away to camp early tomorrow, so I ran around to his house. It wouldn't have seemed fair to have taken him from his mother and father on his last night home, and I knew I wanted to be with him just as much as possible, so — what're you folks drinking? Cognac?" She made a face suggestive of vinegar mixed with

castor oil. "Vile stuff! Come on, treasure," she linked her hand in the young soldier's. "Let's us see if we can promote some Benedictine and Spanish brandy. That's got a scratch and tastes good, too.

"You will inform us of developments?" de Grandin asked as we prepared to go. "This so remarkable young lady who had courage to defy the priests who had condemned her and declared that in spite of their sentence to oblivion she would rise again, she interests me."

It must have been toward three o'clock when the persistent ringing of the telephone awakened me. The voice that came across the wire was agonized, almost hysterical, but doctors get used to that. "This is Granville Taylor, Trowbridge. Can you come right over? It's Vella — she's had some sort of seizure...."

"What sort?" I interrupted. "Does she complain of pain?"

"I don't know if she's in pain or not. She's unconscious — perfectly rigid, and—"

"I'll be there just as fast as gasoline can bring me," I assured him as I hung up and fished for the clothes which years of practice had taught me to keep folded on a bedside chair.

"What makes, *mon vieux*?" de Grandin asked as he heard me stirring. "Is it that Monsieur Taylor has met with the accident he feared—"

"No, it's his daughter. She's had some sort of seizure, he says — she's rigid and unconscious."

"*Pardieu*, that pretty, happy creature? Let me go with you, my friend, if you please. Perhaps I can be of assistance."

Her father had not overstated her condition when he said that Vella was rigid. From head to foot she was as stiff as something frozen; taut, hard as a hypnotist's assistant in a trance. We could not chafe her hands for they were set so stiffly that the flesh was absolutely unyielding. It might have been a lovely waxen tailor's dummy over which we bent rather than the happy, vibrant, vital girl to whom we'd said goodnight a few hours before. Treatment was futile. She lay as hard and rigid as if petrified. As if she had been dead, her temperature was exactly that of the surrounding atmosphere, the uncanny hardness of the flesh persisted, and she was unresponsive to all stimuli, save that the pupils of her set and staring eyes showed slight contraction when we flashed a light in them. There was practically no pulse perceptible, and when we drove a hypodermic needle in her arm to administer a dose of strychnine, there was no reflex flinching of the skin, and the impression we had was more like thrusting a needle through some tough waxy substance than into living flesh. As far as we could see vital functions were suspended. Yet she was not paralyzed in the ordinary sense of the term. Of that much we were certain.

"Is — is it epilepsy?" Dr. Taylor asked fearfully. "Her mother had a brother who—"

"*Non*, calm yourself, my friend," soothed de Grandin. "It is not the epilepsy, of that I can assure you." To me he added in a whisper: "But what it is *le bon Dieu* only knows!"

The dawn was brightening in the east when she began to show signs of recovery. The dreadful stiffness, so like rigormortis, gave way gradually, and the set and horrified expression of her eyes was replaced by a look of recognition. The rigid, hard lines faded from her cheeks and jaw, and her slender bosom fluttered with a gasp of respiration as a little sigh escaped her. The words she spoke I could not understand, for they were uttered in a mumbling undertone, strung together closely, like an invocation hurriedly pronounced, but it seemed to me they had a harsh and guttural sound, as though containing many consonants, utterly unlike any language I had ever heard before.

Now the whisper gave way to a chant, sung softly in an eerie rising cadence with a sharply accented note at the end of every measure. Over and over, the same meaningless jargon, a weird and wavering tune vaguely like a Gregorian chant. One single word I recognized, or thought I did, though whether it really were a word or whether my mind broke its syllables apart and fitted them to the sound of a more or less familiar name I could not be sure; but it seemed to me that constantly recurring in the rapid flow of mumbled invocation was a sibilant disyllable, much like the letter *s* said twice in quick succession.

"Is she trying to say 'Isis'?" I asked, raising my eyes from her fluttering lips.

De Grandin was regarding her intently with that fixed, unwinking stare which I had seen him hold for minutes when we were in the amphitheater of a hospital and a piece of unique surgery was in progress. He waved an irritated hand at me, but neither spoke nor shifted the intentness of his gaze.

The flow of senseless words grew slower, thinner, as though the force behind the twitching red lips were lessening, but the weird soft chant continued its four soft minor notes slurred endlessly. Now her enunciation seemed more perfect, and almost without effort we could recognize a phrase that kept recurring: *O Nefra-Kemmah nehes — Nehes, O Nefra-Kemmah!*"

"Good God!" exclaimed Dr. Taylor. "D'ye get it, gentlemen? She's chanting, '*Nefra-Kemmah, awake — Arise, O Nefra-Kemmah!*' Nefra-Kemmah was the name of that priestess of Isis I told you of last night, remember? In her delirium she's identifying herself with the mummy!"

"She probably heard you talking of it—"

"I'm hanged if she did. You were the only two to whom I've mentioned it outside the Museum. I knew de Grandin

has a taste for the occult, and you were to be relied on, Trowbridge, but as for mentioning that mummy to anybody else — no! D’ye think I’d want my daughter to think me a superstitious old fool, or would I court the pitying smiles of other outsiders? I tell you she never heard that cursed mummy’s name, yet—”

“*S-h-sh*, she awakes,” de Grandin warned.

Vella Taylor looked from Jules de Grandin to me, then past us to her father. “Daddy!” she exclaimed. “O, Daddy, dear, I’ve been so frightened!”

“Frightened, dear? Of what?” Taylor dropped to his knees, beside the bed and took her hands in his. “Who’s been trying to scare my little girl?”

She smiled a little ruefully. “I — I don’t quite know,” she confessed, “but whoever set out to do it surely got away with it. “I think it must have been those horrible old men.”

“Old men, *Mademoiselle*?” de Grandin echoed. “Who and where were they, one asks to know? Tell me and I shall have great pleasure in kicking their false teeth out—”

“Oh, they weren’t really men at all, just dream-images, I suppose. But they seemed terribly real, and oh, how dreadfully afraid of them I was!”

“Tell us of it, if you please, *ma belle*. You have suffered a severe shock. Perhaps it was the result of nightmare, perhaps not; at any rate, if you can bring yourself to discuss the painful subject—”

“Of course, sir. Talking of it may help sweep my memory clear. Harrock left a little after you did, for he had to catch an early train this morning, and I came right upstairs and cried myself to sleep. Sometime this morning — I don’t quite know when, but it must have been a little before three, for the moon had risen late and it was very bright when I awakened — I woke up with a dreadful sense of thirst. It must have been that crying made me feel so, I can’t account for it otherwise; at any rate I was utterly dehydrated, and went to get a glass of water from the bathroom tap. When I came back to my room the first thing that I noticed was that a single shaft of moonlight was slanting through the window and striking full upon the mirror,” she gestured toward the full-length glass that stood against the farther wall. “Something, I don’t know what, seemed urging me to go and look into the glass. When I stopped before it, it seemed the moonlight had robbed it of its power of reflection. I couldn’t see myself in it at all.”

“Ah?” de Grandin nodded. “You cast no shadow?”

“None at all, sir. Instead, the mirror seemed to be glossed over with a layer of opaque silver — not quite opaque, either, but rather iridescent. I could see small points of light reflected in it, and somehow they seemed moving, whirling round and round each other like a swarm of luminous

midges, and burning with an intense blue, cold flame. Gradually the glowing pinpoint of light changed from their spinning to a slow, weaving pattern. The luminous sheet they spread across the mirror seemed breaking up, forming a definite design of highlights and shadows. It was as if the mirror were a window and through it I looked out upon another world.

“The place I looked into was bright with moonlight, almost as bright as day. It was a long, wide, lofty colonnaded building. I thought at first from what I’d heard Daddy say that it must be a temple of some sort, and in a moment I was sure of it, for I could hear the tinkling of *sistra* shaken in unison, and the low, sweet chanting of the priestesses. They knelt in a long double row, those sweet, slim girls, all gowned in robes of white linen, with bands of silver set with lapis lazuli bound about their brows. Their heads were bowed and their hands raised and held at stiff right angles to their wrists as they sang softly. Presently a young man came into the temple and walked slowly toward the altar-place. Despite the fact his head was shaven smooth, I thought him utterly beautiful, with full red lips, a firm, strong chin and great, soft, thoughtful eyes. He kept his gaze fixed on the tiles as he walked toward the altar, but just before he put aside the silver veil that hung before the face of Isis he glanced back and his eyes fell with a sort of sad reproachfulness upon the kneeling girl nearest him. I saw a flush mount up her throat and cheeks and brow, and she bent her head still lower as she sang, but somehow, though she gave no sign, I knew a thought-message had passed between them. Then slowly he passed beyond the veil and was gone.

“Suddenly to the chanting of the priestesses was joined the heavier chant of men singing in a sort of harsh harmony. Instinctively I knew what was transpiring. The young man I had seen had gone into the sanctuary of Great Isis to become one of her priests. He was being initiated into her mysteries. She would flood him with her spirit, and he would be hers for eternity. He would put away the love of woman and the hope of children, and devote himself whole-heartedly to the service of the Great All-Mother. The priestess I had seen blush knew it, too, for I could see the tears fall from beneath her lowered lids, and her slender body shook with sobs which she could not control.

“Then slowly, as if steam were forming on the mirror, everything became cloudy and in a moment the scene in the temple was completely hidden, but gradually the vapor cleared away and I was looking out into bright daylight. The sun shone almost dazzlingly on a temple’s painted pylon. In the forecourt the sacred birds were feeding, and jets of water glistened jewel-bright from a fountain. A woman walked across the courtyard toward the splashing fountain, the priestess I had seen before. She was robed in a white linen

shift that left her bosom and her ankles bare. Sandals of papyrus shod her slender henna-reddened feet, and jewels were on her arms. A band of silver set with lapis lazuli crowned the hair which she wore cut in a shoulder-length bob. In one hand she held a lotus bud and with the other she balanced a painted water pot on her bare shoulder.

“Suddenly, from the deep shadow cast by the high temple gate, an old man tottered. He was very feeble, but his rage and hatred seemed to impart power to his limbs as wires moved a marionette. By his red robe and blue turban and his flowing milk-white beard, no less than by his features, I knew him to be a Hebrew. He planted himself in the girl’s path and let forth a perfect spate of invective. Of their actual words I could hear nothing, but subjectively I seemed to know what passed between them. He was reviling her for proselyting his son from the worship of the Lord Jehovah, for the Jewish youth, it seemed, had seen her and gone mad with love of her, because her vows made it impossible for them to wed he had abjured his race and kin and God to take the vows of Isis, so that he might be near her in the temple and commune with her in common worship of the goddess.

“The little priestess heard the old man through, then turned away contemptuously with a curt, ‘Jewish dog, thou snarlest fiercely, but wherewith hast thou teeth to bite?’ and the old man raised his hands to heaven and called a curse on her, declaring she should find no peace in life or death until atonement had been made; until she turned against the heathen gods she worshipped and bore testimony to their downfall through another’s lips.

“‘How sayest thou, old dotard?’ asked the girl. ‘Our gods are powerful and everlasting. We rule the world by their favor. Is it likely that I should turn from them? And if I did, how could it be that I should speak through the lips of another? Shall I become as one of those magicians the Greeks call polyphonists, who make a stick or stone of brute beast seem to talk because they have the power of voice-throwing?’

“Once more the scene shifted, and I looked out upon a moonlit night. The stars seemed almost within reach overhead, and there blew such a soft perfume on the moon-drenched air that you could almost see it take shape like dancing butterflies. In the deep blue shadow of the temple pylon crouched the priest and priestess, clinging to each other with the desperation of denied love. I saw her rest her curling shoulder-length-cut hair upon his shoulder, saw her turn her face up to his with eyes closed and lips a little parted, saw him kiss her brow, her closed eyes, her yearning, eager mouth, her pulsing throat, the gentle swell of her bare bosom ... then like a pack of hounds that rush in for the kill, I saw the Hebrews pounce upon him. Knives flashed in the

moonlight, curses hard and sharp as knife-blades spewed from their lips. ‘Apostate swine, turncoat, backslider, renegade!’ they called him, and with every bitter curse there was another biting stab. He fell and lay upon the sands, his life-blood spurting from a dozen mortal wounds, and as his murderers turned away I seemed to hear the patter of bare feet upon the tiles, and half a dozen shaven-headed priests of Isis came running. ‘What passes here?’ their leader, an old man, panted angrily. ‘Thou Jewish dogs, if thou hast—’

“The leader of the assassins interrupted with a scornful laugh: ‘Naught passes here, old bare-poll, all is passed. We took one of your priests and priestesses red-handed in infidelity. The man we dealt with, for aforesaid he had been one of us; the woman we leave to thy vengeance, ’tis said thou hast a way of treating such.’

“I saw the priests seize the poor, stricken, trembling girl and lead her unresistingly away.

“Then once again the mirror clouded, and when it cleared I was looking full into the little priestess’ face. She seemed to stand directly behind the glass, as close as my own reflection should have been, and she held out her hands beseechingly to me, begging me to help her. But my power of understanding was gone. Though I saw her lips move in appeal I could make nothing of the words she strove so desperately to pronounce, although she seemed repeating something with a deadly, terrible insistence.

“Then suddenly I felt a dreadful cold come in the air, not the chill of the wind from the opened window, but one of those subjective chills we sometimes have that make us say, ‘Someone is walking over my grave.’ Instinctively I felt the presence of another person in my bedroom. Someone — no, *something* had come in while I watched the changing pictures in the mirror.

“I turned to look across my shoulder — and there they were. I think that there were five of them, though possibly there were seven — old men in long white robes with dreadful masks upon their faces. One wore a bull’s head, another a mask like a jackal, another had a false-face like a giant hawk’s head, and still another wore a headdress like a lion’s face—”

“If they were masked how did you know they were old men?” I asked,

“I *knew* it. Their eyes were bright with a fierce, supernatural light, the kind of gleam that only those who are both old and wicked have in their eyes, and the flesh of their forearms had shrunk away from the muscles, leaving them to stand out like thick cords. Their hands and feet were knotty and misshapen with the ugliness of age, and the bones and tendons showed like painted lines against the skin.

“They grouped behind me in a semi-circle staring at me menacingly, and though they made no sound I knew that

they were threatening me with something dreadful if I acceded to the little priestess' entreaty.

"'Vella Taylor, you are dreaming,' I told myself, and closed my eyes and shook my head. When I opened them again the horrible old masked men still stood there, but it seemed to me they had come a step nearer.

"The priestess in the mirror seemed to see them, too, for suddenly she threw her hands up as if to ward off a blow, made a frenzied gesture to me as if to warn me to escape, and turned away. Then she disappeared in vapor, and I was left alone with those terrific, silent shapes.

"'I won't be bluffed by anything so utterly absurd,' I declared, and started toward the door. The masked men drew together, barring my way. I turned toward the bed and they shrank back toward the corners of the room. Then I lay down and closed my eyes. 'I'll count up to a thousand,' I said. 'When I'm done counting I'll open my eyes, and they'll be gone.'

"But they weren't. In every corner of the room they hunched and crouched and panted, waiting the moment to pounce.

"I felt stark panic hammering at me; terror yarnmered at my will, abysmal fear ripped at my nerves, and when I tried to call to Daddy I could make no sound. A dreadful weight seemed pressing on me, so heavy I could not endure it; I felt it crushing out my breath, cracking my ribs, breaking every bone in my body. My eyes seemed starting from my face, I could feel my tongue protruding from my mouth, and..."

"Yes, *Mademoiselle*, and then?" de Grandin prompted as she ceased talking with a shudder.

"Then I saw you and Dr. Trowbridge and my own dear Daddy standing by me, and the terrible old men had gone away. You won't let them come back, will you?"

"Be assured, *Mademoiselle*, if they come back while I am here they shall indubitably wish they had not. Now it is time for you to get some rest and gather back your strength.

"Will you prepare the hypo, good Friend Trowbridge?" he asked me.

"D'ye realize what Vella saw was the Infernal Assizes of Old Egypt?" Dr. Taylor whispered as we tiptoed from the bed chamber.

"The Infernal Assizes?" I repeated.

"Precisely. When a man died the Egyptians believed his soul was led by Thoth and Anubis to Amenti, where it stood trial before the judges of the Dead. These included hawk-headed Kebhsnauf, ape-headed Taumatet, dog-visaged Hapi, cat-headed Bes, and, of course, ox-headed Osiris. Similarly, when a living person was accused of heresey, a court of priests made up to represent the infernal deities tried him or her. The Priestess Nefra-Kemmah must have stood trial

before just such a tribunal."

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured. "Ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?"

"What is it?"

"I am persuaded, Friend Taylor, that what your daughter saw was more than 'such stuff as dreams are made on' — or, to be more explicit, just such stuff as that of which a dream is compounded, namely, thought-force. Just what it is I do not know, but somewhere there is an influence running from the mummy of the Priestess Nefra-Kemmah to *Mademoiselle* your daughter. The poor, misfortunate priestess seeks her aid, the ghostly old ones would prevent it. The daylight quickens in the east, my friend. Soon it will be full day. We shall arrange to have a nurse attend *Mademoiselle* Vella, and if you will be so kind we shall repair to the Museum and inspect this precious mummy of yours."

"H'm, that's a bit irregular," Taylor demurred.

"Irregular, *ha?* And by damn-it, was it not irregular for *Mademoiselle* your daughter to be vouchsafed a glimpse of the old times, to watch the unfolding of the romance of those so sadly unfortunate lovers, and to see the olden ones from the parapets of hell come trooping into her bed chamber? *Parbleu*, I damn think yes!"

With a precision rivaling that of a jeweler, Dr. Taylor cut away the criss-crossed bandages of yellowed linen that swathed the mummy of the Priestess Nefra-Kemmah. Yard after endless yard he reeled off, finally coming to a strong, seamless shroud drawn sackwise over the body and tied at the foot with a stout cord. The cloth of which the bag was made seemed stouter and heavier than the bandages, and was heavily coated with beeswax or some ceraceous substance, the whole being, apparently, both air- and water-tight.

"Why, bless my soul, I never saw a thing like this before!" exclaimed Dr. Taylor.

"*Monsieur*, unless I am more greatly mistaken than I have any right to suppose, I make no doubt there are at least a dozen things in this case which will be novelties to you," de Grandin answered rather grimly. "Come, cut away that seventeen-times-damned sack. I would see what lies within it.

"Ah-ha?" he exclaimed as with a gentle twitching motion Dr. Taylor worked the waxed bag upward from the mummy's shoulders. "*Que diable?*"

The body that came gradually in view beneath the blue-white glare of the electric lights was not technically a mummy, though the aromatic spices in the coffin and the sterile, arid atmosphere of Egypt had combined to keep it in a state of almost perfect preservation. The feet, first parts to be exposed, were small and beautifully formed, with long straight toes and narrow heels and high-arched insteps, the digits as well as the whole plantar region stained brilliant red

with henna. There was astonishingly little desiccation, and though the terminal tendons of the *brevis digitorum* showed prominently through the skin the effect was by no means revolting; I had seen equal prominence of flexor muscles in living feet where the patient had suffered considerable emaciation.

The ankles were sharp and shapely, the legs straight and well turned, with the leanness of youth rather than the wasted look of death; the hips were narrow, almost boyish, the waist slender, and the gently swelling bosom high and sharp.

“*Morbleu*, Friend Taylor, you had right when you said she had suffered grievous hurt before she died,” de Grandin murmured as the waxed sack slid over the body’s shoulders.

I looked across his shoulder and gulped back an exclamation of horrified amazement. The slimly tapering arms had been folded demurely on the breast in accordance with Egyptian custom, but the humerus of the left arm had been cruelly crushed, resulting in a compound comminuted fracture, so that an inch or more of splintered bone had thrust through the skin above the deltoid attachment. The same cruel blow that crushed the arm had smashed the bony structure of the chest, the third and fourth ribs had snapped in two, and through the smooth skin underneath the breast a prong of bone protruded. “*La pauvre!*” de Grandin murmured. “*Fi donc!* By damn-it, if I could but come to grips with those who did this thing I should—” He paused in mid-word, pursed his lips as if about to whistle, then whispered half-thoughtfully, half-gleefully, “*Nom d’un porc vert, c’est possible!*”

“What’s possible?” I demanded, but his only answer was a shrug as he diverted his gaze to the face exposed as Dr. Taylor drew the sack away. The features were those of a woman in her early youth. Semitic in their cast, they had a delicacy of line and contour which bespoke patrician breeding. The nose was small, high-bridged, a little aquiline, with slim, aristocratic nostrils. The lips were thin and sensitive, and where they had retracted in the process of partial desiccation showed small, sharp teeth of startling whiteness. The hair was black and lustrous, cut in a shoulder-length bob that seemed amazingly modern, and bound about the brows was a circlet of hammered silver set with small studs of lapis lazuli. For the rest, a triple-stranded necklace of gold and blue enamel, armlets of the same design, and a narrow golden girdle fashioned like a snake composed her costume. Originally a full, plaited skirt of sheer white linen had been appended to the girdle that circled her slim torso just beneath the bosom, but the fragile fabric had not been able to withstand the years of waiting in the tomb, and only one or two thin wisps remained.

“*La pauvre belle créature!*” de Grandin repeated. “If it

were only possible—”

“I think we’d better wrap the body up again,” Dr. Taylor broke in. “To tell the truth, I’m just a little nervous—”

“You fear,” de Grandin did not ask a question, he made an assertion. “You fear the ancient gods of olden Egypt may take offense at our remaining here to speculate upon the manner of this poor one’s death — or murder, one should say.”

“Well, you must admit there’ve been some unexpected things happening in connection with this mummy, if you can call it that, for technically it’s never been embalmed at all, just preserved by the aromatics sprinkled in the coffin, and—”

“One understands and agrees,” de Grandin nodded. “There have been unexpected happenings, as you say, Friend Taylor, and unless I’m more mistaken than I think, there will be more before we finish. I should say — *gran Dieu des pommés de terre*, observe her, if you please!”

As Dr. Taylor had reminded us, the body had not been embalmed but merely preserved by the spices strewn around it and the almost hermetic sealing of the coffin and waxed shroud. It had been dehydrated in the years since burial so that blood, tissue and bones while retaining their contours had been reduced to something less stable than talcum powder. Now, beneath the impact of the fresh damp air and Dr. Taylor’s gentle handling the triturated body-substance began crumbling. There was nothing horrifying in the process. Rather, it was as if we witnessed the slow disintegration of a lovely image moulded in sand or chalk-dust.

“*Sic transit bellitas mundi*,” murmured Jules de Grandin as the shape before us lost its human semblance. “At least we’ve seen her in the flesh, which is a thing those wicked old ones never thought would happen, and you, *Monsieur* still have the coffin and her priceless ornaments for souvenirs. They are decidedly worthwhile, and—”

“Damn her coffin and her ornaments!” Dr. Taylor cut in sharply. “What frightens me is what this devilish business may do to my girl. She’s already partially identified herself with Nefra-Kemmah and saw a vision of the priestly court that condemned her to be crushed to death beneath great stones. If that vision keeps recurring — isn’t there some way we can break up this obsession—”

“By blue, there is, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin assured him. “Precisely as a phobia may be overcome by showing him who suffers from it that it has no basis, so we can clear the vision of those wicked old ones from your daughter’s mind. Of that I am persuaded. But the treatment will not be orthodox—”

“I don’t care what it is. D’ye realize her sanity may be at stake?”

“Perfectly, *Monsieur*. Have we your consent to proceed?”

“Of course—”

“*Très bon*. Tonight, at your convenience, we shall call at your house, and unless I am far more mistaken than I think, we shall give battle to and wrest a victory from those shapes that haunt the darkness. Yes. Certainly. Of course.”

All day he was as busy and as bustling as a bluebottle fly. Calling on the telephone repeatedly, swearing poisonously improbable French oaths when he found our friend John Thunstone had been called away from New York on a case, rushing to the Library to consult some books the librarian had never heard of, but managed to dig up from dust-hidden obscurity at his insistence; finally dashing to the wholesale poultry market to secure something which he brought home in a thermos bottle and placed with loving care in the sterilizing cabinet of the surgery. At dinner he was almost silent, absent-mindedly forgetting to request a third helping of the lobster cardinal, a dish of which he was inordinately fond, and almost failing to refill his glass with Pouilly-Fuisse a fourth time.

“You’ve figured everything out?” I asked as we began dessert.

“*Corbleu*, I only wish I had,” he answered as he raised a forkful of apple tart to his lips. “I used brave words to Monsieur Taylor, Friend Trowbridge, but just between the two of us I do not know if I am right or wrong. I grope, I feel my way, I stumble in the dark like a blind man in an unfamiliar street. I have an hypothesis, but it cannot yet be called a theory, and there is not time to test it. I warn you, what we do tonight may be dangerous. You can ill be spared to suffering humanity, my friend. The sick and ailing need your help. If you prefer to stay home while I give battle to these olden forces of evil I shall not feel offended. It is not only your privilege, it is almost your duty to remain away—”

“Have I ever let you down?” I broke in reproachfully. “Have I ever stayed behind because of danger—”

“*Non, par la barbe d’un bouc vert*; that you have not, *brave comrade*,” he denied. “You may not be a trained occultist, but what you lack in training you make up in courage and loyalty, dear friend. You are one in twenty million, and I love you, *vieux comrade*, may the devil serve me hot with *sauce bordelaise* for his dinner if I do not!”

Shortly after nine o’clock that evening we gathered in the recreation room of Dr. Taylor’s house. Vella, looking little worse for her attack of the night before, was wearing a black velvet dinner dress, quiet and unadorned, save for a great intricate gold pin which emphasized by contrast the ivory of her complexion and the dark mistiness of her black hair.

De Grandin set his stage precisely. Dribbling red liquid from his thermos bottle, he traced a double interlaced

triangle across the tiled floor and placed four chairs inside it. “Now, *Mademoiselle*, if you will be so kind,” he invited with a bow to Vella.

She dropped into an armchair, hands folded demurely in her lap, head lolling back against the cushions.

The little Frenchman took his stand before her, drew out a small gold pencil and held it vertically in front of her face. “*Mademoiselle*,” he ordered, “you will please be kind enough to look at this — at its very tip, if you will. So. Good. Excellent. Observe him closely.”

Deliberately, as one who beats time to a slow andante tune, he wove the little gleaming pencil back and forth, describing arabesques and intricate interlacing figures in the air. Vella watched him languidly from under long black lashes, but gradually her attention became fixed. We saw her eyes follow every motion of the pencil, finally converge toward each other until it seemed she made some sort of grotesque grimace; then the lids came down across her great dark eyes and her head moved slightly sidewise as her neck muscles relaxed. Her folded hands fell loosely open on her velvet clad knees, and she was, to all appearances, sleeping peacefully. Presently the regular, light heaving of her bosom and her softly sibilated, regular light breathing told us she had indeed fallen asleep.

De Grandin returned the pencil to his pocket, put his fists upon his hips and held his arms akimbo as he regarded her steadily. “You can hear me, cannot you, *Mademoiselle*?” he demanded.

“I can hear you,” she repeated drowsily.

“*Bien*. You will rest a moment, then, as the inclination moves you, say whatever comes into your mind. You understand?”

“I understand.”

For something like five breathless minutes we waited in silence. I could hear the great clock in the hall above: “*Tick-tock — tick-tock!*” and the soft hiss of a green log burning in the fireplace, then, gradually, but certainly, for no reason I could think of, the room began to grow colder. A hard, dull bitterness of cold that seemed to affect the spirit as well as the body pervaded the atmosphere; a biting, searing cold suggestive of the limitless freezing eternities of interstellar space.

“*Ah-ha!*” I heard de Grandin’s small strong teeth click sharply, like a pair of castanets. “*Ah-ha-ha!* It seems you did not wait a second invitation, *Messieurs las Singeries*.” How they came there I had no idea, but there they were — a semi-circle of old men in flowing robes of white linen, masked with headgear simulating hawks, jackals, lions, apes and oxen. They stood in a grim, silent crescent, looking at us with dull, lack-luster eyes, the very embodiment of inhibitory hatred.

“*Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin whispered, “the time has come for you to speak, if you can find the words.”

The sleeping girl moaned softly, tried to articulate, then seemed to choke upon a word.

The semi-circle of grim silent watchers moved a step nearer, and the cold that theretofore had been a mere discomfort became a positive torture. The nearest of the shadowy masked figures reached the point of one of the interlaced triangles, paused irresolutely a moment, then shrank back.

“*Sa-ha, Monsieur Tête de Singe*, you do not like him, *hein?*” de Grandin asked with a short spiteful laugh. “Have patience, *Monsieur Monkey-Face*; there is to come that which you will like still less.” He glanced across his shoulder at the girl. “Speak, *Mademoiselle*. Speak up and fear no evil!”

“Lords of the Ghostland,” came a voice from Vella Taylor’s lips, but it was not her voice. There was an indefinable and eerie undercurrent to the tone that sent a shiver tingling up our spines. Her words were slurred and languorous, yet strangely mechanical, as though an unseen hand were playing a gramophone:

“Revered and dreadful judges of the worlds of flesh and spirit, ye awful ones who sit on the parapets of hell, I answer guilty to the charge ye bring against me. Aye, Nefra-Kemmah who stands now before ye on the brink of deathless death, whose body waits the crushing stones of doom, whose spirit, robbed forever of the hope of fleshly tenement, must wander till time blends into eternity, confesses that the fault was hers, and hers alone.

“Behold me, awesome judges of the living and the dead, am I not a woman, and a woman shaped for love? Are not my members beautiful to see, my lips like apricots and pomegranates, my eyes like milk and beryl, my breasts like ivory set with coral? Yes, mighty ones, I am a woman, and a woman formed for joy.

“Was it my fault or my volition that I was pledged to serve the Great All-Mother or ever I had looked upon the daylight? Did I abjure the blissful agony of love and seek a life of sterile chastity, or was the promise spoken for me by another’s lips?

“I gave all that a woman has to give, and gave it gladly, knowing that the pains of death, and after death the torment of the gods awaited me, nor do I deem the price too high a one to pay.

“Ye frown. Ye shake your dreadful heads upon which rest the crowns of Amun and of Kneph, of Seb and Tem, of Suti and Osiris’ mighty self. Ye whisper one to other that I speak sacrilege. Then hear me yet awhile: She who stands in chains before you, shorn of all reverence as a priestess, stripped of

all honor as a woman, tells ye this to your teeth; knowing that ye cannot do her greater hurt than she stands prejudged to endure. Your reign and that of those ye serve draws to a close. A little while ye still may strut and preen yourselves and mouth the judgments of your gods, but in the days to come your very names shall be forgot save when some stranger from another time and place drags forth your withered mummies from the tomb and sets them up to make a show of. Aye, and the gods ye serve shall be forgotten. They shall be sunk so low that none shall be found in the world to do them reverence; none to call on their names, not even as a curse, and in their ruined temples there shall not be found a living thing except the fearful, whimpering jackal and the white-bellied lizard.

“And who shall do this thing to them and ye? An offspring of the Hebrews. Yea, from the race of him I loved and for whose sake I trod my vows of cold sterility into the desert sand, from that race that ye despise and hate shall come a child and unto Him shall be all glory. He shall put down your gods beneath His feet and spoil them of all respect; they shall become but shadow-gods of a forgotten past.

“My name ye’ve stricken from the roll of priestesses of the All-Mother; no writing shall be graven on my tomb or coffin, and I shall be forgotten for all time by men and gods. So reads your dreadful judgment.

“Ye hoary-headed fools, I hurl the lie into your teeth! Upon a day in the far future men from a strange land shall delve into the tomb where ye have laid me and take forth my body from it, nor shall your spite and hatred stop them till they’ve looked upon my face and seen my broken bones and heard the story of my love for the Hebrew who for my sake abjured his God and became a shaven-headed servant of the great All-Mother. I swear that I shall tell the story of my love and death, and in another age and land strange men shall hear my name and weep for me — but *your names they shall never know*.

“Ye think to cast me to oblivion? I tell ye I shall triumph in the end, and it is ye who shall be utterly forgotten, nameless as the sands the wind pursues across the desert.

“Pile now your stones of doom upon my heart and still its fevered beating. To death I go, but not from out the memory of men as ye shall. I have spoken.”

The girl’s voice ended on a weary little sob, and de Grandin’s shout of spiteful laughter slashed the silence as a sword might slash through flesh.

“And hast thou heard, thou animal-faced fools?” he asked. “Who prophesied the truth, and who was caught in the web of his own conceit, old monkey-faces? Take now your pale and breathless shades back to that shadow-land from whence they came. Ye tried your evil best to keep her from revealing her story, and ye have failed. Go — go quickly to oblivion.

In nomine Dei, I bid ye begone now and henceforth!”

He took a step toward the half-circle of masked forms, and they gave ground before him. Another step, and they fell back another pace. They were wavering now, becoming less substantial, more shadowy; as he raised his hands and took a third step toward them they seemed merely nebulous gray vapor swirling and eddying in the light draft from the open fireplace where the logs blazed, and — suddenly they were gone.

“*Fini — triomphe — achevé — parfait!*” de Grandin drew a silk handkerchief from his cuff and wiped his brow. “Ye were strong and hateful, *Messieurs les Revenants*, but Jules de Grandin he is strong, too, and when it comes to hating — *morbleu*, who knows his power better than you?”

“What was that stuff you sprinkled on the floor of Taylor’s recreation room before we began tonight, and why did it hold back those dreadful shadowy forms while Vella spoke?” I asked him as we drove homeward.

He broke off the tune he hummed with a laugh. “It was pigeons’ blood, my friend. I got it from the *marchand de volaille* this afternoon. As to why it held them back, *morbleu*, I am as much at sea as you. It is one of those things we know without understanding.

“You know, by example, that in all ancient religions the priest was wont to purify the altars with the blood of the sacrifices — of the goats, lambs, doves or bullocks offered to the god?”

“Yes, I’ve heard that.”

“And for why? Not that the blood is cleansing. *Mais non*. Blood is simply liquid tissue, and very messy stuff indeed. Why, then? Because, my friend” — he tapped me solemnly upon the knee — “the blood contained some secret, potent

power to *hold the god in check*. He could not pass beyond a circle traced in it. That kept him in his place and kept him in control as one might say. He could not swoop down on the congregation past that barrier of sacrificial blood, as long as that stood between him and them they were safe from his wrath or spite or his capricious wish to do them hurt and injury. Yes. Of course. Very good The priests of Isis wet her altars with the blood of doves. I secured a similar substance and with it traced a pentacle about us; the votaries of Isis, like their mistress, could not pass by that barrier; within it we were safe. And then, *pardieu*, when Mademoiselle Vella had delivered Nefra-Kemmah’s message to us — shown those olden ones their cruel and wicked judgment had been set at naught — then, *morbleu*, they were completely undone. They had not strength nor spirit to oppose me when I ordered them to begone. *Parbleu*, I literally laughed them out of existence!” He drummed gloved fingers on the silver knob of his short military cane:

*Sacré de nom,
Ron, ron, ron.
La vie est brève,
La nuit est longue—*”

he hummed. “Make haste, Friend Trowbridge.”

“Why, what’s the hurry?”

“It is dry work, this battling with those olden dusty ones, and just before we left for Monsieur Taylor’s I saw a man put a bottle of champagne in the frigidaire.”

“A man put champagne in our frigidaire?” I echoed. “Who—”

“*C’est moi* — I am the man, my friend, and *mort d’un rat mort*, how I do thirst!”

"CHARIOTS OF SAN FERNANDO" by MALCOLM JAMESON

JANUARY

Weird Tales

15¢

Shadow-shapes in the nightmare land of the Infinite . . .

"Kurban"

SEABURY QUINN

Kurban

THE CLOCK on my desk registered 6:45, the patient had been dismissed, from the house came appetizing odors and the rattle of a cocktail shaker briskly agitated. Dinner would be ready in a few minutes and— The chiming of the office bell came like a warning of impending disappointment as the late caller obeyed the “Ring and Enter” engraved on the brass plate decorating the door. Devoutly I hoped that the *pièce de resistance* would not be steak. A roast is little the worse for an extra half hour in a low oven, but a steak...

“Trowbridge!” Dunscomb Doniphan strode into the consulting room. “Thank goodness I caught you in. I’m almost frantic, old man.”

“Sit down,” I invited, noting the deep grooves etched by worry wrinkles in his brow, the long lines like parentheses that scored his cheeks, and the tired look in his eyes. Here was fatigue as plainly to be read as sky-writing on a still day, another case of the “nervous prosperity” that had swept the country like a plague as war orders piled up and price became a matter of decreasing importance. “What seems to be the trouble?”

“Austine!” he flung the name at me as if it were a missile.

“Austine?” I echoed. “What—”

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, the ducklings roasting for our dinner are utterly *incinérée*, and the Martinis I have made with loving care — ah!” as he noticed Doniphan the little Frenchman paused abashed, “a thousand pardons, *Monsieur*, I did not know that Dr. Trowbridge entertained a patient—”

“This is Dr. de Grandin, Doniphan,” I introduced. “Dr. de Grandin, Dunscomb Doniphan. We were in college together.” The small Frenchman shook hands cordially and turned to leave, but:

“I’ve heard of you, Dr. de Grandin,” Doniphan interposed. “I understand you’re an expert in psychiatry.”

“There are no experts in psychiatry,” de Grandin denied with a smile. “Some of us may have penetrated a little deeper into the fog than others, but all of us are groping in that no-man’s land where theory plays a game of blind man’s buff with fact. “However,” he dropped into a chair, all thoughts of desiccated ducklings, and lukewarm Martinis gone from his mind, “if there is anything that I can do I shall be very happy. What is the problem vexing you?”

“Problem is right,” responded Doniphan grimly. “It’s my daughter Austine. If she were ten years younger I’d turn her over my knee and reason with her with a slipper; if she were five years younger I’d cut her spending money off and lock

her in her room. But she’s free, white and twenty-five, with what some people might consider a fortune inherited from her grandmother, so there’s not a damn’ thing I can do with her.”

“*Tiens, Monsieur*, this is no problem for a psychiatrist. I damn’ think most fathers of daughters suffer from the same complaint. Jules de Grandin is not equal to this task, neither is the good Trowbridge. What you need is a Solomon, and even he, if I recall my Scripture correctly, confessed the ways of a maid—”

“You know a crazy person when you see one, don’t you?”

“U’m?” de Grandin took his narrow chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. “I cannot say with certainty, *Monsieur*. We are all a little what you call crazy; some of we are just a little more so than the rest. What is the particular aberration from which your daughter suffers?”

The half-worried, half-puzzled look on Doniphan’s face gave way to an expression of anger. “New Thought,” he shot back. “Or Theosophy, or Yoga or Hinduism; maybe Bahaism? I don’t know what they call it. All I know is that it’s a lot of damn’ nonsense and has made an imbecile of what was once a fairly intelligent young woman.” The smoldering anger in his eyes gave way to blazing rage. “Listen, you two:

“Ten months ago this Swami Ramapali came to brighten our ignorance with the light of his countenance. Where he came from, only God knows. He might have come from India or Indiana, but wherever he hails from, he’s got what the women, young and old, eat up. Started out by giving little talks at afternoon gatherings, driveling about being In Tune With the Infinite and the Nothingness of Matter, and all that sort of rot. First thing we knew he’d progressed to holding regular meetings, then to forming a congregation with a temple of its own; three months ago he bought the Judson farm out by Passaic and founded a colony. Good Lord!” he snorted in disgust.

“And this colony of which you speak, *Monsieur*. It is—”

“I don’t know what it is. Nobody does. Austine had been going to this faker’s meetings regularly, and contributing plenty to them, judging by the entries we found in her check books since she left home. When he set up housekeeping at the Judson place she was one of the first to join him. I haven’t laid eyes on her since. Neither has her mother. We’ve been out there half a dozen times, but she won’t see us. Sends out word she’s in her Silence, or some such damnfool message.”

De Grandin's slender brows went up the fraction of an inch. "You suspect it to be a place where — how do you say *hein*? — untrammled love is practiced?"

"I don't know what to think or suspect. I don't know anything about it, neither does anyone else. As nearly as we can find out, there are some thirty or forty people living here, mostly young women, though there's a sprinkling of old spinsters and a few widows. All of 'em are wealthy and all of them have cut themselves off from their families as completely as Austine has broken with us. I've been to the police. They can't, or won't, do anything. Say there's no crime charged, and all that sort of legalistic rot. Now, what I want you to do is" — he leveled a stiff forefinger at de Grandin and me in turn — "find some way of getting into that booby-hatch, sizing up the situation, and then, if you can find a shred of evidence appear before a lunacy commission and have Austine committed. I really think she's clear off her rocker over this business, but if we can get her out and away from the Swami's influence she'll come out of it. Then — it ought to be as easy to have her declared sane as it was to have her adjudged incompetent, oughtn't it?"

"It is deplorable," de Grandin murmured.

"Ain't it," Doniphan agreed inelegantly. "To think that a well-brought-up young woman—"

"Should have such a bigoted, narrow-minded parent, *parbleu!*" interrupted the small Frenchman fiercely. "This cult to which *Mademoiselle* your daughter has attached herself may be all that you suspect, and more, but at any rate it satisfies her. She finds it to her liking. And you, *Monsieur*, because it does not meet with your approval, would perpetrate this dreadful thing, have your own daughter branded *alienée* — a mad women — to be forever suspected of insanity, to have her children suspect of a strain of madness in their blood. *Pardieu*, it is entirely too much, this! Me, I will have none of it. Good day, *Monsieur!*" He rose, bowed coldly, and left the room.

"Well, Trowbridge, that's that," Doniphan murmured. "What do you say?"

"I say go slow," I temporized. "Austine may have gone off the deep end, but she'll come round in time. Just wait and see what happens."

"That your last word?"

"I'm afraid so. I couldn't lend myself to any such scheme as you propose—"

"All right. You're not the only doctor in town. I'll find one who'll be willing to listen to reason for a thousand-dollar fee."

"By the way, de Grandin," I remarked casually at dinner some nights later, "that Swami that Doniphan was so burned up about is making a talk at Mrs. Tenbroeck's this evening.

Would you care to have a look at him? I must confess I'm somewhat curious after all I've heard."

He looked up from his apple tart with one of his direct cat-stares. "I think I should, my friend. He may be a *jongleur*, quite possibly a criminal, but I should like to see this fellow who has, as Monsieur Doniphan expressed it, what the ladies devour. Yes, by all means, let us go."

The Swami Ramapali was just finishing his discourse as de Grandin and I found seats in the Tenbroeck drawing room. He was a young man slightly under middle height, dark complected, but obviously not a member of the colored races. Dark hair, lustrous and inclined to curl, was smoothly parted in the middle and hung in long ringlets each side of his face, brushing the velvet collar of his dinner coat. His shirt of fine white linen was decorated with a double row of box pleats edged with fine lace, and against its immaculate whiteness there showed studs of onyx set with small star sapphires. Knotted negligently beneath his wide collar was a flowing black silk tie of the sort affected by art students of the '90's. His eyes were very large, prune-black, and held a drowsy, sensuous expression.

"All, all is only seeming," he concluded in a voice that was almost a purr. "All seeming is a fantasy, a nothingness, a part of Brahm's dream. We are but shadow-shapes in the Dream of the Infinite; what we call matter is delusion. Thought only is eternal, and that which we call thought is but the echo of an echo in the Dream of the Creator."

"*Grand dieu des porcs*, he talks the double-talk, this one!" de Grandin whispered. "What is this maundering of the nothingness of something and echoes of echoes—"

"*S-s-st!*" I hissed him into silence, for the Swami had stepped forward from his place beside the grand piano and the lights which had been lowered while he spoke were turned on. The vaguely unfavorable impression the Swami had made on me when I first saw him was heightened by the full light of the chandelier. As our hostess presented us and his somber, brooding eyes fell on me with a look of almost calculating appraisal, I had a momentary feeling of revulsion as unreasonable and inexplicable, but as tangible, as a warm-blooded creature's instinctive reaction to a snake.

He spoke no word of recognition as de Grandin and I bowed. Serene, statue-still, he received our murmured expressions of pleasure at the meeting with an air of aloofness that was almost contemptuous. Only for a fleeting instant did his expression change. Something, perhaps the gleam of mockery in the little Frenchman's gaze, hardened his large eyes for an instant, and I had a feeling that it would behoove my friend not to turn his back on the Swami if a dagger were handy.

In the dining room the long sideboard was laden with

silver dishes of nuts, dried figs, dates and raisins. De Grandin sampled the contents of the first compote and turned away with a wry face. "Name of a name," he swore softly, "such vileness should be prohibited by law!"

"Isn't it simply wonderful?" a lady with more than ample bosom and a succession of assistant chins gushed in my ear. "It's in honor of the Swami, you know. His religion forbids eating anything that has been cooked or killed. Only the kind fruits of the kind earth are spread for a repast when he is present. I'm thinking seriously of taking up the diet. Poor dear Estrella Santho took it up, you know, and it did wonders — simply wonders — for her."

De Grandin fixed his set, unwinking cat-stare on her. "And this poor dear lady, where is she now, if you please?"

Our *vis-à-vis* seemed slightly taken aback, but rallied in a moment with a sad sweet smile. "She has passed on — her faith was stronger than ours. Where we linger hesitating on the brink, afraid to take the plunge she made the great decision and became a neophyte in the Swami's colony, the Gateway to Peace. She had completed the initial steps and was almost ready to become one of the *hieroi* when she was absorbed into the Infinite, she has passed her final incarnation and dwells forever in the ineffable light emanated by the Divine All—"

"In fine, *Madame*, one gathers she is defunct, deceased; dead?"

"In the language of the untaught — yes," the lady admitted. "It was so tragic, too. You see, the dwellers on the Threshold of Peace wear Eastern costume — no hampering Western clothes to take their minds from contemplation — and she was bitten by a snake—"

"A snake, *Madame*? You interest me. What sort of snake was it, if you know?"

"Really, sir," the lady had apparently become tired of his catechism, "I haven't the faintest idea. What sort of snakes usually bite people in this latitude?"

"That is precisely what one asks to know," he answered, but he spoke to the departing dowager's broad back.

"Ah-h'm?" he murmured as he drew a gold pencil from his pocket and scribbled a memorandum in his notebook. "This we shall look into, I damn' think."

"What?" I demanded, but our hostess' announcement from the farther room prevented further conversation:

"The Swami has consented to perform a miracle for us. He will demonstrate the power of mind over seeming matter."

"*Qu'est-ce-qui?*" de Grandin's tightly waxed wheat-blond mustache was all a-quiver, like the whiskers of an alert tomcat. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, this is something we must not forbear to witness, not by any means."

The drawing-room lights had been lowered again and the

Swami was seated before a small table on which lay an ordinary lead pencil. He put his elbows on his knees and stared intently before him a long moment, then raised slender, ring-decked hands and moved them back and forth above the pencil. Faster and faster moved the undulating hands. It seemed, almost, they wove a pattern of invisible threads in the air. Then slowly, unbelievably, it happened. With a movement almost serpentine the pencil writhed a little, rose a full half-inch, then dropped back, the metallic band that held its rubber tip making a faint clicking sound against the polished table top. The Swami's hands wove fresh patterns above it, came together with a soft clap, then separated slowly. And as they drew apart the pencil rose unsteadily, wavered drunkenly a moment at an acute angle and, almost against its will, it seemed, balanced on its sharpened point. The half-lit room seemed vibrant with something unseen and unholy. I had a sudden feeling of uncanny dread, as if I'd witnessed the raising of a dead and stiffened body. For a moment the insensate bit of rubber, wood and graphite stood upright as a toe-dancer executing a pirouette, then, falling drunkenly sidewise, rolled off the polished table to the floor.

"How wonderful! Marvelous! Miraculous!" the whispered comments ran around the shadowed room.

The Swami leant back in his chair, a look of physical exhaustion on his face. "Thought," he murmured tiredly, "only thought is strong. What you have seen, my friends, is but a manifestation of the power of the will. That we call matter is of no consequence, no potency. The vaunted science of the West cannot explain such things; the stupid, cold religions of the West have nothing concrete to offer. Their storybooks are full of tales of miracles and wonders, all worked in the long-ago. But if you ask them for a miracle today — even such a little thing as that which I have done just now — they turn to vague excuses, saying that the age of miracles is past—"

De Grandin had tiptoed to the hall now, as the Swami paused a moment, he came back into the drawing room, his silver-headed stick beneath his elbow. "*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur Swami,*" he interrupted, "but here is one who does not subscribe to your thesis. In one of those story-books which you deride it is recorded how Pharaoh's necromancers cast their rods upon the earth and they became live, hissing serpents. And when Aaron, Moses' brother, cast his staff upon the ground, it likewise became a serpent and devoured those rod-serpents of Pharaoh's sorcerers. *Regardez-moi, s'il vous plaît—*" He dropped into a chair opposite the Swami, braced his stick between his knees and began to make passes over it. "You vitalized a little, insignificant lead pencil, Monsieur Swami. *Très bon.* Me, I shall call a walking stick to life. *Attendez!*"

He waved slim hands above the silver knob of the cane a moment, and the upright stick fell from between his knees, almost struck the floor, then, rallying with a wavering, uncertain movement, slowly rose until it stood upright upon its ferrule. For a moment it swayed gently, then rose clear of the floor and fell clattering to the polished boards at his feet.

He rose and bowed to the assemblage as if he were an actor on a stage, but no applause greeted his exhibition. "What, is there none to show appreciation of my *jonglerie*?" he demanded. "For shame, *messieurs et 'dames*. Is it that you seek an explanation? *Bien*. I show you. Lights, if you will be so kind," and as the lights snapped on, he took the cane up and showed them a three-foot length of black suture silk attached to it. "You see, I fasten this small thread to the stick, then I take the ends between my hands — so." He drew the string taut, and the cane rose till it stood upon its ferrule. "*Très bien*. Then I loosen the thread, and the cane she leans from side to side. When I once more tighten the thread she comes back to the vertical. *C'est très simple, n'est-ce-pas?* It is an old, old juggler's trick, one that I learned in boyhood. Yes, certainly.

"Ah, but,' you say, 'the Monsieur Swami had no thread to make his pencil dance upon its tip. He are a really-truly supernatural someone.' Ah, bah!" So quickly none of us divined his purpose, he lashed a hand out, thrust his fingers into the Swami's waistcoat pocket and dragged out the pencil with which the miracle had been worked. From its upper end, close to the metal cap that held the rubber to the wood, there dangled eighteen inches of hair-fine black silk thread.

A flush stained the Swami's cheeks and brow, his great dark eyes suffused with tears of embarrassment. "It is a trick," he almost shrieked. "A trick—"

"But certainly, *mon ami*," the Frenchman laughed delightedly. "A trick it is, and a most good one, too. Come now, confess that you did make the innocent joke tonight. They asked you for to perform some wonder, and you did do it for them. Very well you did it, too. I could not have done it better myself, and I am very clever. Let us make no hard feelings" — he clapped the Swami jovially upon the shoulder — "let us all be jolly friends together."

The amiability he sought to rouse was something less than hilarious, but at least the tension had been broken, and half an hour later we took our leave with a rather wintry good-bye from our hostess.

"Name of a small green man!" he chuckled delightedly as we drove to my house. "Did I not make a monkey out of him, Friend Trowbridge? I think that he will not try to make the dancing pencil very soon again; not before that audience, at any rate."

"H'm," I rejoined. "You surely showed him up, but all the same I have a feeling everything was not as innocent as it seemed. There was an atmosphere of something evil—"

"*Parbleu*, you felt it, too? I am delighted!"

"Delighted!"

"But certainly. I had a feeling of *malaise*, of something sinister and ugly, directly I went into that room where he drooled his senseless dribble, but I am the suspicious one. I have traveled much among the fakirs and seen the so-called holy men at their unholy monkey-business. I do not like or trust those ones. To me they have the odor of dead fish.

"It was no parlor trick that he performed tonight, my friend. He was in deadly earnest, and would have let the imposition stand, had I not unmasked it. It was as false as his philosophy and his alleged religion, but — did you take note of that gathering?" he changed the subject abruptly.

"How do you mean?"

"Its composition. Did you notice the preponderance of women? And what sort of women? Not young, not old, but middle-aged.

"A very dangerous age indeed, my friend. Too old for romance, yet too young for resignation, and obviously well supplied with cash. Such people make the ideal victims for the charlatan. I damn' think I shall follow the investigation of this Monsieur Swami further in the morning. Yes, certainly."

He was late for dinner the next evening, and when he came in there was that expression in his little round blue eyes that told me he had made an important discovery. "Well?" I demanded as we took our seats.

"*Non*, my dear, good friend, I do not think that it is well," he denied as he sipped his Martini. "Upon the contrary, I fear that it is very not-so-well. I have apologized to Monsieur Doniphan and agreed to take his case."

"You mean you'll be a party to having Austine declared insane—"

"Better temporarily insane than dead, *mon vieux*. Perhaps she will be both before this business has come to its end. Attend me, if you please," he leveled his soup spoon at me. "This morning I went to the court house and asked to see the wills that have been probated in the last three months."

"Yes?"

"*Oui-da*. Among them I did find the one I sought, that of the poor dear Mademoiselle Santho, of whom the lady of the several chins told us last night. Dear she may have been, but certainly she was not poor. She had a comfortable fortune, oh, a very comfortable one of two hundred thousand dollars. And what did she do with it, I ask you? *Parbleu*, she willed it to her dear friend the Swami Ramapali! What do you make from that?"

“Undue influence?”

“Indubitably. Damn yes. But there is something more, a something sinister that does not leap immediately to the eye. She died, if you recall, of snake-bite.”

“Yes, I remember hearing that.”

“Very well, or, more precisely, very bad. She made her will upon a Wednesday. Upon the following day, Thursday, she was bitten fatally by a snake. Was it not a most accommodating serpent who dispatched her so conveniently and quickly?”

“Good heavens, d’ye think—”

“Not yet, my friend. I do not think. I am like a blind man in an unfamiliar place. I feel about me, grope for something which will show me where I am and how I should proceed, and what is it my searching fingers find? Nothing, *pardieu!* Nothing at all. It may be that I raise the shadow of a bugaboo unnecessarily, but — can you spare tomorrow morning to go out to Monsieur Swami’s colony where Mademoiselle Austine has taken residence? I should greatly like to see that place.”

It was evident that Swami Ramapali did not welcome visitors to the colony, for a cement wall some ten feet high surrounded the grounds, and the morning sunlight glinted on the raw edges of a triple row of broken bottles set in mortar on its top. The only entrance was a narrow door of heavy planking reinforced with iron straps and fitted at man’s height with a little wicket through which callers might be inspected.

De Grandin struck a sharp, authoritative knock on the door, then, as no answer came to his hail, repeated the summons more loudly. The wicket in the door flew open abruptly and a dark face topped by a soiled white cotton turban scowled at us. “Go away,” the porter ordered. “Your noise annoys the silence of this holy place.”

“*Tiens*, Monsieur Dirty-Hat, you will experience even more annoyance if you do not make your door open all soon. I am Dr. Jules de Grandin and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, and we would talk with Mademoiselle Austine Doniphan. Conduct us to her quickly, if you please.”

The panel snapped shut suddenly as it had opened, and we were left to view the door again in silence.

“*Queue d’un rat mort*, they shall not shut their twenty-times-accursed door in our faces!” de Grandin swore. “They shall not—”

The heavy door swung open slowly and the porter greeted us with a salaam. “Be pleased to enter through the Gateway to Peace,” he announced sonorously.

“Ah, now, my friend, you use the gas for culinary purposes,” de Grandin complimented as we stepped across the threshold.

We followed our guide down a long alley lined with little cement hutches no larger than good-sized dog houses and, like dog houses, having only one opening shaped like an inverted *U* and so low that whoever entered would have to crawl on hands and knees. Crossing the alleyway were other even narrower passages, apparently forming a series of concentric circles radiating from a low one-story structure of stucco with a pagoda-like roof and low porch surrounded by a series of interlaced trefoil arches. There was no sign of life in the street through which we passed, but in the transverse alleys we caught glimpses of white-robed figures kneeling before the kennel-like houses, heads bent, hands clasped in what seemed silent contemplation. Curiously enough, several of them seemed to combine cigarettes with their devotions, for we saw them raise the little paper tubes to their mouths, draw deeply at them, and blow smoke slowly from their nostrils.

We reached the central structure, mounted the low single step that led to its veranda and paused before a curtained doorway. “Proceed into the presence of the Sublimity,” our guide bade, holding back the hanging of striped cotton goods that draped the doorway, and we stepped into the almost total darkness of a bare, unfurnished room. As my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I descried a seated figure at the far side of the apartment. He was squatting on a large pillow, legs crossed, feet folded sole-upward upon his calves, hands resting palm-up in his lap, with fingertips barely touching. As far as I could see his costume consisted of a sheet of saffron-yellow cotton loosely belted at the waist, leaving arms, chest, legs and feet uncovered. His head was bowed, nor did he look up as we entered, but:

“You would speak with her who in the world was known as Austine Doniphan?” he asked in a low voice, and instantly I recognized the Swami Ramapali.

But how changed! Where there had been luxuriant dark hair the night we saw him at the Tenbroeck house we now saw only naked scalp, for his head was shaven smooth as an egg, giving him at once a curiously infantile and aged appearance.

De Grandin bent a sharp look on him “It seems that I was right, Monsieur Swami,” he announced. “I could have sworn that you were crowned with a wig. Your hair, apparently, is no more genuine than your magic—”

“You would speak with her who in the world was known as Austine Doniphan?” the Swami interrupted in the same low, level voice.

“By blue, we would, and quickly, if you please, *Monsieur*. My patience is no longer than my nose, and nature has not gifted me with a long proboscis.”

The Swami struck his hands together with a sharp clap. “Bid Savatri to the presence,” he ordered as our late guide

paused upon the threshold with a deep salaam.

We waited for perhaps five minutes while de Grandin and the Swami seemed to be engaged in seeing who could stare the other down, then a shaft of sunlight stabbed the shadows as the doorway curtain was pulled back and a girl stepped soundlessly into the room.

I had not seen Austine Doniphan for some time, and probably should not have recognized her if I'd passed her in the street. Certainly the odd figure which crept into our presence bore no resemblance to the girl I'd known. Her costume seemed to consist of some yards of soiled white cotton cloth wrapped round and round her body from bosom to ankles almost as tightly as mummy-bandages. Her arms and shoulders were uncovered, as were her feet and ankles, and so tightly was the cotton bound about her knees that she walked like a hobbled animal, setting one foot precisely before the other, and turning her hips with an exaggerated motion. A loose end of her winding sheet had been brought up to drape her head with a sort of veil, secured by a long wooden pin passed through cloth and hair. Her arms were held stiffly at her sides, hands at right angles to wrists, palms parallel to the floor. On her brow above the bridge of her nose a small daub of bright vermilion showed like a fresh wound against the skin.

Her eyes were large and fine, with long, silky lashes, and though her face was thin with sunken-cheeked thinness, there was no evidence of ill-health. I recognized the symptom. Primary emaciation resulting from sudden diminution of diet.

Looking neither right nor left, without so much as indicating by the lifting of an eyebrow that she saw us, she slipped forward with her oddly creeping walk and came to a halt before the Swami.

A moment she paused thus, head bent demurely, hands clasped together palm to palm, the fingers pointing downward, then like a hinged dummy she sank to her knees, raised both hands above her head, bent forward, laying them upon the floor palm-upward, and dropped her forehead between them.

"Name of a name!" de Grandin swore. "This is indecent, this! Arise, thou foolish one, stand on thy feet—"

"Rise, follower of the Eternal Truth," the Swami bade, and at the command the girl struggled to her knees, awkwardly, for the tightness of her winding-sheet was like a fetter, raised her hands above her head and joined them palm to palm, but kept her eyes downcast. Look on these men," he ordered. "Dost thou know them?"

She cast a quick, almost frightened glance in our direction, then bent her head again. "I know one of them, Sublimity. He is a friend of my father—"

The Swami struck his palms together sharply. "Remember thy oath, Savatri! Thou has no father nor mother, nor any friends or kin. Thy every thought is centered on the Infinite Eternal—"

The girl lurched forward till she lay full-length before him and beat her forehead on the floor. "Forgive, forgive, Sublimity! Be patient with the dullest of thy pupils!" Her self-abasement was so complete that I felt almost sick with embarrassment for her.

"Proceed, then, but be mindful of your vow," he ordered.

"One of them, Sublimity, was known to me in the house wherein I dwelt in the world of ignorance," she replied in a low, frightened voice as she once more struggled to her knees. "He was a doctor — a physician who in his ignorance pretended to have power to cure the ills of the flesh—"

"Instruct him, Savatri," the Swami nodded to her.

"Dr. Trowbridge," she turned her great eyes, large and gentle as a gazelle's, full on me, "I pity you. You struggle in the dark, even as I did before the light of Truth Eternal fell on me. Do you not know, you foolish old man, that what we call the flesh, the body, all that we think material, are but the faintest shadows of shadows, and nothing real exists in the universe but thought? By treating what we call our bodies with contempt, by starving them, tormenting them, bringing them to utter and complete subjection, we weaken them but strengthen our souls. Anon we shall succeed in sloughing them away, flinging off the useless and undying—"

"*Cordieu, Mademoiselle*, you interest me," de Grandin broke in. "And the end of it is—"

"Nothing," she replied. "From the Infinite we came, and slowly toward the Infinite we struggle through countless incarnations. At last we shall attain perfection and be absorbed into the Infinite, all trace of self — of what you call the personality — forever lost and blotted out."

"Well said, my pupil," the Swami commended softly. "But is not the Way of Truth too hard for you? I have thought sometimes you were not able to endure the task of bodily subjection—"

"Sublimity!" Austine fell forward on her face and clasped her hands across her bowed neck. "Have gracious pity! Do not send me hence, I beg! If I have faltered in my duty it was not because I lacked the will; I had not strength to beat the flesh into complete subjection—"

There was something subtle and beguiling in the soft tone of his voice as he broke in: "For those who have the courage there is a short way to *Kailas*. There is a long and toilsome way, and a short, easy path.

"Omkar holds the door of *Kailas* open for those who would be reabsorbed into the Infinite without necessity for countless reincarnations—"

A tremor like a spasm shook the girl's bowed body. "Sublimity," she panted, "say that I may take that way! Give me leave to go to *Kailas* through *Kurban!* Grant permission for my entry into the Ineffable Nothingness that brings rest and oblivion. I would be *Kurban*, Sublimity!"

"*Grand Dieu!*" de Grandin breathed.

"Ah," the Swami let the syllable out slowly. "Thou hast made the choice thyself, Savatri. Remember, only thou canst make the choice—"

"I know, I know!" the girl broke in, breath coming in quick, sobbing gasps. "None but I can make the choice, none in heaven or in earth can revoke it. Record the vow, Sublimity! Freely, fully, voluntarily, I have made the choice. I will be *Kurban!*"

At a sign from the Swami she rose and turned to us. "I'm sorry, Dr. Trowbridge," she said gently, every trace of the frenzy that had possessed her completely gone. "You can never understand, neither can the others. I have come here of my own free will, and here I shall remain. In this place I have found such peace as I had never hoped to find on earth. Thank you for coming, and good-bye. I go to greater joys than ever woman knew before." She stretched a slender hand out, took mine in a firm clasp, and turned away with a murmured, "Peace be with you."

"See here," I told the Swami as Austine slipped from the room, "I don't know what all this nonsense is about, but it's obvious to me Miss Doniphan is not sound mentally. I came here to observe her, and in my opinion she's not responsible—"

"You think so?" Ramapali interrupted sarcastically. "However unusual her actions may have seemed at first, you can hardly say she seemed irrational when she left, Dr. Trowbridge. Do you honestly believe any jury would commit her to an institution if she appeared as normal as she did a moment since? Perhaps you'll see things in a different light when you have thought them over."

"*Eh bien*, Monsieur Swami, we have not yet begun our thinking, I assure you," answered Jules de Grandin. "It may be we shall meet again—"

"I greatly doubt it, Dr. de Grandin," the Swami broke in. "Now, if you will excuse me — I would resume my contemplation."

"*Au 'voir*, Monsieur, but by no means *adieu*," de Grandin answered as he turned on his heel.

It was shortly after three o'clock that afternoon when he called up to ask permission to bring a friend to dinner. "A most delightful person, Friend Trowbridge. An Indian gentleman named Ram Chitra Das who has been most kind and helpful, and will be more so. Yes."

Mr. Das proved a pleasant surprise. I had had visions of a

sloe-eyed Oriental with a pink or green turban and an air of insufferable condescension. Had I not known his origin I should have mistaken the man de Grandin brought to dinner for a Spaniard or Italian. His dark eyes were alert and keen with more than a suggestion of humor in them, his features small and regular, his tailoring faultless and his accent reminiscent of Oxford. He was, it appeared, the son of the tenth son of a Nepalese princeling who had so far forgotten the conventions as to fall in love with and actually marry a *nautchni* — a solecism comparable to an American parson's son marrying a burlesque strip-teaser. But because the old prince loved his son, and because the son was so far removed from the throne that the possibility of his succession was practically nil, the only punishment inflicted was banishment on a pension which equaled the income he would have enjoyed had he remained in the palace.

Ram Chitra Das was born in British India and for his first ten years was educated by a queer mixture of Mission School and native *gurus'* teaching. It was his father who insisted on his English education and his mother who saw that he received the training of a high-caste Hindu. "The dear old girl was frightfully keen on the princely blood, you know, even though the strain had begun to run pretty thin by the time it reached me."

When he was ten his father sent him to a good public school in England. He had been only fifteen when the World War broke out, but was given a commission as subaltern in an Indian regiment, fought in France, took his degree at Oxford after the war, and returned to India as a member of the Intelligence Section of the British Indian Police.

"Lord, no, I'm no Brahmin," he laughed when I commented on the ample justice he had done the roast beef at dinner. "The pater's caste was broken when he married the mater, you know, and whatever caste I had was smashed to bits when I crossed the ocean to England. I hadn't any desire to go through the disagreeable ceremony of having it restored. Sometimes I wonder what I really am. I was nurtured in the belief of the old gods of Hindi, and several English parsons, not to mention kind old ladies, labored manfully to make a Christian of me. The net result is that I try to follow St. Paul's advice to prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good. I've found a lot of good — and some things not entirely to my liking — in all religions."

"But you recall your early training" de Grandin asked.

"Oh, yes, just as a worldly Christian adult recalls the catechisms he learned as a child. Like this, you mean?" He looked about him, finally crossed the drawing room and took a tiny ivory figure from a curio cabinet. It was perhaps an inch high and represented a peacock with spread tail.

Placing it on the coffee table, he stared fixedly at it, elbows on knees, hands interlaced beneath his chin. A

moment — two — went by, and I experienced a slight chill along my spine as I saw the carved ivory rise half an inch from the table, circle round as if in flight, then settle down at least a foot from the spot where he had placed it.

“Why, that’s the trick the Swami did!” I exclaimed, but Mr. Das shook his head.

“No, Dr. Trowbridge, that’s the trick this fellow you call Ramapali pretended to do, and which Dr. de Grandin exposed so neatly. I assure you I had no strings tied to your peacock, and you saw that my hands were motionless and never nearer than my chin to the ivory.”

“But — that’s magic. True magic.”

Again he shook his head. “I wouldn’t call it that, sir, although there are many who would. I don’t pretend to understand it, any more than the dear old ladies who practice table tipping can explain why lifeless wood will vibrate and dance all round the parlor beneath their fingers. But just as I’m perfectly sure that spooks have nothing to do with the movements of the ladies’ tables, I’m certain that neither gods nor demons had anything to do with making that bit of ivory seem to defy gravity. It’s just one of those things for which we have no ready explanation — yet.”

“Now,” his laughing eyes became suddenly serious, “I’m interested in this Swami Ramapali, as he calls himself. From what Dr. de Grandin tells me, I think I know him. Some twenty years ago a young man named Michael Quinault was sent to jail in Bombay for practicing Christian wiles on the heathen in his blindness. He had been some sort of confidence man in the States, I understand. He certainly lacked confidence that day in Bombay when the judge sahib sentenced him to five years penal servitude for fleecing a Parsee widow out of her insurance money.

“He really should have thanked the judge, however, for jail proved just the thing he needed. No” — as I prepared a question — “it didn’t reform him. It opened up new vistas. In jail he made the acquaintance of our slickest native criminals, and they can be very slick, believe me. He got a smattering of Hindustani, and a fair working knowledge of Hindu philosophy and religion. Learned something about Yoga, too. In fine, when he came out he was equipped to palm himself off as a genuine *guru* — that means holy man, or teacher, sometimes miracle-worker — on anybody not too well acquainted with the genuine article. He also had another souvenir of imprisonment. A severe case of fever had made him totally and permanently bald as an egg. That might have proved a handicap to most; it was a valuable asset to him in his new role of religious teacher and revealer of the Truth. We hear of him occasionally — he’s swindled his way clear across the continent of Europe and the British Isles with his merry little masquerade, and done a handsome business in

the States. His victims are nearly always women. There is a certain type of Western woman to whom anything oriental is simply irresistible, just as there’s a type of oriental female who can’t resist a Western man. He’s an adept at picking his — what is it you chaps call ’em? — suckers?

“If it were just a matter of separating credulous ladies from their cash I shouldn’t be so much concerned. That sort of thing’s been going on since time began, and will probably continue till eternity replaces time. But from what Dr. de Grandin tells me there’s something far more serious involved here.”

“Indeed?” I answered. “What?”

“Murder.”

“Murder?” I echoed, horrified.

“Murder, *parbleu!*” de Grandin seconded. “Consider, if you please: This Mademoiselle Santho who willed her whole estate to the Swami Ramapali-Quinault, then so conveniently shuffled off the mortal coil by snake-bite. I was greatly interested in her. So to the Bureau of Vital Statistics I went and looked at her death certificate. It was signed by Dr. William Macwhyte of Tunlaw Mills. You know him?”

“No.”

“So did I. But I made his acquaintance. According to his report he was roused from bed early in the morning to minister to a lady at the Swami’s colony who had been bitten by a serpent. ‘What sort of serpent?’ I ask him.

“‘A rattlesnake,’ he tells me.

“‘Indeed?’ I asked to know. ‘And did you satisfy yourself concerning this, *cher collègue?*’

“‘But certainly,’ he tells me. ‘She was bitten in the ankle. The venom was injected directly into the posterior tibial artery about four inches above the astragalus. Death must have supervened within a very short time. There were the characteristic punctures where the fangs had pierced the epidermis and the derma to the subcutaneous tissue; slight lividities around the wounds, and considerable coagulation of the blood.’

“Does it not leap to the eye?”

“Perhaps it leaps to yours. Not to mine.”

“Forgive me, Friend Trowbridge. I do forget you are a general practitioner, and though a very skillful one, not familiar with reptile bites. The venom of the rattlesnake destroys the protoplasm of the blood, rendering it uncoagulable. It is about ninety-eight percent blood-destroying in its action. The venom of the cobra, *tout le contraire*, permits the blood to thicken, since its action is a swift paralysis, the poison attacking the nerve centers at once, and being only two to five percent blood-destroying. You see?”

“Can’t say I do.”

“*Mordieu*, I did forget. Perhaps you did not read him: Just

two weeks prior to Estrella Santho's death two cobras — king cobras, *ophiophagus elaps* — were secretly abstracted from the reptile house at the zoological garden. I remembered reading of it in *le Journal* and wondering who would be such a great fool as to steal two six-foot tubes of sudden death. Then, when I put the pieces of the so unfortunate lady's death-puzzle together, 'Jules de Grandin,' I say to me, 'we have something here, Jules de Grandin,' and 'It are indubitably as you say, Jules de Grandin,' I reply to me, 'just what it are we have I do not rightly know, but beyond the question of a doubt, we have something.'"

He turned to Ram Chitra Das. "Tell him what *Kurban* means, if you will be so kind," he ordered.

"*Kurban*," the Indian replied, "means self-immolation, the offering of oneself voluntarily as a human sacrifice. A Hindu woman may find quick access to *Kailas* — heavenly oblivion — by voluntarily offering herself as a sacrifice on the altar of Okmar, which is one of Siva's less admirable attributes. Or a widow, who is doomed to countless incarnations for the sin of having permitted her husband to predecease her, may avert the curse by *Kurban*. Perfectly ridiculous, of course, yet it differs more in degree than kind from the Christian woman's entering a convent or enlisting in the Salvation Army or going as a nurse in a lepersorium."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "We heard her say she wanted to become *Kurban*—"

"*Précisément*," de Grandin agreed. "I, too, heard it. Therefore, my friends, in half an hour Captain Chenevert of the State *gendarmérie* will meet us on the Andover Road, and to that sixty-three-times damned colony we go to see what happens. Are you with us, *mon vieux*?" he turned to Mr. Das.

"Oh, absolutely, old thing. This Quinault bloke led our police a merry chase. I'd like to be in at the death."

A highway patrol car waited for us a mile or so out on the Andover Road, and as we drew abreast, Captain Chenevert thrust his head from a window. "Good evening, Dr. de Grandin; evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Das," as de Grandin introduced our guest. "What's all this hush-hush stuff about? If I hadn't worked with you before, and didn't know you've always got something on the ball I'd have said, 'The hell with it,' tonight. I've got a big day tomorrow—"

"*Parbleu*, my worthy one, and you shall have a fine large night of it tonight, or Jules de Grandin is more greatly mistaken than he thinks! But yes."

Briefly he outlined the situation, and Chenevert's lips pursed in a soundless whistle. "Baldy Quinault?" he murmured. "Masqueradin' as a Hindu faker an' bumpin' women off with trick snakes. Well, what d'ye know? Let's

get going."

"Softly, my friends, be silent, I implore you!" de Grandin bade as we drew up before the entrance-way of the colony. "We must make no noise—"

At his gestured command we flattened ourselves to the wall and he struck three peremptory knocks on the door. There was no answer, but after the third repetition of the summons the wicket shot back, and though we could not see from our positions, we knew the porter looked through the spy-hole.

De Grandin crouched out of the warder's line of vision, silent as a shadow, till the wicket slammed shut, then beat three thunderous blows upon the planking of the gate. This time the response was instantaneous. The wicket shot back violently, the porter took a second look, then, seeing nothing, slipped the heavy bar from its braces and swung the door back a few inches, thrusting his head out.

"*Merci bien; merci bien une mille fois* — a thousand thanks, my friend!" de Grandin chuckled. His blackjack swung in a short arc, not downward where its impact would have been cushioned by the fellow's turban, but sidewise, so that it took him squarely on the frontal bone and dropped him to his knees like a steer bludgeoned on the killing floor of a slaughter house.

Chenevert took over momentarily. "Two of you stay here," he ordered the four troopers who accompanied him. "If this bird comes out of it, see that he doesn't raise a holler. McCarty, you and Hansen come with me. Have your riot guns ready; we're apt to need 'em in a hurry. Okay, Dr. de Grandin. It's your ball from here on."

Not a light showed anywhere, nor was there any sign of life among the little buildings of the colony, but from the central structure came a muted wailing of reed pipes played in tuneless unison and the muttering rhythm of a tom-tom. "*Ah-ha?*" the Frenchman whispered. "They have lost no time, these ones. Forward, *mes enfants!*"

Stepping high to avoid unseen obstacles, breathing through our mouths lest our respiration betray us, we hastened toward the central building, mounted its low single step and paused a breathless moment at its curtained doorway. "*Entrez, mais en silence!*" ordered Jules de Grandin.

Twin bronze braziers burned at the far side of the room, shedding a ruddy glow that stained rather than lightened the darkness of the place, and from them curled long spirals of heady incense as kneeling women fed handfuls of aromatic powder on their glowing charcoal. The air was sickening with the mingled scents of aloes, sandalwood and cedar, and — even mixed with the perfumes of the aromatics its odor could not be disguised — cannabis Indica, the *bhanga*, or

hashish of the East, the drugs of madness compared to which the marijuana of the West is as beer to brandy.

About the darkened room, their robes of cotton shining ghostly, leprous white against the gloom, some thirty figures, mostly women, crouched in attitudes of abject prostration, humming a low, wailing chant and emphasizing its crescendos by rising to their knees, hands held aloft, and clapping them together softly.

The mournful canticle came to a close, and from a farther doorway stepped the Swami Ramapali. His yellow robe had been replaced by a white gown of rhinestone-studded satin, a turban of white silk was bound about his head, and from its knot a brooch of brilliants caught the red reflection of the braziers' glow. Jeweled sandals shod his feet, and in his hand he held a rod of polished wood tipped with a knob shaped like an acorn. At sight of him the congregation groveled on the floor, then as a brazen gong clanged ominously rose to their knees and raised their hands in salute.

Two more deep, clanging strokes came from the unseen gong, and through the curtains of the door behind the Swami came Austine Doniphan. She, too, had changed her costume. Gone was her wrapped robe of soiled cotton, and in its place she wore a short bodice of purple satin and a full skirt of gold tissue bound about the waist and hips with a scarf of crimson silk. Silver anklets clinked and chimed with each step that she took, and band on band of silver circled wrists and arms. Her dark hair had been smoothly parted in the middle, and down the part there ran a streak of vivid red. As I glanced at her bare feet I saw their soles were painted red to match the part in her hair, and when she raised her hands in salute to the Swami I saw their palms were stained a brilliant yellow. Memory rang a horrifying bell in my mind: Years ago I had been told by a missionary that the colors daubed on Austine's head, hands and feet were thus applied to the bodies of Hindu women whose husbands had not survived them, and were never smeared on till the time and place of cremation had been fixed.

The girl bent in a deep salaam to the Swami, then as the gong boomed three full, brazen strokes, elevated hands above her head, pressed their yellow-painted palms together, and, rising on tiptoe, began gyrating rapidly. Faster and faster she whirled; the weighted hem of her gold-tissue dress rose slowly with centrifugal force until the garment stood out from her like a wheel and she was like a golden-petaled flower of which her white legs were the stem, the stiffly outstanding skirt the blades, and her body from the waist upward, the pistil.

"Look, for God's sake!" rasped Chenevert in my ear, and I choked on a horror-stricken breath as something like a narrow streak of shadow rippled from the doorway just

behind the madly whirling girl. It was about the thickness of a steamship's hawser, and about its color, too, and bent and twisted sinuously in a series of conjoined *W*'s, then coiled upon itself until the circle of its body and upreared head were like a giant, obscene *Q*. Then it uncoiled once more, lay upon the floor in a long, twisted line, and reared its wedge-shaped head to thrust forth a forked tongue. Slowly the steely whip of elongated body crept across the floor, nearer the girl's white, whirling feet, nearer — nearer.

The breath stopped in my throat. What was it Dr. Macwhyte had told de Grandin? Estrella Santho had died of snake-venom injected directly into her posterior tibial artery, the great blood vessel that supplies the back of the foot — about four inches above the astragalus or ankle bone.

A ripple of movement showed in the wavering light cast by the braziers and a second cobra joined the first, its sphenoid head raised inquiringly, its molasses-colored tongue flickering forward like a jet of flame.

"Don't shoot!" I heard Chenevert caution the troopers. "They're too close. We'd be sure to hit her—"

Beside me, coming unexpectedly as a clap of thunder on a clear day, there rose a sudden spiral of sound. Not strident, but soft, melodious, lilting, liquid as an ocarina played in middle register. With hands pressed tight against his lips, Ram Chitra Das was imitating the notes of an Indian flute. The music fluctuated from a slender spider-web of sound to a soft and throaty murmur like that of pigeons busy with their courtship. It was in a minor key, the mourning, sad lament that stamps all Oriental music, yet underneath its liquid, muted tones there was the faint suggestion of shrill, spiteful laughter.

The cobras heard it, and halted their zigzagging course toward the madly whirling girl. One of them raised its head questioningly, then the other. Suspiciously they paused a moment, swaying slowly, uncertainly, then turned away from Austine and faced Ram Chitra Das. The foremost snake raised half a yard of mottled body from the floor, and as it reared itself the hood behind its head expanded slowly till it looked like a gigantic toadstool fastened to the sinuous barrel of its body just behind the head. The second cobra seemed to struggle for a moment, then, like the first, began to rise. Slowly, apparently unwillingly, they rose and rose; now they were balancing upon what seemed no more than half a foot of coiled tail, and their heads swayed slowly with a circular motion in time to the flute's rhythm.

"Get her to hell away from there!" Ram Chitra Das brought his cupped hands down from his lips an instant. "I'll hold the snakes — be quick!"

"Take her, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," de Grandin cried as he kicked his way through the groveling congregation toward the Swami. "Take her in your arms and bear her

hence. This one is mine!”

Avoiding the charmed snakes as widely as I could, I put my arms about Austine and drew her to me. She made no struggle as I lifted her, but lay as limp and helpless as a woman in a swoon.

The little Frenchman’s fist shot out and cracked against the Swami’s chin with a sharp impact. “*Hola, mon ami,*” he cried “here is company you did not expect at your party!” A second uppercut sent the Swami reeling back against the wall, and before he could regain his balance handcuffs snapped upon his wrists. “I make you arrested for the murder of Estrella Santho and the attempted murder of Austine Doniphan, Michael Quinault alias Ramapali,” de Grandin announced. “This time, *par la barbe d’un babouin rouge,* I think you will not beat the rap. No, not at all, by damn it!”

Ram Chitra Das had followed us, and stood above the swaying cobras. “*Hayah-hou!*” he cried as he ceased humming the flute-tune. “The dance is ended, favored ones of Brahm. The time for rest has come!”

Slowly, as if they had been lowered on invisible threads, the almost erect snakes sank to the floor and lay there inertly, quivering slightly, but giving no further sign of life. Unceremoniously as if he gathered up two lengths of rope Ram Chitra Das picked them up, seizing them carefully behind the head, and bore them, tails trailing flaccidly on the floor, through the doorway whence they had emerged.

“Nobody move!” Chenevert’s voice rang like metal striking metal. “You’re all under arrest as material witnesses. Take ’em in charge, McCarty.”

“Most of it’s plain,” I told de Grandin as he, Ram Chitra Das and I disposed of a bottle of champagne in my study some hours later. “I’m frank to admit, though, that what was plain as a pikestaff to you meant nothing to me until you’d pointed it out. But how d’ye account for Austine’s apparent desire to offer herself as a sacrifice? Self-preservation is one of the strongest instinctive urges—”

“In normal people, yes,” he agreed. “But this young woman, like all too many of her generation, is definitely neurotic. We all have a queer streak in us somewhere, and if the streak becomes too wide we are thrown off our mental balance. Man’s innate impulse, as we know all too well, is to take, and woman’s is to give. It is this ‘give complex’ — a series of emotionally accented impulses in a suppressed state — that fills our hospitals with nurses, that makes daughters devote their lives to selfish parents, keeps women true to undeserving husbands. But when this natural trend in woman gets out of hand it becomes pathological. We call it masochism, sometime algolagnia. Very well. Consider:

“She is neurotically unbalanced, this Mademoiselle Austine. Guided in the proper channels her over-developed

‘give impulse’ might have made her a second Florence Nightingale. Alas, it had no guidance. It was left to run riot, and her inhibitions were naturally less strong than those of normal young women. When first we met her in the colony of the Swami I thought that I detected the scent of cannabis Indica — hashish — on her hair and garments. This drug, as you know, has a powerful tendency to increase dormant, suppressed desires, to render them unnaturally — sometimes overwhelmingly — strong. When Captain Chenevert and I went through the Swami’s private rooms we found hundreds of drugged cigarettes — tobacco mixed with hashish — what you call reefers. These he had systematically led his followers to smoke until they had become addicts, living in an unreal world of drug-created fantasy, wholly free from the inhibitions which ordinary sane people possess as brakes upon their impulses, especially their unnatural or ‘queer’ impulses. Yes. Certainly. Of course.

“Now, when one takes a sensitive, neurotic young woman and keeps her in a virtually continuous state of drug-intoxication for upward of three months she makes a fertile soil in which suggestion — either good or bad — may be implanted. Constantly, without remission, this so vile Quinault had dinned into her ears the suggestion that she give herself as a sacrifice — that she become *Kurban*. She had completely lost whatever inhibitions she once had. Her instinct for self-preservation was entirely blotted out, and her natural womanly instincts cried incessantly ‘give—give—give!’ with thousand-tongued insistence, until she felt the only way to happiness lay in offering herself as a sacrifice.

“You remember when she told the Swami she would become *Kurban*? She hesitated for a long moment before she made the declaration, then, all at once she burst out with the offer of herself so frenziedly that she could scarcely make her words coherent. That was entirely symptomatic. So was the calm that followed when she had made the hard choice. They had so constantly suggested the act to her that her poor drugged brain had come to regard it as inevitable. Natural love of life had fought against the act, but when she’d finally given way and made the decision to become *Kurban* she felt a positive relief. The long, hard, losing struggle had come to an end.

“The poor Mademoiselle Santho was less fortunate. Her they inveigled into making a will leaving her fortune to the unspeakable Quinault, then killed her ruthlessly. Mademoiselle Austine was next in line, and when we finish our investigation I am convinced that we shall find that every person in that colony is wealthy in his own right, and able to dispose of a neat fortune by will. Yes, I am certain.

“Some they would have killed as they killed la Santho and attempted to kill Mademoiselle Austine. The others they

would have blackmailed mercilessly, for all of them were parties to the murders in a way, and would have paid and paid to keep their part in them from being known. But of course—”

“Why did you take those cobras up?” I asked Ram Chitra Das. “You could have killed them easily enough.”

The Indian grinned amiably at me. “I didn’t serve with the police for nothing, sir. Those snakes alive will make good evidence against Quinault when they try him for the murder

of Miss Santho and the attempted murder of Miss Doniphan. They’d have been no use to us if I had killed them.”

“*Mon brave,*” the little Frenchman complimented. “My old wise one! *Morbleu,* but you do think of everything! Come, let us have another little so small drink” — he refilled our glasses and raised his toward the Indian — “to your cleverness, which is second only to de Grandin’s, my friend!”

The Man in Crescent Terrace

BUT THIS is most pleasant, *vraiment*,” Jules told me as we reached the corner where the black-and-orange sign announced a bus stop. “The *moteur*, he is a convenience. Yes, *Whiz-pouf!* he takes you where you wish to go all quickly, and *sifflement!* he brings you back all soon. But where there is no need for haste — *non*. It is that we grow soft and lazy substituting gasoline for walking-muscle, Friend Trowbridge. Is it not better that we walk on such a lovely evening?”

The brief October dusk had deepened into dark as if a curtain had been drawn across the sky, and in the east a star sprang out and a cluster of little stars blinked after it. A little breeze came up and rustled faintly in the almost-leafless maples, but it seemed to me a faint sound of uneasiness came from them, not the comfortable cradle-song of evening, but a sort of restrained moaning.

And with the sibilation of the wind there came the sound of running footsteps, high heels pounding in a sharp staccato on the sidewalk with a drumming-like panic made audible. The diffused glow of a street showed her to us as she ran, hurrying with the awkward, knock-kneed gait of a woman unused to sprinting, casting fearful looks across her shoulder each few steps, but never slackening her terror-goaded pace.

It was not until she was almost within touching distance that she saw us, and gave vent to a gasp of relief mingled with fright.

“Help!” she panted, then, almost fiercely, “run — run! He — it’s coming....”

“*Tenez*, who is it comes, *Mademoiselle?*” de Grandin asked. “Tell us who it is annoys you. I shall take pleasure in tweaking his nose—”

“*Run* — run, you fool!” the girl broke in hysterically, clutching at my lapel as a drowning person might clutch at a floating plank. “If it catches me—” Her breathless words blurred out and the stiffness seemed to go from her knees as she slumped against me, flaccid as a rag-doll.

I braced her slight weight in my arms, half turning as I did so, and felt the warm stickiness of fresh blood soak through my glove. “De Grandin,” I exclaimed, “she’s been hurt — bleeding—”

“*Hein?*” he deflected the sharp gaze which he had leveled down the darkened street. “What is it that you say — *mordieu*, but you have right, Friend Trowbridge! We must see to her — *hola, taxi, à moi, tout vite!*” he waved imperatively at the rattletrap cab that providentially emerged from the tree-arched tunnel of the street.

“Sorry, gents,” the driver slowed but did not halt his vehicle, “I’m off duty an’ got just enough gas to git back to the garage—”

“*Pardieu*, then you must reassume the duty right away, at once, immediately!” de Grandin broke in. “We are physicians and this lady has been injured. We must convey her to the surgery for treatment, and I have five — *non*, three — dollars to offer as an incentive—”

“I heard you the first time, chief,” the cabby interrupted. “For five dollars it’s a deal. Hop in. Where to?”

Our impromptu patient had not regained consciousness when we reached my house, and while de Grandin concluded fiscal arrangements with the chauffeur I carried her up the front steps and into the surgery. She could not have weighed a hundred pounds, for she was slightly, almost boyishly built, and the impression of boyishness was heightened by the way in which her flaxen blond hair was cropped closely at back and sides and combed straight back from her forehead in short soft waves. Her costume added little to her weight. It was a dress of black watered silk consisting of a sleeveless blouse cut at the neckline in the Madame Chiang manner and a pleated skirt that barely reached her knees. She wore no hat, but semi-elbow length gloves of black suede fabric were on her hands and her slim, small, unstockinged feet were shod with black suede sandals criss-crossed with straps of gold. If she had had a handbag it had been lost or thrown away in her panic-stricken flight.

“Ah — so, let us see what is to be done,” de Grandin ordered as I laid my pretty burden on the examination table. Deftly he undid the row of tiny jet buttons that fastened the girl’s blouse at the shoulder, and with a series of quick, gentle tweaks and twitches drew the garment over her head. She wore neither slip nor bandeau, only the briefest of sheer black-crêpe step-ins; we had only to turn her on her side to inspect her injury.

This was not very extensive, being an incised wound some four inches long beginning just beneath the right scapula and slanting toward the vertebral aponeurosis at an angle of about sixty degrees. At its commencement it was quite deep, striking through the derma to subcutaneous tissue, but at termination it trailed off to a mere superficial skin wound. It was bleeding freely, and its clean-cut edges gaped widely owing to the elasticity of the skin and the retraction of the fibrous tissue. “H’m,” de Grandin murmured as he bent above the wound. “From the cleanness of its lips this cut was

evidently inflicted by a razor or a knife that had been honed to razor-sharpness. Do not you agree, Friend Trowbridge?"

I looked across his shoulder and nodded.

"*Précisément*. And from the way it slants and from the fact that it is so much deeper at commencement than at termination, one may assume the miscreant who inflicted it stole up behind her, hoping to take her by surprise, but struck a split-second too late. The blow was probably directed with a slicing motion at her neck, but she was already in flight when her assailant struck. *Tiens*, as things are, she had luck with her, this little pretty poor one. A little deeper and the weapon might have struck into the rhomboideus, a little to the right, it might have sliced an artery. As it is—" He wiped the welling blood away, sponged the wound and surrounding epidermis with alcohol and pinched the gaping lips of the incision together in perfect apposition, then laid a pad of gauze on the closed wound and secured it with a length of adhesive plaster. "*Voilà*," he looked up with an elfin grin. "She are almost good like new now I damn think, Friend Trowbridge. Her gown is still too wet with blood for wearing, but—" he paused a moment, eyes narrowed in thought, then: "Excuse me one small, little second, if you please," he begged and rushed from the surgery.

I could hear him rummaging about upstairs, and wondered what amazing notion might have taken possession of his active, unpredictable French brain, but before I had a chance to call to him he came back with a pleased smile on his lips and a Turkish towel from the linen closet draped across his arm. "Regard me, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "See what a fellow of infinite resource I am." He wrapped the soft, tufted fabric about the girl's slim torso, covering her from armpits to knees, and fastened the loose end of the towel with a pair of safety pins. "*Morbleu*, I think perhaps a brilliant *couturier* was lost when I decided to become a physician," he announced as he surveyed his handiwork. "Does she not look *très chic* in my creation? By damn it, I shall say she does!"

"Humph," I admitted, "she's adequately covered, if that's any satisfaction to you."

"I had expected more enthusiastic praise," he told me as he drew the corners of his mouth down, "but — *que voulez-vous?* — the dress-designer like the prophet must expect to be unhonored in his own country. Yes." He nodded gloomily and lifted the girl from the table to an easy chair, taking care to turn her so her weight would not impinge upon her injured shoulder.

He passed a bottle of ammonium carbonate beneath her nostrils, and as the pungent fumes made her nose wrinkle in the beginnings of a sneeze and her pale lids fluttered faintly: "So, *Mademoiselle*, you are all better now? But certainly.

Drink this, if you will be so kind." He held a glass of brandy to her lips. "Ah, that is good, *n'est-ce-pas? Morbleu*, I think it is so good that I shall have a small dose of the same!

"And now," with small fists on his hips and arms akimbo he took his stand before her, "will you have the kindness to tell us all about it?"

She cowered back in the chair and we could see a pulse flutter in her throat. Her eyes were almost blank, but fear stared from them like a death's head leering from a window. "Who are — where am I?" she begged piteously. "Where is it? Did you see it?" As her fingers twisted and untwisted themselves in near-hysteria, then came in contact with the towel swathed round her. They seemed to feel it unbelievably, as if they had an intelligence separate from the rest of her. Then she looked down, gave a startled, gasping cry and leaped from the chair. "Where am I?" she demanded. "What has happened to me? Why am I dressed in — in this?"

De Grandin pressed her gently back in the chair. "One question and one answer at a time, if you please, *Mademoiselle*. You are in the house of Dr. Samuel Trowbridge. This is he," he bowed in my direction, "and I am Dr. Jules de Grandin. You have been injured, though not seriously, and that is why you were brought here when you swooned in the street. The garment you are wearing is fashioned from a bath towel. I am responsible for it, and thought it quite *chic*, though neither you nor Dr. Trowbridge seem to fancy it, which is a great pity and leaves your taste in dress open to question. You have it on because your gown was disfigured when you were hurt; also it is a little soiled at present. That can and will be remedied shortly.

"Now," his little round blue eyes twinkled and he laughed reassuringly, "I have answered your questions. Will not you be so kind as to answer ours?"

Some of the fear went out of her eyes and she managed to contrive a little smile. People usually smiled back at de Grandin. "I guess I've been seeing too many horror films," she confessed. "I saw the operating table and the bandages and instruments, and smelled the medicines, then when I realized I was dressed in this my first thought was that I'd been kidnaped and—"

De Grandin's shout of laughter drowned her half-ashamed confession. "*Mordieu*, you thought that you were in the house of Monsieur Dracula J. Frankenstein, and that the evil, mad surgeons were about to make a guinea-pig or white rabbit of you, *n'est-ce-pas, Mademoiselle?* I assure you that fear is quite groundless. Dr. Trowbridge is an eminently respectable practitioner, and while I have been accused of many things, human vivisection is not one of them.

"Some three-quarters of an hour ago Dr. Trowbridge and I stood at Colfax and Dorondo Streets, waiting for an

omnibus. We observed you coming toward us, running like Atalanta racing from the suitors, and obviously very much afraid. When you reached us you cried out for us to run also, then swooned in Dr. Trowbridge's arms. It was then we saw that you had been injured. *Alors*, we did the proper thing. We bundled you into a taxi and brought you here for treatment. You know why we removed your dress, and why you wear my own so smart creation.

"That puts you in possession of the facts, *Mademoiselle*. It is for you to tell us what transpired before we met. You may speak freely, for we are physicians, and anything you say will be held in strict confidence. Also, if we can, we shall be glad to help you."

She gave him a small grateful smile. "I think you've done a lot to help me already, sir. I am Edina Laurace and I live with my aunt, Mrs. Dorothy Van Artsdalen at 1840 Pennington Parkway. This afternoon I called on some friends living in Clinton Avenue, and walked through Crescent Terrace to Dorondo Street to take a number four bus. I was almost through the Terrace when—" she stopped, and we could see the flutter of a little blue vein at the base of her throat as her heart action quickened — "when I heard someone running."

"*Parbleu*, another runner?" murmured Jules de Grandin. Aloud he ordered: "Proceed, if you please, *Mademoiselle*."

"Naturally, I looked around. It was getting dark, and I was all alone—"

"One understands. And then what was it that you saw?"

"A man was running toward me. Not exactly toward me, but in the same direction I was going. He was a poor-looking man; that is, his clothes were out of press and seemed too loose for him, and his shoes scuffed on the pavement as he ran — you know how a bum's shoes sound — as if they were about two sizes too large? He seemed almost out of breath and scared of something, for every few steps he'd glance back across his shoulder. Then I saw what he was running from, and started to run, too. It was—" her hands went up to her eyes, as if to shut some frightful vision out, and she trembled as if a sudden draft of cold air had blown on her — "it was a mummy!"

"A *what*?" I demanded.

"*Comment*?" Jules de Grandin almost barked.

"All right," she answered as a faint flush stained her pale cheeks, "tell me I'm crazy. I still say it was a mummy; one of those things you see in museums, you know. It was tall, almost six feet, and bone-thin. As far as I could make out it was about the color of a tan shoe and seemed to be entirely unclothed. It ran in a peculiar sort of way, not like a man, but sort o' jerkily, like a marionette moved by unseen wires; but it ran fast. The man behind me ran with all his might, but it kept gaining on him without seeming to exert itself at all."

Her recitation seemed to recall her terror, for her breathing quickened as she spoke and she paused to swallow every few words. "At first I thought the mummy had a cane in its hand, but as it came neater I saw it was a stick about two — maybe three — feet long, tipped with a long, flat spearhead made of gold, or perhaps copper.

"You know how it is when you're frightened that way. You run for all you're worth, yet somehow you have to keep looking back. That's the way I was. I'd run a little way, then feel I *had* to look back. Maybe I couldn't quite convince myself it was a mummy. It was, all right, and it was gaining steadily on the man behind me.

"Just as I reached Dorondo Street I heard an awful cry. Not exactly a scream, and not quite a shout, but a sort of combination of the two, like '*ow-o-o-oh!*' and I looked back just in time to see the mummy slash the man with its spear. It didn't stab him. It chopped him with the edge of its weapon. That's when he yelled." She paused a moment and let her breath out in a long, quivering sigh. "He didn't fall; not right away. He sort o' staggered, stumbling over his own feet, or tripping over something that wasn't there, then reeled forward a few steps, with his arms spread out as if he reached for something to break his fall. Then he went down upon his face and lay there on the sidewalk perfectly still, with his arm and legs spread out like an X."

"And then?" de Grandin prompted softly as she paused again.

"Then the thing stood over him and began sticking him with its spear. It didn't move fast nor seem in any hurry; it just stood over him and stuck the spear into him again and again, like — like a woman testing a cake with a broom-straw, if that means anything to you."

De Grandin nodded grimly. "It does, indeed, *Mademoiselle*. And then?"

"Then I *did* start to run, and presently I saw it coming after me. I kept looking back, like I told you, and for a while I didn't see it; then all at once there it was, moving jerkily, and sort o' weaving back and forth across the sidewalk, almost as if it weren't quite sure which way I'd gone. That gave me an idea. I ran until I came to a dark spot in the road, the point between two street lamps where the light was faintest, and rushed across the street, running on tiptoes. Then I ran quietly as I could down the far side of the road, keeping to the shadows as much as possible. For a time I thought I'd shaken it, for when it came to where I'd crossed the street it seemed to pause and look about. Then it seemed to realize what I'd done and came across to my side. Three times I crossed the street, and each time I gained a few yards on it; but I was getting out of breath and knew I couldn't keep the race up much longer.

“Then I had another idea. From the way the creature ran it seemed to me it must be blind, or almost so, and followed me by sound more than sight. So next time I crossed the street instead of running I hid behind a big tree. Sure enough, when the thing came over it seemed at fault, and stood there, less than ten feet from me, turning round and round, pointing its spear first one way, then another, like a blind man feeling with his cane for some familiar object.

“It might have missed me altogether if I could have stayed stock-still, but when I got a close-up look at it — it was so terrible I couldn’t keep a gasp of terror back. That did it. In an instant it was after me again, and I was dodging, round and round the tree.

“You can’t imagine how horrible it was. The thing was blind, all right. Once I got a good look at its face — its lips were like tanned leather and I could see the jagged line of its teeth where the dried-up mouth had come a little open, and both its eyes were tightly shut. But blind or not it could hear me, and it was like a dreadful game of blind man’s buff, I dodging back to keep the tree between us, then crouching for a sprint to the next tree and doubling and turning around that, and all the time that dreadful thing following, sometimes thrusting at me with its spear, sometimes chopping at me with it, but never hurrying. If it had rushed or sprung or jumped at me it wouldn’t have seemed half so terrifying. But it didn’t. It just kept after me, seeming to know that sooner or later it would find me.

“I’d managed to get back my breath while we were dodging back and forth around the trees, and finally I made another break for freedom. That gave me a short respite, for when I started running this time I kept on the parking, and my feet made no noise on the short grass, but before I’d run a hundred feet I trod on a dried, curled-up leaf. It didn’t make much noise, just the faintest crackling, but that was enough to betray me, and in another second the mummy was after me. D’ye remember that awful story in Grimms’ *Fairy Tales* where the prince is captured by a giant, and manages to blind him, but finds that the charmed ring upon his finger forces him to keep calling, ‘Here am I,’ each time he eludes his pursuer? That’s the way it was with me. The thing that followed me was blind, but any slightest sound was all it needed for direction, and no matter how still I tried to be, I couldn’t help making some small noise to betray my position.

“Twice more I halted to play blind man’s buff with it around the streetside trees, and the last time it slashed me with its spear. I felt the cut like a switch on my shoulder, it didn’t hurt so much as smart, but in a moment I could feel the blood run down my back and knew that I’d been wounded. Then I lost my head completely and rushed straight down the sidewalk, running for my life. That would

have been the end of me had it not been for the cat.”

“The cat, *Mademoiselle*?” de Grandin asked.

“Yes, sir. It — the mummy — was about a hundred and fifty feet behind me, and gaining every step, when a big black cat came across the sidewalk. I don’t know where it came from, but I hope that it has cream for dinner and two nice, fat mice for dessert every day for the rest of its life. You know how cats act sometimes when they see something coming at them — how they sort o’ crouch down and stay still, as if they hope whatever it is that threatens ’em won’t see ’em if they don’t move? That’s the way this cat did — at first. But when the mummy was almost on it, it jumped up and arched its back, puffed out its tail and made every hair along its spine stand straight up. Then it let out a miaul almost loud enough to wake the dead.

“That stopped the mummy in its tracks. You know how deceptive a caterwaul can be — how it rises and falls like a banshee’s howl, and seems to come from half a dozen places at once? I think that’s what must have happened. The mummy was attuned to catch the slightest sound vibration, like a delicate radio instrument, but it couldn’t seem to locate the exact place whence the cat’s miaul came.

“I glanced back once, and if it hadn’t been so horrible it would have seemed ludicrously funny, that murderous blind mummy standing there, swaying back and forth as if the unseen strings that moved it had suddenly come loose, turning its leathery, unseeing face this way and that, and that big black tomcat standing stiff-legged in its path, its back arched up, its tail fluffed out, and its eyes blazing like two little spots of green fire. They might have stayed that way for two minutes, maybe more. I didn’t stop to watch, but kept on running for dear life. The last I saw of them the puss was circling round the mummy, walking slowly and stiff-kneed, the way cats do before they close for a fight, never taking its eyes off the thing, and growling those deep belly-growls that angry cats give. I think the mummy slashed at it with its spear, but I can’t be sure of that. I know the cat did not give a scream as it almost certainly would have if it had been struck. Then I saw you and Dr. Trowbridge standing by the bus stop, and” she spread her slim hands in a gesture of finality — “here we are.”

“We are, indeed,” de Grandin conceded with a smile, “but we cannot remain so. It grows late and *Tante* Dorothée will worry. Come, we will take you to her and tomorrow you may come to have your wound dressed, or if you prefer you may go to your own family physician.” He took his chin between his thumb and forefinger and looked thoughtfully at her. I fear your dress is not yet quite dry, *Mademoiselle*, and from my own experience I know blood-wet garments are most uncomfortable. We shall ride in Dr. Trowbridge’s *moteur* — do you greatly mind retaining the garment I

devised for you, wearing one of my topcoats above it? No one would notice—”

“Why, of course, sir,” the girl smiled up into his eyes. “This is really quite a scrumptious dress; I’m sorry I said horrid things about it.”

“*Tiens*, the compliment is much appreciated, *Mademoiselle*, even though it is a bit late,” he returned with a bow. “Now, if we are all ready....” He stood aside to let her precede us to the hall.

“Perhaps it would be best if you did not tell *Tante* Dorothée all your adventure,” he advised as I drew up before the modest but attractive little house where she lived with her aunt. “She might not understand—”

“You mean she’d never believe me!” the girl broke in with what was more than the suggestion of a giggle. “I don’t think I’d believe a person who told me such a story.” Her air of gaiety dropped from her and her laughing eyes became serious. “I know it really couldn’t have happened,” she admitted. “Mummies just don’t run around the streets killing people like that — but all the same, it’s so!”

“*Tu, parles, ma petite*,” de Grandin chuckled. “When you have grown as old as I, which will not be for many years, you’ll know as I do that most of the impossible things are quite true. Yes, I say it.”

“You mean you actually believe that cock and bull yarn she told us,” I demanded as we drove home.

“But certainly.”

“But it’s so utterly fantastic. Mummies, as she herself admitted, don’t run about the streets and kill people—”

“Mummies ordinarily do not run about the streets at all,” he corrected. “Nevertheless, I believe her.”

“Humph. Next thing, I suppose, you’ll be calling Costello in on the case.”

“If I am not much more mistaken than I think the good Costello will not need my summons,” he returned as we reached my driveway. “Is not that he at our front door?”

“*Hola, mon lieutenant*,” he called as he leaped from the car. “What fortunate breeze has wafted you hither?”

“Good evenin’ gentlemen,” Detective-Lieutenant Jeremiah Costello answered as he stepped back from the door. “’Tis luck I’m in, fer Mrs. McGinnis wuz just afther tellin’ me as how ye’d driv away, wid yer dinner practic’ly on th’ table, an’ hadn’t said a word about when ye’d come back.”

“But now that we are so well met, you will have dinner with us?” asked the Frenchman.

“Thank ye kindly, sor. I’ve had me supper, an’ I’m on duty—”

“*Ah bah*,” de Grandin interrupted, “I fear you are deteriorating. Since when have you not been competent to eat two dinners, then smack your lips and look about for

more? But even if you have no appetite, you will at least lend us your company and share a cup of coffee, a liqueur and a cigar?”

“Why, yes, sor, I’ll be glad o’ that,” Costello returned. “An’ would ye be afther listenin’ to me tale o’ woe th’ while?”

“Assuredly, *mon vieux*. Your shop-talk is invariably interesting.”

“Well, sors,” Costello told us as he drained his demi-tasse and took a sip from the glass of old whiskey de Grandin had poured for him, “it’s like this way: I wuz about to lave the office an’ call it a day, fer this bein’ a lootenant ain’t as easy as it wuz when I wuz sergent, d’ye understand, an’ I’d been hard at it since eight o’clock this mornin’, when all to onct me tellyphone starts ringin’ like a buzz-saw cuttin’ through a nail, an’ Dogherty o’ th’ hommieside squad’s on th’ other end. He an’ Schmelz, as fine a lad as never ate a bite o’ bacon wid his breakfast eggs an’ fasted all day on Yom Kippur, had been called to take a look into th’ killin’ o’ Louis Westbrook, also known as Looie th’ Louse. He wuz a harmless sort o’ bum, th’ Louse, never doin’ much agin th’ law except occasionally gettin’ drunk an’ maybe just a mite disorderly, an’ actin’ as a stooly fer th’ boys sometimes—”

“A stooly?” echoed de Grandin. “And what is that, if you please?”

“Sure, sor, ye know. A stool pigeon.”

“Ah, yes, one comprehends. A *dénonciateur*, we use them in the *Sûreté*, also.”

“Yes, sor. Just so. Well, as I wuz sayin’, Looie’d been found dead as a mackerel in Crescent Terrace, an’—”

“*Morbleu*, do you say it? In Crescent Terrace?”

“That same, sor. An’, like I says—”

“One moment, if you please. He was dead by a wound inflicted from the rear, possibly in the head, but more likely in the neck, and on his body were numerous deep punctured wounds—”

“Howly Mither! He wuz all o’ that, sor. How’d ye guess it?”

“I did not guess, my friend. I knew. Proceed with your description of the homicide.”

“Well, sor, like ye said, Looie had been cut down from th’ rear, swiped acrost th’ neck wid a sword or sumpin like that. His spinal column wuz hacked through just about here—” he turned his head and held his finger to his neck above the second cervical vertebra. “I’ve seen men kilt just so when I was in th’ Fillypines. They’re willin’ workers wid th’ bolo, those Fillypino johnnies, as many a bloody Jap can certify. An’ also like ye said, sor, he wuz punctured full o’ deep, wide wounds all up his back an’ down his legs. Like a big, wide-bladed knife or sumpin’ had been pushed into him.

“Ever see th’ victim o’ one o’ them Comorra torture-

killin's — th' *Sfregio* or Death o' th' Seventy Cuts, as they calls it? Well, th' way this pore Joe had been mangled reminded me o' them, on'y—"

"A moment, if you please," de Grandin interrupted. "This Joseph of whom you speak? We were discussing the unhappy demise of Monsieur Louis the Louse; now you introduce a new victim—"

"Arrah, Dr. de Grandin, sor, be aisy," Costello cut in, halfway between annoyance and laughter, "when I say Joe I mean Looie—"

"*Ha?* It is that they are identical?"

"Yes, sor. Ye might say so."

De Grandin glanced at me with quizzically raised brows then lifted narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug a Frenchman gives when he wants to indicate complete dissociation with the matter. "Say on, my friend," he ordered in a weary voice. "Tell us more of this Monsieur Joseph-Louis and his so tragic dissolution."

"Well, sor, like I wuz tellin' ye, Looie'd done a bit o' stoolin' now an' then, but it wuz mostly small-fry, unimportant stuff puttin' th' finger on dips an' dope-peddlers, or tippin' th' department off when a pawnbroker acted as a fence; sometimes slippin' us th' office when a loft burglary wuz cookin', an' th' like o' that. We hadn't heard that he'd been mixed up with any of these now black-handers, so when he turns up dead an' all butchered like I said, we're kind o' wondering who kilt him, an' why."

"I have the answer to one part of your question, *mon lieutenant*," de Grandin informed him with a grave nod.

"An' have ye, now, sor? That's just grand. Would ye be afther tellin' me who done it, just for old times' sake? That is, if it's not a military secret."

"*Mais non. Point du tout.* He was killed by a mummy."

"A — glory be to God!" Costello drained his glass of whiskey at a gulp. "Th' man says he wuz kilt be a mummy! Sure, Dr. de Grandin, sor, ye wuz always a great one for kiddin', but this is business."

De Grandin's little round blue eyes were hard and cold as ice as they looked into Costello's. "I am entirely serious, my friend. I who speak to you say he was slain by a mummy."

"O.K., sor. If ye say so, I s'pose it's so. I've never known ye to give me a bum steer, but sayin' a gink's been kilt be a mummy is pretty close to tryin' to tell me that pigs fly an' tomcats sing grand op'ry. Now, th' question is, 'How're we gonna find this murderin' mummy?' Do they kape him in a museum, or does he run loose in th' streets?"

"*Le bon Dieu* only knows," the little Frenchman answered with a shrug, "but perhaps we can narrow down our search. Tomorrow I shall go to the morgue and inspect the corpse of Monsieur Joseph-Louis. Meantime there is something you can do to aid the search. This Crescent Terrace, as I recall it,

is a little street. Secure the names of every householder and compile as complete a *dossier* on each as is possible: what his habits are, whence he comes, how long he has lived there — everything. The smallest little detail is important. There are no unimportant things in such a case as this. You comprehend?"

"I do, sor."

"*Très bon.*" He cast a speculative look at the decanter of whiskey. "There is at least three-quarters of a quart left in the bottle, my friends. Let us do a little serious drinking."

The street lights were coming on and the afterglow was faint in the west under the first cold stars when we gathered in my study for a council of war next evening. De Grandin tapped a sheaf of neatly piled pages lying on the table before him. This Monsieur Grafton Loftus is our most likely suspect," he announced. "This is the *dossier* compiled on him by your department, Friend Costello:

No. 18 Crescent Terrace — Loftus, Grafton. Unmarried, about fifty. Born in England. Came to this country from London four years ago. No occupation, maintains fair account in the Clifton Trust Co., periodically replenished by foreign bank drafts. Pays all bills promptly. Goes out very little, has no intercourse with neighbors. Few visitors. Nothing known of personal habits, hobbies, etc. No pets. Neighbors on each side speak of having heard low, peculiar whistle, no tune, coming from his home at night, sometimes continuing for half hour at a time, have also noted strong smell like that of Chinese incense coming from his house at times.

"Perhaps I am a trifle dull," I said sarcastically, "but I fail to see where anything in that *dossier* gives ground for suspicion. We haven't any personal description of Mr. Loftus. Does he look like a mummy?"

"I would not say so," de Grandin replied. "I took occasion to call on him this afternoon, pretending to ask direction to the house of an entirely mythical Monsieur John Garfield. Monsieur Loftus came to the door — after I had rung his doorbell unremittingly for half an hour — and seemed considerably annoyed. He is a big man, most decidedly stout, bald-headed, with a red face and fat cheeks threatening to engulf his small eyes. His lips are very red, his mouth is small, and pouts like that of a petulant child. Also, he was distressingly uncivil when I asked most courteously for the non-existent Monsieur Garfield's address. I did not like his looks. I do not like him. No. Not at all."

"All the same, there's nothing in what you've told us to indicate he goes around disguised as a mummy and murdering inoffensive bums," I persisted.

"*Ah bah!*" he answered. "You vex me, Friend Trowbridge. Attend me, if you please. When I had seen this Monsieur

Loftus I called New Scotland Yard on Transatlantic telephone, and talked with my friend Inspector Grayson, formerly of the British Intelligence. He told me much I wished to know. By example: Monsieur Loftus served with the British troops in Egypt and Mesopotamia during the first World War. While there he forgathered with decidedly unsavory characters, and was three times court-martialed for being absent without leave when native pow-wows were in progress. Of no importance, you say? Very, well, to continue: When he returned to England he became identified with several malodorous secret societies. The first of these was the Gorgons, ostensibly a nature-worship cult, but actually concerned with diabolism. He appears to have grown tired of these and joined the cult of Lokapala, which comprised as sinister a company of blackguards as could be found anywhere. They were known to have sacrificed animals with revolting cruelties, and were suspected of having indulged in human sacrifice at least on one occasion. The police broke this gang up and Loftus, with several others, was sentenced to a short term in the workhouse.

“We next hear of him as a member of the gang known as *Los Leopardos*, the Human Leopards, whose headquarters in the Shooter’s Hill locality of Blackheath was raided by the police in 1938. Again the estimable Monsieur Loftus served a short term in jail. He was also implicated in the deviltries of Rowely Thorne, whose nemesis our mutual friend John Thunstone is. Now,” he swept us with a cold, challenging stare, “you will admit the company he kept was something less than desirable.”

“That may be so,” I conceded, “but all the same—”

“But all the same he was a member of the Esoteric Society of the Resurrection. You comprehend?”

“I can’t say that I do. Was that society one of those half-baked religious organizations?”

“Neither half-baked nor religious, in the true sense of the term, my friend. They were drawn from every stratum of society, from every country, every race. Scientists some of them were, men and women who had perverted their knowledge to base ends. Others were true mystics, Indian, Egyptian, Syrian, Druse, Chinese, English, French, Italian, even some Americans. They brought together the wisdom — all the secret, buried knowledge — of the East, and mated — not married — it to the science of the West. The offspring was a dreadful, illegitimate monster. Here, let me read you a transcription of an eyewitness’ account of a convocation of the society:

The members of the cult, all robed in flowing white draperies, gathered in the courtyard of the society’s headquarters around the replica of an Egyptian tomb with heavy doors like those of an ice box held fast with triple

locks and bolts of solid silver. After a brief ceremony of worship four members of the society wearing black and purple draperies came out of the house, led by the Grand Hierophant robed in red vestments. They halted before the tomb and at a sign from the High Priest all members of the congregation stopped their ears with their fingers while the Hierophant and his acolytes mumbled the secret formula while the silver locks and bolts were being unfastened. Then the High Priest cried the Secret Word of Power while his assistants threw incense on the brazier burning before the tomb.

In a moment they emerged bearing a black-painted bier or stretcher on which lay the unwrapped body of an Egyptian mummy. Three times they bore the embalmed corpse around the courtyard that every member of the congregation might look on it and know that it was dead. Then they went back into the tomb.

More incense was burned while everybody knelt on the bare earth and stared fixedly at the entrance of the tomb. Minutes passed, then at the gaping doorway of the tomb appeared the mummy, standing upright and moving slowly and mechanically, like a marionette moved by invisible wires. In its right hand it held a short spear tipped with the tempered copper that only the ancient Egyptians knew how to make.

The Chief Hierophant walked before the mummy, blowing softly on a silver whistle each few steps, and the revived lich seemed to bear and follow the sound of the whistle. Three times the mummy followed the High Priest in a circuit of the courtyard, then priest and living corpse went back into the tomb. The priest came out in a few moments and quickly fastened the silver locks of the tomb door. He was perspiring profusely, although the night was cold.

The strictest silence was enjoined during the entire ceremony, and instant dismissal from the society was the penalty decreed for any member making even the slightest sound while the mummy was out of the tomb. Once, it was said, a woman member became hysterical when the mummy emerged from the tumulus, and burst into a fit of weeping. The lich leaped on her in an instant and struck her down with its spear, then hacked her body to ribbons as she lay writhing on the earth. It was only by the shrilling of the High Hierophant’s whistle that the thing was finally persuaded to give over its bloody work and lured back to the tomb.

“What do you think from that, *hein?*” he demanded as he finished reading.

“It sounds like the ravings of a hashish-eater, or the recollection of a most unpleasant dream,” I volunteered.

There was no hint of impatience in the smile he turned on me. “I agree, Friend Trowbridge. It are assuredly *extra ordinem* — outside things’ usual and accepted order — as the lawyers say; but most of us make the mistake of drawing the line of the possible too close. When I read this transcription over the ’phone to our friend Monsieur Manly Wade Wellman this afternoon he agreed it was entirely

possible for such things to be.

“Now,” once more he swept us with his fixed, unwinking cat-stare, “me, I have evolved an hypothesis: This so odious Loftus, who had been a member of this altogether detestable society, has made use of opportunity to cheat. While others stopped their ears as the Hierophant pronounced the secret invocation — the Word of Power as the witness to the ceremony calls it — he listened and became familiar with it. He anticipated making similar experiments, I have no doubt, but the onset of the war and the bombings of London interfered most seriously with his plans. *Alors*, he came to this country, took up residence in the quietly respectable Crescent Terrace, and proceeded with his so unholy trials. That would account for the incense his neighbors smelled at night, also for the whistlings they heard. Do not you agree?”

“I don’t agree,” I answered, “but if we grant your premises I see the logic of your conclusions.”

“*Triomphe!*” he exclaimed with a grin. “At last good skeptical Friend Trowbridge agrees with me, even though he qualifies his agreement. We make the progress.

“And now, my friends,” he turned from me to Costello, Dogherty and Schmelz, “if we are ready, let us go. The darkness comes and with it — *eh bien*, who shall say what will eventuate?”

Crescent Terrace was a short semilunar by way connecting Clinton Avenue and Dorondo Street built up on the west side with neat houses. There were only twenty of them in the block, and their numbers ran consecutively, since a small park faced the east curb of the street.

We drew up at the far side of the park and walked across its neatly clipped lawns between beds of coleus and scarlet sage. At the sidewalk we halted and scanned the blank-faced houses opposite. “The second building from the end is Number 18,” Jules de Grandin whispered. “Do you take station behind yonder clump of shrubs, Friend Costello, and Sergeants Dogherty and Schmelz will form an ambush just behind that hedge of hemlock. Friend Trowbridge, it is best that you remain with the Lieutenant, so that we shall have two parties of two each for reserves.”

“An’ where will you be, sor?” Costello asked.

“Me, I shall be the lure, the bait, the stalking-horse. I shall parade as innocently as an unborn lamb before his lair.”

“But we can’t let ye take th’ risk all by yerself, sor,” Costello objected, only to be cut short by de Grandin’s sharp:

“*Zut!* You will do exactly as I say, *mon ami*. Me, I have worked this strategy out mathematically and know what I am doing. Also, I was not born yesterday, or even day before. *A bientôt, mes amis.*” He slipped into the shadows silently as a bather letting himself down into dark water. In a moment

we saw him emerge from the far side of the park into Clinton Avenue, turn left and enter Crescent Terrace. Somehow, as he strode along the footway with an air of elaborate unconcern, his silver-headed ebony stick tucked beneath his left elbow, he reminded me of a major strutting before a band, and heard him humming to himself as if he had not a care in the world.

He had almost traversed the three hundred yards of the short half-moon of the Terrace, walking slower and more slowly as he approached Dorondo Street. “Nothin’ doin’ yet,” breathed Dogherty. “I been lookin’ like a tomcat at a mouse-hole, an’ don’t see nothin’—”

“Zat so?” whispered Costello sharply. “If ye’d kape yer eyes on th’ street an’ not on Dr. de Grandin, maybe ye’d see more than ye have. What’s that yonder in th’ doorway o’ Number 18, I dunno?”

Dogherty, Schmelz and I turned at his sharp question. We had, as he said, been watching Jules de Grandin, not the street behind him. Now, as we shifted our glances, we saw something stirring in the shadow that obscured the doorway of Number 18. At first it seemed to be no more than a chance ray of light beamed into the vestibule by the shifting of a tree-bough between house and street lamp, but as we kept our eyes glued to it we saw that it was a form — a tall, attenuated, skeletally-thin form moving stealthily in the shadow.

Slowly the thing emerged from the gloom of the doorway, and despite the warning I had had, I felt a prickling sensation at the back of my neck just above my collar, and a feeling as of sudden chill ran through my forearms. It was tall, as we had been told, fully six feet from its bare-boned feet to hairless, parchment-covered skull, and the articulation of its skeleton could be seen plainly through the leathery skin that clung to the gaunt, staring bones. The nose was large, high-bridged and haughty, like the beak of a falcon or eagle, and the chin was prominent beneath the sheath of skin that stretched across it. The eyes were closed and showed only as twin depressions in the skull-like countenance, but the mummified lips had retracted to show a double line of teeth in a mirthless grin. Its movements were irregular and stiff, like the movements of some monstrous mechanical doll or, as Edina Laurace had expressed it, like a marionette worked by unseen wires. But once it had emerged from the doorway it moved with shocking quickness. Jerkily, and with exaggeratedly high knee-action, it crossed the lawn, came to the sidewalk, turned on its parchment-soled feet as if on a pivot, and started after de Grandin.

The luckless bum it had pursued the night before had run from it. De Grandin waited till the scraping of its fleshless feet against the flagstones was almost at his elbow, then

wheeled to face it, little round blue eyes ablaze, small teeth showing in a grin as mirthless and menacing as the mummy's own. "*Sa-ha, Monsieur le Cadavre,*" he spoke almost pleasantly, "it seems we meet to try conclusions, *hein?* Monsieur Joe-Louis the Louse you killed, but me you shall not kill. Oh, no!"

Glinting like a flash of silver lightning in the street lamp's glow the blade of his sword cane ripped from its sheath, and he fell into guard position.

The mummy paid no more attention to his sword than if it had been a straw. It never faltered in its advance, but pressed upon him, broad-bladed spear raised like an axe. Down came the chopping spearhead, up went de Grandin's rapier, and for a moment steel and spear-shaft locked in an impasse. Then nimbly as an eel escaping from a gloved hand the Frenchman's weapon disengaged and he leaped back beyond the reach of the spear.

But the mummy came on relentlessly or, more exactly, insensately, with the utter lack of caution of an automaton. The rapier played lightning-like, weaving glittering patterns in the pale light of the street lamps; de Grandin danced as agilely as the shadow of a wind-blown leaf, avoiding heavy slash and devastating lunge, then closed in quickly as a winking eye, thrusting, stabbing, driving with a blade that seemed more quicksilver than steel. Once, twice, three times we saw his rapier pass clear through the lich, its point emerging four full inches from the leather-skinned back, but for all the effect his thrusts had, he might have been driving a pin into a pincushion.

The mummy could not have weighed much more than fifty pounds, and the little Frenchman's devastating thrusts drove it back on its heels like blows from a fist, rocking it from perpendicular until it leant at an angle of forty degrees to the earth, but it seemed endowed with devilish equilibrium and righted itself like a gyroscope each time he all but forced it off its balance.

"*Mais c'est l'enfantillage* — this is childishness!" we heard de Grandin pant as we closed in and sought a chance to seize his skeleton-like antagonist. "He who fights an imp of Satan as if he were human is a fool!"

"Stand back, my friends," he called to us as we approached, "this is my task, and I will finish it, by blue!" He dodged back from the chopping of the mummy's spear, fumbling in his pocket with his left hand, then once more drove in savagely, his rapier slipping past the weapon of his adversary to pierce clear through the bony body.

And as the sword hilt struck against the mummy's ribs and swayed it backward, he thrust forward with his left hand. There was a click, a spurt of sparks, and the blue point of a little cone of flame as the wick of his cigarette lighter kindled.

The tiny blue flame touched the mummy's wrinkled skin, a flickering tongue of yellow fire bloomed like a golden blossom from the point of contact, and in an instant the whole bony, bitumen-smear'd body of the lich was ablaze. If it had been composed of oil-soaked cotton waste it could not have caught fire more quickly or blazed more fiercely. The flame licked up its wasted torso, seized greedily upon emaciated limbs, burned scrawny neck and scraggy, parchment-covered head as if they had been tinder. The stiffness went from thigh- and shin-bones as they crumbled into ashes, and the blazing torso fell with a horrifying thud to the flagstones, flame crackling through its dryness.

"*Ha*, that was a trick you had not thought of, *Monsieur le Cadavre!*" De Grandin thrust the tip of his sword into the fast-crumbling remnants of the lich, stirring them as he might have stirred a coal-fire with a poker. "You were invulnerable to my steel, for you had no life in you to be let out with a sword, but fire you could not stand against. Oh, no, my old and very naughty one, you could kill poor Monsieur Joe-Louis the Louse, you could frighten poor Mademoiselle Edina, and wound her most sorely in the shoulder, but me you could not overcome, for Jules de Grandin is one devilish clever fellow and more than a match for all the mummies ever made in Egypt. Yes, certainly; of course!"

"And now, my friends," he turned to us, "there is unfinished business on the agendum. Let us have some pointed conversation with this so offensive Monsieur Loftus."

A brass knocker hung on the door of Number 18 Crescent Terrace, and de Grandin seized its ring and beat a thunderous tattoo. For some time there was no response, but finally a shuffling step came in the hall, and the door opened a few inches. The man who stared at us was big in every way, tall, broad and thick. His fat checks hung down like the dewlaps of a hound, his little mouth was red and full-lipped, like that of a spoiled child or wilful woman, and he stared at us through the thick lenses of rimless spectacles with that expression of vague but vast kindness which extreme short-sightedness often confers. "Yes?" he asked in a soft oleaginous voice.

"Monsieur Loftus, one assumes?" de Grandin countered.

The man looked at him searchingly. "Oh, so it's you?" he replied. "You're the man who came here today—"

"*Assurément, Monsieur*, and I have returned with these gentlemen of the police. We would speak with you if you can spare us a few minutes. If you find it inconvenient — *eh bien*, we shall speak with you nevertheless."

"With me? About what?"

"Oh, various matters. The matter of the so abominable mummy you endowed with pseudo-life by means of certain

charms you learned as a member of *la Société de la Résurrection Esotérique*, by example. Also about the death of Monsieur Joe-Louis the Louse which was occasioned yesternight by that same mummy, and of the attack on Mademoiselle Edina Laurace by your utterly detestable mummy-creature—”

The fat face looking at us underwent sudden transformation. The childish, peevish mouth began to twist convulsively and little streams of saliva dribbled from its corners. “You can’t do anything to me!” Loftus exclaimed. “I deny everything. I never had a mummy; never raised it from the dead; never sent it out to kill — who would believe you if you tried to bring me into court on such a charge? No judge would listen to you; no jury would convict me—”

“Silence, *cochon!*” cried de Grandin sharply. “Go up the stairs and pack a valise. We take you to the *Bureau de Police* all soon.”

The fat man stepped back, looking at him with an almost pitying smile. “If you wish to make a fool of yourself—”

“*Allez vous-en!*” the Frenchman pointed to the stairs. “Go pack your things, or we shall take you as you stand. Your execrable mummy we have burned to ashes. For you the fire of the electric chair awaits. Yes.”

As Loftus turned to mount the stairs the little Frenchman whispered to Costello: “He has right, by damn it! He could not be convicted in a modern court of law, especially in this country. We might as well charge him with riding on a broomstick or turning himself into a wolf.”

“Be dad, sor, ye’ve got sumpin there,” Costello admitted gloomily. “We seen th’ whole thing wid our own ten eyes; we seen ye fight wid it an’ finally make a bonfire out o’ it, but if we tried to tell it to a judge he’d have all five o’ us in th’ bughouse quicker’n ye could say ‘Scat!’ so he would.”

“*Précisément*. For that reason I ask that you will go out on the porch and await me. I have a plan.”

“I don’t see how ye’re goin’ to work it, sor—”

“It is not necessary that you see, my friend. Indeed, it is far better that you do not. Be swift and do as I say. In a moment he will be among us; then it will be too late.”

We filed out the door and waited on the little roofless porch before the house. “If this ain’t screwy,” Dogherty began but got no further, for a sharp cry, half of protest, half of terror, sounded from the house, and we rushed back into

the vestibule. The door had swung to behind us and the lock had snapped, so while Costello and Dogherty beat on it Schmelz and I raced to a window.

“We’re coming!” I called as Sergeant Schmelz broke the glass, thrust his hand through the opening and undid the lock. “We’re coming, de Grandin!”

Costello and Dogherty forced the front door as Schmelz and I broke through the window, and the four of us charged into the hall together. “Howly Mither!” exclaimed Costello. Loftus lay at the foot of the stairs as oddly and grotesquely lifeless as an over-stuffed scarecrow. His head was bent at an utterly impossible angle, and his arms and legs splayed out from his gross body, unhinged and nastily limp at knees and elbows.

De Grandin stood above him, and from the expression on his face I could not determine whether laughter fought with weeping or weeping with laughter. “*Je suis désolée* — I am completely desolated, my friends!” he told us. “Just as Monsieur Loftus was about to descend the stairs his foot slipped and he fell heavily. *Hélas*, I fear his neck is broken. Indeed, I am quite sure of it. He are completely dead. Is it not deplorable?”

Costello looked at Jules de Grandin, Jules de Grandin looked at Costello, and nothing moved in either of their faces. “Ye wouldn’t ’a’ helped him be any chanct, would ye, sor?” the Irishman asked at length.

“Helped him, *mon lieutenant*? Alas, no. He was below me when he fell. I could not possibly have caught him. It is unfortunate, disastrous, most regrettable — but that is how things are. Yes.”

“Yes, sor,” Costello answered in a toneless, noncommittal voice. “I had a hunch that’s how things would turn out.”

“Schmelz, Dogherty, why th’ divil are ye standin’ there gapin’ like ye’d never seen a dead corpse before, an’ ye both members o’ th’ hommyside squad? Git busy ye omadhauns. Tellyphone th’ coroner an’ tell him we’ve a customer for him.

“An’ now, sor, what’s next?” he asked de Grandin.

“*Eh bien*, my old and rare, what should men do when they have finished a good day’s work?”

“Sure, Dr. de Grandin, sor, ye’d never be advisin’ that we take a wee dhrap o’ th’ potheen, would ye?”

They exchanged a long, solemn wink.

Three in Chains

THE MURMUR of voices sounded from the drawing room as I let myself in wearily after a hard afternoon at the hospital. An interne might appreciate two appendectomies and an accouchement within the space of four hours, but an interne would need the practice and be thirty years my junior. I was dog-tired and in no mood to entertain visitors. As silently as I could I crept down the hall, but:

“Trowbridge, *mon vieux*,” de Grandin hailed as I passed the partly opened door on tiptoe, “*à moi, s’il vous plaît*. This is of interest, this.” Putting the best face I could upon the matter I joined him.

“May I present Monsieur and Madame Jaquay?” he asked, then with a bow to the callers, “*Monsieur, Madame, Dr. Trowbridge*.”

The young man who stepped forward with extended head had fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, a broad, low forehead and deep greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath straight brows. The woman seated on the sofa was in every way his feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap her short-cropped black hair, combed straight back from her forehead and waved in little ripples, lay against her small well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to seem almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry. The dead-white pallor of her skin was enhanced by her lack of rouge and the brilliant lipstick on her mouth, while the greenness of her hazel eyes was rendered more noticeable by skillfully applied eye shadow which gave her lids a faintly violet-green tinge and a luster like that of worn silk.

I shook hands with the young man and bowed to the girl — she was little more — then looked at them again in wonder. “Mr. and Mrs. Jaquay?” I asked. “You look more like—”

“Of course, we do,” the girl cut in. “We’re twins.”

“Twins—”

“Practically, sir. Our mothers were first cousins, and our fathers were first cousins, too, though not related to our mothers, except by marriage. We were born in the same hospital within less than half an hour of each other, and grew up in adjoining houses. We went to school, high school and college together, and were married the day after graduation.”

“Is it not entirely charming?” Jules de Grandin demanded.

I was becoming somewhat nettled. Tired as I was I had no wish to interview two-headed calves, Siamese twins, cousins married to each other and like as grains of sand on the

seashore or other natural phenomena. “Why, yes, of course,” I agreed, “but—”

“But there is more — *parbleu*, much more! — my old and rare,” the little Frenchman assured me. To the young man he ordered: “Tell him what you have told me, *mon jeune. Mordieu*, but you shall see his eyes pop like those of an astonished toad-frog!”

I dropped into a chair and tried my best to assume a look of polite interest as young Jaquay ran his hand over his sleek hair, cast a look of appeal at de Grandin and began hesitantly. “Georgine and I came here three months ago. Our Uncle, Yancy Molloy, made us sole beneficiaries of his will and Tofte House — perhaps you know the place? — was part of our inheritance. There were a few repairs to be made, though the place was in extraordinarily good condition for so old a structure, and we’ve been living there a little over two months. We’ve become very much attached to it; we’d hate to have to leave.”

“Then why not stay?” I answered somewhat ungraciously. “If the house is yours and you like it—”

“Because it’s haunted, sir.”

“What!”

He colored slightly, but went on: “It’s haunted. We didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary for the first few days we lived there, then gradually both Georgine and I began to — well, sir, to feel alien presences there. We’d be reading in the library or sitting at table, or just going about our affairs in the house when suddenly we’d have that strange, uncanny feeling you have when someone stares fixedly at the back of your neck.

“When, we’d turn suddenly as we always did at first, there’d be no one there of course, but that odd, eerie sensation of being constantly and covertly watched persisted. Instead of wearing off it grew stronger and stronger till we could hardly bear it.”

“U’m?” I commented, taking quick stock of our callers, noting their small stature, their delicacy of form and feature ... their double cousinship amounted almost to inbreeding, fertile ground for neuroses to sprout in. “I know that feeling of malaise you refer to, and the fact that you both experienced it seems diagnostic. You young folks of today burn the candle at both ends. There’s no need to hurry so; save a few sensations to be probed when you’re past forty. These visual, sensory and circulatory symptoms aren’t at all unusual. You’ll have to take it easier, get much more rest and a lot more sleep. If you can’t sleep I’ll give you some

trional—”

“But certainly,” de Grandin cut in. “And the trional will surely stop the sound of clanking chains and dismal, hollow groans.”

“What?” I turned on him. “Are you trying to tell me—”

“Not at all, by no means, my old one. But Monsieur Jaquay was endeavoring to do so when you interrupted with your prattle of the so odious trional. Say on, *Monsieur*,” he ordered our guest.

“We were getting pretty much on edge from this feeling of being watched so constantly,” young Jaquay continued, “but it wasn’t till last week we heard anything. We’ve made some pleasant friends in Harrisonville, sir, and been going out quite a bit. Last Saturday we’d been to New York on a party with Steve and Mollie Tenbroeck and Tom and Jennie Chaplin — dinner at the Wedgewood Room, to Broadway to see ‘Up in Central Park,’ then to Copacabana for supper and dancing. It must have been a little after three when we got home.

“Georgine had gone to bed, and I was in the bathroom washing my teeth when I heard her scream. I ran into the bedroom with the dentifrice suds still on my lips, and there she was, huddled in bed with the covers drawn up to her chin, pushing against the headboard as if she were trying to force herself through it. ‘Something touched me!’ she chattered. ‘It was like an ice-cold hand!’

“Well—” he smiled apologetically — “you know how it is, sir. ‘What?’ I asked.

“I don’t know. I was almost asleep when it put its clammy fingers on me!’

“We’d had several rounds of cocktails both dinner and supper, and Burgundy with dinner and champagne at supper, but both of us were cold sober — well, not more than pleasantly exhilarated — when we got home. ‘You’re nuts,’ I told her.

“And just as I spoke something went wrong with the lights. They didn’t go out all at once. That could have been explained by a blown-out fuse or a short circuit in the feed line. This was different. The lamp began to grow dim slowly, as if a rheostat were being turned off. It was possibly a half-minute before the room was dark, but when the darkness came it was terrific. It pressed down on us like a great blanket, then it seemed to smother us completely — more completely than a thousand black cloths. You know that wild, unreasoning feeling of panic you have when you choke at table? This was like it. I was not only blinded, but bound and gagged as well. I tried to call to Georgine. The best that I could do was utter a choked, strangling gasp. I tried to go to her; it was like trying to wade waist-deep through a strong tide. The blackness in that room seemed liquefied, almost

solidified.

“Then we heard it. At first it was no more than a whisper, like the sighing of a storm heard miles away, but getting louder, stronger, every second, like a storm that rushes toward you. Then the sigh changed to a moan and the moan became a howl, and the howl rose to a screech, and then rose to a piercing shriek that stabbed our eardrums like a needle. It rose and rose, spiraling upward till it seemed no human throat could stand the strain of it. Then it stopped suddenly with a deep, guttural gurgle, as if all that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into a drainpipe. The silence that followed was almost worse than the noise. It was as if we had suddenly been stricken stone-deaf.

“I could feel the perspiration trickling down my forehead and into my eyes, but the sweat seemed turned to ice as the silence was smashed by the clanking of a chain. At first it was no more than a light clinking sound, as if some tethered beast stirred in the darkness. But like the shriek it increased in volume till it seemed some chained monster were straining at his iron leash, striving with a strength past anything that man or beast knows to break loose from its fetters.”

Jaquay halted in his narrative to draw a handkerchief from his breast pocket and pass it over his brow. His wife was sobbing on the sofa, not violently, but with soft, sad little sounds, like those a frightened child might make.

“And then, *Monsieur*?” de Grandin prompted.

“Then the lights flashed on, not slowly, as they had gone off, but with a sudden blaze of blinding brightness, and there we were in our bedroom and everything was just the same. Georgine was cowering against the headboard of the bedstead, and I was standing at the bathroom door blinking like a fool in the sharp, dazzling light, with the dentifrice suds still on my lips and running down my chin to dribble on the floor.”

“And there have been more — manifestations?”

Georgine Jaquay answered in her charmingly modulated contralto. “Not so — so violent, sir. George and I were pretty badly shaken by what happened Saturday night, or more precisely Sunday morning, but we were both very tired and dropped off to sleep before we realized it. Next day was bright and sunny and we’d almost succeeded in convincing ourselves the experience of the night before was nothing but a sort of double nightmare when that sensation of being watched became stronger than ever. Only now it seemed somehow different.”

“*Hein?*”

“Yes, Sir. As if whoever — or whatever — watched us were gloating. Our uneasiness increased as the afternoon wore on; by bedtime we were in a pretty sorry state, but—”

“Ah, but you had the hardihood, the courage, *n’est-ce pas*,

Madame? You did not let it drive you from your home?"

"We did not," Gcorgine Jaquay's small mouth snapped shut like a miniature steel trap on the denial. "We hadn't any idea what it was that wanted to get rid of us, but we determined to face up to it."

"*Bravissimo!* And then?"

"I don't know how long we'd been sleeping. Perhaps an hour; perhaps only a few minutes, but suddenly I wakened and sat bolt-upright, completely conscious. I had a feeling of sharp apprehension, as if an invisible alarm-bell were sounding a warning in my brain. There was no moon, but a little light came through the bedroom windows, enough for me to distinguish the furniture. Everything seemed as usual, then all at once I noticed the door. It showed against the further wall in a dark oblong. Dark. Dark like a hole. Somehow the comparison made me breathe faster. I could feel the pulses racing in my wrists and throat. The door had been shut — and locked — when we went to bed. Now it swung open, and I had a feeling unseen eyes were staring at me from the hallway while mine sought helplessly to pierce the darkness. Then I heard it. Not loud this time, but a sort of whimpering little moan, such as a sick child might give, and then the feeble clanking of a chain, as if whatever were bound by it moved a little, but not much.

"I sat there staring helplessly into the dark while every nerve in my body seemed taunted to the breaking point, and listened to that hopeless moaning and the gentle clanking of that chain for what seemed like an hour. Then, very softly, came a woman's voice."

"A woman's, *Madame?*"

"Yes, sir. I could not possibly have been mistaken. It was low, not a whisper, but very weak and — hopeless."

"Yes, *Madame?* And what did this so small voice say, if you please?"

"My poor darling!"

"*Sang du diable!* It said that?"

"Yes, sir. Just that. No more."

"And were there further voices?"

"No, sir. There were a few weak, feeble moans, repeated at longer and longer intervals, and every once in a while the chain would rattle, but there were no more words."

De Grandin turned to young Jaquay. "And did you hear this so strange voice also, *Monsieur?*"

"No, sir. I slept through it all, but later in the night, perhaps just before morning, I wakened with a feeling someone stood beside the bed and watched me, and then I heard the scraping of a chain — not across our floor, but over something hard and gritty, like stone or perhaps concrete, and three people moaning softly."

"Three? *Grand Dieu des cochons,* the man says three!

How could you tell, *Monsieur?*"

"Their voices were distinct and different. One was a man's, a light baritone, well-pitched, but very weak. The other two were women's, one soft and husky, like stroked velvet, a Negro woman's, I'm sure, and the other was lighter in tone, musical, but very feeble, like that of a person sinking in a swoon."

"They did not speak?"

"Not in words, sir, but from their tones I knew all three were very weak and exhausted, so far gone that it seemed nothing mattered to them."

"U'm?" de Grandin took his little pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "And what did you do next, *Monsieur?*"

Jaquay looked embarrassed. "We sent for Dr. Van Artdalen, sir."

"Ah? And who is he, if one may inquire?"

"He's pastor of the Union Church at Harbordale, sir. We told him everything that had happened, and he agreed to exorcise the house."

"*Mordieu,* did you, indeed?" de Grandin twisted the waxed ends of his small blond mustache until they were as sharp as twin needles. "And did he succeed in his mission?"

"I'm afraid he didn't, sir. He read a portion of the Scriptures from St. Luke, where it says that power was given the Disciples to cast out devils, and offered up a prayer, but — we haven't had a moment's peace since, sir."

The little Frenchman nodded. "One understands all too well, *Monsieur.* The occultism, he is neither good nor safe for amateurs to dabble in. This Doctor — the gentleman with the so funny name — may be an excellent preacher, but I fear he was out of his element when he undertook to rid your premises of unwelcome tenants. Who, by example, told him they were devils he came out to drive away?"

"Why — er—" Jaquay's face reddened — "I don't think anybody did, sir. We told him only what we had experienced, and he assured us that evil is always subject to good, and could not stand against the power of—"

"One understands completely," de Grandin cut in sharply. "The reverend gentleman is also doubtless one of those who believe savage animals cannot stand the gaze of the human eye, that sharks must turn upon their back to bite, and that you are immune from lightning-stroke if you have rubber heels upon your shoes. In fine, one gathers he is one of those who is not ignorant because of what he does not know, but because of the things he knows which are not true. What has occurred since his visit?"

"All day we feel those unseen eyes fairly boring into us; at night the sighs and groans and chain-clankings begin almost as soon as darkness comes and keeps up till sunrise. Frankly, sir, we're afraid to stay in the place after sunset."

The Frenchman nodded approval. "I think that you are wise to absent yourselves, *Monsieur*. For you to stay in that house after dark would not be courageous, it would be the valor of ignorance, and that, *parbleu*, is not so good. No, not at all.

"Attend me, if you please: I have made a study of such matters. To 'cast out devils,' may be an act of Christian faith which anyone possessing virtue may perform. Me, I do not know. But I do know from long experience that what will be effective in one case will wholly fail in another. Do you know surely what it is that haunts this house from which you have so wisely fled? Did the good *pasteur* know? Do I know? *Non, pardieu*, we grope in ignorance, all of us! We know not what it is we have to contend with. Attend me, *Monsieur*, if you please, with great carefulness. As that very learned writer, Manly Wade Wellman, has observed, there are many sorts of disembodied beings.

'In earth and sky and sea
Strange things there be.'

"There are, by example, certain things called elementals. These never were in human form; they have existed from the beginning, and, I assure you, they are very naughty. They are definitely unfriendly to humankind; they are mischievous, they are wicked. They should be given as wide a berth as possible. It is safer to walk unarmed through a jungle infested with blood-hungry tigers than to frequent spots where they are known to be, unless you are well-armed with occult weapons, and even then your chances are no better than those of the hunter who goes out to trail the strong and savage beast.

"Then there are those things we call ghosts. They cannot be defined with nicety, but as a class they are the immortal, or at least the surviving spiritual part of that which was once man or woman. These may be either good, indifferent or bad. The bad, of course, far outnumber the good, for the great bulk of humanity that has died has not been good. *Alors*, it behooves us to step carefully when we have dealings with them. You comprehend?

"*Bien*. It may well be the good *pasteur* used the wrong technique when he assumed to rid you of your so unwelcome co-tenants. He did not surely know his adversary; it is entirely possible that he succeeded only in annoying him as one might irritate but not cripple a lion by shooting him with a light rifle. *Mais oui*, it may be so. Let us now proceed with system. Let us make a reconnaissance, spy out the land, acquaint ourselves with that with which we must match forces.

"When this is done we shall proceed to business, not before. No, certainly; by no means.

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he asked at breakfast next morning, "what do you know of this house from which *Monsieur* and *Madame Jaquay* have been driven?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," I answered. "I know it's more than a hundred years old and was built by Jacob Tofte whose family settled in New Jersey shortly after the Dutch wrested it from the Swedes in 1655."

"U'm? It is the original structure?"

"As far as I know. They built for permanence, those old Dutchmen. I've never been inside it, but I'm told its stone walls are two feet thick."

"You do not know the year in which it was erected?"

"About 1800, I believe. It must have been before 1804, for there were originally slave quarters on the back lot, and slavery was abolished in New Jersey in that year."

"*Morbleu, pas possible!*"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing of the consequence, my friend. I did but entertain an idle thought. Those ghostly sighs and groans, those ghostly clankings of the chains, might not they have some connection with slavery?"

"None that I can see."

"And none, *hèlas*, that leaps to my eye, either," he admitted with a smile as he rose. "I did but toy with the suggestion." He lit a cigarette and turned toward the wall. "Expect me when I return, *mon vieux*. I have much ground to cover, and may be late for dinner — may *le bon Dieu* grant otherwise."

The evening meal was long since over when he returned, but that his day's work had not been fruitless I knew by the twinkle in his little round blue eyes, and his first words confirmed my diagnosis. "My friend, I would not go so far as to say I have found the key to this mystery, but I damnation think that I can say under which doormat the key hides."

I motioned toward the decanter and cigars, a work of supererogation, for he was already pouring himself a generous drink of brandy. "*Bien oui*," he nodded solemnly as he shot the soda hissing into his glass. "All morning I did search, and nowhere could I find a person who knew much about that execrable Tofte House until I reached the County Historical Society's archives. There I found more than ample reward for my labors. There were old deeds, old, yellowed newspapers; even the diaries of old inhabitants. Yes.

"This Jacob Tofte, he who built that house, must have been the devil of a fellow. In youth he followed the sea — *eh bien*, who shall say how far he followed it, or into what dark paths it led him? Those were the days of sailing ships, my old and rare, a man set forth upon a voyage new-married and easily might find himself the father of a five-year-old when

he returned. But not our friend old Jacob. Not he! He traveled many times to Europe, more than once to China and the Indies, and finally to Africa. There he found his true vocation. Yes.”

He paused, eyes gleaming, and it would have been cruel to have withheld the question he so obviously expected. “Did he become a ‘blackbirder,’ a slaver?” I asked.

“*Parbleu*, my friend, you have put your finger on the pulse,” he nodded. “A slave trader he became, *vraiment*, and probably a very good one, which means he must have been a very bad man, cruel and ruthless, utterly heartless. *Tiens*, the wicked old one prospered, as the wicked have a way of doing in this far from perfect world. When he was somewhere between forty-five and fifty years of age he returned to New Jersey very well supplied with money, retired from his gruesome trade and became a solid citizen of the community. Anon he built himself a house as solid as himself and married.

“Now here—” he leveled a slim forefinger at me like a pointed weapon — “occurs that which affords me the small inkling of a clue. The girl he married was his cousin, Marise Tenbrocken. She was but half his age and had been affianced to her cousin Merthou Van Brundt, a young man of her own age and the cousin, rather more distantly, of Monsieur Jacob. One cannot say with certainty if she broke her engagement willingly or at parental insistence. One knows only that Monsieur Jacob was wealthy while young Monsieur Merthou was very poor and had his way to make in the world. Such things happened in the old days as in the present, my friend.”

He paused a moment, took a sip of brandy and soda, and lighted a cigar. “Of these things I am sure,” he recommenced at length. “From there on one finds only scattered bones and it is hard to reconstruct the skeleton, much more so to hang flesh upon the frame. Divorce was not as common in those days as now, nor did people wash domestic soiled linen in public. We cannot surely know if this marriage of May and October was a happy union. At any rate the old *Monsieur* seems to have found domestic life a trifle dull after so many years of adventure, so in 1803 we find him fitting out a small schooner to go to New Orleans. *Madame* his wife remained at home. So did her *ci-devant fiancé*, who had found employment, if not consolation, in the offices of Peter Tandy, a ship chandler.

“Again I have but surmise to guide me. Did the almost-whitened embers of old love spring into ardent flame once more when Monsieur Van Brundt and Madame Tofte found themselves free from the surveillance of the lady’s husband, or had they carried on a liaison beneath old Monsieur Jacob’s nose? One wonders.

“*En tout cas*, Monsieur Jacob returned all unexpectedly from his projected voyage to New Orleans, dropping anchor in the Bay but three weeks after he had left. With Monsieur Tofte’s arrival we find Madame Marise and her cousin, formerly her *fiancé*, and doubtless now her lover, vanishing completely. *Pouf!* Like that.”

“And what became of them?” I asked as he remained silent.

“*Qui drait?* The devil knows, not I. They disappeared, they vanished, they evaporated; they were lost to view. With them, perhaps went one Celeste, a Martinique mulatress Monsieur Jacob had bought — or perhaps stolen — to be Madame Marise’s waiting maid.

“Her disappearance seemed to cause him more concern than that of *Madame* his wife and his young cousin Merthou, for he advertised for her by handbill offering a reward of fifty dollars for her return. She was, it seems, a valuable property, speaking French, Spanish and English, understanding needlework and cooking and the niceties of the toilette. One would think he would have offered more for her, but probably he was a very thrifty man. At any rate, it does not appear she was ever apprehended.”

“And what became of Jacob Tofte?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “He sleeps, one hopes peacefully, in the churchyard of St. Chrysostom’s. There was a family mausoleum on his land, but when he died in 1835 he left directions for his burial in St. Chrysostom’s, and devised five thousand dollars to the parish. *Tiens*, he was a puzzle, that one. His very tombstone presents an enigma.”

“How’s that?”

“I viewed it in the churchyard today. Besides his name and vital data it bears this bit of doggerel:

‘Beneath this stone lies J. Tofte,
The last of five fine brothers.
He died more happy by his lone
And sleeps more sound than others.’

“What do you make from that, *hein?*”

“Humph. Except that it’s more generous in its substitution of adjectives for adverbs than most epitaphs, I’d say it compares favorably with the general level of graveyard poetry.”

“Perhaps,” he agreed doubtfully, “but me, I am puzzled. ‘He died more happy,’ says the epitaph. More happy than whom? And than whom does he sleep more soundly? Who are these mysterious others he refers to?”

“I can’t imagine. Can you?”

“I — think—” he answered, speaking slowly, eyes narrowed, “I — think — I — can, my friend.

“I have searched the title to that property, beginning with Monsieur Jacob’s tenancy. It has changed hands a surprising

number of times. Monsieur Molloy, from whom Monsieur and Madame Jaquay inherited, was the fiftieth owner of the house. He acquired it in 1930 at an absurdly small price, and went to much expense to modernize it, yet lived in it less than a year. There followed a succession of lessees, none of whom remained long in possession. For the past ten years the place was vacant. Does light begin to percolate?"

I shook my head and he smiled rather bleakly. "I feared as much. No matter. Tomorrow is another day, and perhaps we shall be all wiser then."

"You have no office hours today, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked me shortly after breakfast the next morning.

"No, this is my Sabbatical," I answered. "One or two routine calls, and then—"

"Then you can come to Tofte House with us," he interrupted with a smile. "I damn think we shall see some things there today."

George and Georgine Jaquay were waiting for us at the Berkeley-York where they had taken temporary residence, and once more I was struck by their amazing likeness to each other. George wore gray flannels and a black Homburg, a shirt of white broadcloth and a pearl-gray cravat; Georgine wore a small black hat, a gray flannel manishly-cut suit with a white blouse and a little mauve tie at her throat. They were almost exactly of a size, and their faces similar as two coins stamped from the same die. The wonder of it was, I thought, that they required words to communicate with each other.

The gentleman with them I took to be their lawyer. He was about fifty, carefully if somberly dressed in a formally-cut dark suit with white edging marking the V of his waistcoat. His tortoise-shell glasses were attached to a black ribbon and in one gray-gloved hand he held a black derby and a black malacca cane.

"This is Monsieur Peteros, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin introduced when we had exchanged greetings with the Jaquays. "He is a very eminent medium who has kindly agreed to assist us."

Despite myself I raised my brows. The man might have been an attorney, a banker or mill-owner. Certainly he was the last one I should have picked as a practitioner of the rather malodorous profession of spiritualistic medium. Perhaps my face showed more than I realized, for Mr. Peteros' thin lips compressed more tightly and he acknowledged the introduction with a frigid "How d'ye do?"

But if the atmosphere were chilly de Grandin seemed entirely unaware of it. "Come, *mes amis*," he bade, "we are assembled and the time for action has arrived. Let us go all soon and not delay one little minute. No, certainly not."

Framed by birch and oak, elm and maple, the big old

house in Andover Road looked out upon a stretch of well-kept lawn. It was built of native bluestone without porches, and stood foursquare to the highway. Its walls were at least two feet thick, its windows high and narrow, its great front door a slab of massive oak. The sort of house a man who had been in the slave trade might have put up, a veritable fortress, capable of withstanding attacks with anything less than artillery.

Jaquay produced his key and fitted it into the incongruously modern lock of the old door, swung back the white-enameled panels and stood aside for us to enter. Mr. Peteros went first with me close at his elbow, and as I stepped across the sill I all but collided with him. He had come to an abrupt halt, his head thrown back, nostrils quivering like those of an apprehensive animal. There was a nervous tic in his left cheek, the corners of his mouth were twitching. "Don't you sense it?" he asked in a voice that grated grittily in his throat.

Involuntarily I inhaled deeply. "No," I replied shortly. The only thing I "sensed" was the Charbert perfume Georgine Jaquay used so lavishly. I had no very high opinion of mediums. If Peteros thought he could set the stage to put us in a mood for any "revelations" he might later make, he'd have to try something more subtle.

We stood in a wide, long hall, evidently stretching to the rear of the house, stone-floored and walled with rough-cast plaster. The ceiling was of beamed oak and its great timbers seemed to have been hand-squared. The furniture was rather sparse, being for the most part heavy maple, oak or hickory — benches, tables and a few rush-bottomed square-framed chairs, and though it had small beauty it had value, for the newest piece there must have been at least a hundred years old. A fireplace stretched a full eight feet across the wall to the right, and on the bluestone slab that served for mantel were ranged pewter plates and tankards and a piece or two of old Dutch delft any one of which would have fetched its weight in gold from a knowing antique dealer. To our left a narrow stairway with a handrail of wrought brass and iron curved upward.

I was about to remark on the patent antiquity of the place when de Grandin's sharp command forestalled me: "It was in the bedroom you had your so strange experiences, my friends. Let us go there to see if Monsieur Peteros can pick up any influences."

Young Jaquay led the way, and we trooped up the narrow stairway single file, but halfway up I paused and grasped the balustrade. I had gone suddenly dizzy and felt chilled to the bone, yet it was not an ordinary chill. Rather, it seemed a sudden coldness started at my fingertips and shivered up into my shoulders, then, as with a cramp induced by a galvanic battery, every nerve in my body began to tingle and contract.

Just behind me, Peteros grasped my elbow, steadying me.

“Swallow,” he commanded in a sharp whisper. “Swallow hard and take a deep breath.” As I obeyed the tingling feeling of paralysis left me and I heard him chuckle softly. “I see you felt it, too,” he murmured. “Probably you felt it worse than I did; you weren’t prepared for it.” I nodded, feeling rather foolish.

Apparently the Jaquays had refurnished the bedroom, for it had none of the gloomy eighteenth century air of the rest of the house. The bedstead was a canopied four-poster, either Adam or a good reproduction, a tall chest of mahogany stood against one wall, between the narrow, high-set windows was a draped dressing table in the long mirror of which were reflected silver toilet articles and crystal bottles. Curtains of fluted organdie, dainty and crisp, hung at the windows. The floor was covered with an Abusson carpet.

“*Bien.*” De Grandin took command as we entered the chamber. “Will you sit there, *Madame?*” he indicated a chintz-covered chair for Georgine. “And you, Monsieur Jaquay, I would suggest you sit beside her. You may be under nervous strain. To have a loving hand to hold may prove of helpfulness. *Mais oui*, do not I know? I shall say yes. You, Friend Trowbridge, will sit here, if you please, and Monsieur Peteros will occupy this chair—” he indicated a large armchair with high, tufted back. “Me, I prefer to stand. Is all in readiness?”

“I think we’d better close the curtains,” Peteros replied. “I seem to get the emanations better in the dusk.”

“*Bien. Mais certainement.*” The little Frenchman drew the brocade over-draperies of the windows, leaving us in semi-darkness.

Mr. Peteros leant back and took a silver pencil from his waistcoat pocket. Holding it upright before his face, he fixed his eyes upon its tip. A minute passed, two minutes; three. From the hall below came the ponderous, pompous ticking of the great clock, small noises from the highway — the rumble of great cargo trucks, the yelp of motor horns came to us through the closed and curtained windows. Peteros continued staring fixedly at the pencil point, and in the semi-darkness his face was indistinct as a blurred photograph. Then the upright pencil wavered from the perpendicular. Slowly, like a reversed pendulum, or the arm of a metronome, it swung in a short arc from right to left and back again. His eyes followed it, converging on each other until it seemed he made a silly grimace. The silver rod paused in its course, wavered like a tree caught in a sudden wind, and dropped with a soft thud to the carpet. The medium’s head fell back against the cushions of his chair, his eyelids drooped and in a moment came the sound of measured breathing, only slightly stertorous, scarcely more noticeable than the ticking of the clock downstairs. I knit my brows and shook my head in annoyance. I could have

simulated a more convincing trance. If he thought we could be imposed upon by such a palpable bit of trickery....

“O-o-o-oh!” Georgine Jaquay exclaimed softly. She had raised one hand to her throat and the painted nails of her outspread fingers were like a collar of garnets on the white flesh.

I felt a sudden tenseness. Issuing from Peteros’ lips was a thin column of smoke, as if he had inhaled deeply from a cigar. Yet it was not ordinary smoke. It had an oddly luminous quality, as if its particles were microscopic opals that glowed with their own inward fire, and instead of coming in a series of short puffs, as cigar smoke would have come from his mouth, it flowed in steady, even stream, like steam escaping from a simmering kettle. “*Regardez, s’il vous plaît*, Friend Trowbridge,” de Grandin whispered half belligerently. “I tell you it is psychoplasm — soul stuff!”

The cloud of luminescent vapor drifted slowly toward the ceiling, then as if wafted by an unfelt zephyr coiled and circled toward the wall pierced by the curtained windows, and slowly, more like dripping water than a cloud of steam or smoke, began to trickle down the wall until it covered it completely.

It is difficult to describe what happened next. Slowly in the opalescent vapor that obscured the wall there seemed to generate small sparks of bluish light, mere tiny points of phosphorescence, and gradually, but with a gathering speed, they multiplied until they floated like a swarm of dancing midges circling round each other till they joined to form small nebulae of brightness large as gleaming cigarette ends. The nebulae became more numerous, touched each other, coalesced as readily as rain drops brought together, till they formed a barrier of eerie, intense bluish light.

There was eeriness, uncanniness about it, but it was not terrifying. Instead of fear I felt a sort of gentle melancholy. Vague, long-forgotten memories wafted through my mind ... a girl’s soft laugh, the touch of a warm hand, the echo of the muted whisper of a once-loved voice, the subtle fragrance of old hopes and aspirations.

Half dazzled, wholly mystified by the phenomenon, I watched the luminous curtain.

A sort of cloudiness appeared in its bright depths, at first no more than a dim, unformed network of small dots and dashes, but gradually they built up a pattern. As when an image appears on the copper of a halftone plate in its acid bath, a picture took form on the surface of the glowing curtain. As if through the proscenium of a theatre — or on a motion picture screen — we looked into another room.

I recognized it instantly, so did Georgine Jaquay, for I heard her gasp, “Why, it’s the hall of this house!”

“*Taisez-vous!*” de Grandin snapped. “*Laissez-moi*

tranquille, s'il vous plaît, Madame! Be silent!"

It was the hall we had come through less than ten minutes before, yet somehow it was not the same. A great fire blazed on the wrought-metal andirons and in a pair of brass candlesticks tallow dips were burning. The lights and shadows shifted constantly, but such illumination as there was seemed to do little more than stain the darkness. The door through which we had come opened and a middle-aged Negro dressed in a suit of coarse tow came into the apartment, bending almost double under the weight of a brass-bound trunk of sole leather. He paused uncertainly a moment, seemed to turn as if to hear some command shouted at him from outside, then shambled toward the stairway.

The door, which had swung partly shut, was kicked back violently, and across the sill a man stepped with a woman in his arms. He was a big man, tall and heavy-set, with enormous shoulders and great depth of chest, dressed in the fashion of a hundred years and more ago. His suit of heavy woolen stuff was snuff-colored, made with a long coat and breeches reaching to his knees, and his brown stockings were of knitted wool but little better than those of the Negro. I guessed his age as somewhere near fifty, for there were streaks of gray in the long hair that he wore plaited in a queue and in the short dark reddish beard and mustache that masked his lower face. He had a big nose, dark hawk-eyes, broad low forehead and high-jutting cheek-bones. His skin was darkly tanned, and though he had few wrinkles they were deep ones. He was, I thought, a well-to-do farmer, perhaps a merchant sea captain. Certainly he was no gentleman, and just as certainly he was a hard customer, tricky and unscrupulous in bargaining and fierce and ruthless in a fight.

Of the woman we could see little, for a long hooded cloak of dark blue linsey-woolsey covered her from head to heels. What was at once apparent, however, was that she did not snuggle in his arms. She neither held his shoulders nor put her arms about his neck, merely lay quiescent in his grasp as if she rested after an exhausting ordeal, or realized the futility of struggling.

But when he set her on her feet we saw that she was very delicately made, not tall but seeming taller than her actual height because of extreme slenderness. She was pretty, almost beautiful, with a soft cream-and-carnation skin, bronze hair that positively flamed in the firelight, and eyes of luminous greenish violet with the wondering expression of a hurt child.

The man said something to her and with a start I realized we witnessed a pantomime, a scene of vibrant life and action soundless as an old-time moving picture, but legible in meaning as sky-writing on a windless day. We saw her shake her small head in negation, then as he echoed his peremptory demand, hold out her hands in a gesture of entreaty. Her face

was bloodless and her eyes suffused with tears, but if she had been a bird and he a cat her appeal could not have been more futile. Abruptly he seized her left hand and raised it to a level with her eyes, and on its third finger we saw the great, heavy plain gold band that marked her as a matron. For a moment he stood thus, then flung the little hand from him as if it were a bit of dross and grasped the trembling girl in his arms, crushed her to him and bruised her shrinking lips with kisses that betrayed no trace of love but were afire with blazing passion.

When he released her she shrank back, cheeks aflame with outraged blood and eyes almost filmy with nausea, but as he repeated his command she crept rather than walked to the stairway and mounted it slowly, holding fast to the wrought-brass handrail for support.

The man turned toward the kitchen, bellowing an order and into the hall stole another girl about the age of her whom he had just mauled so lustfully. She was a mulatress, scarce larger than a child, with delicately formed features, short wavy brown hair clustering round her ears and neck in tiny ringlets, and large dark eyes as gentle — and as frightened — as a gazelle's. Despite the almost shapeless gown of woolen stuff that hung on her we saw her figure was exquisite, with high breasts, narrow hips and lean, small waist. She bore a straw-wrapped stone demijohn stopped with a broken corncob, and at his order, took a pewter tankard from the mantel and poured some of the colorless contents of her jar into it. "More!" We could not hear the word, but it required no skill in lip-reading to know what he ordered, and with a shrug that was no more than a flutter of her shapely shoulders she splashed an added half-pint of liquor into the beaker.

It was obvious; she was afraid of him, for she stayed as far away as she could, and her large eyes watched him furtively. When she had filled the mug she stood back quickly, pretending to be busy with recorking the bottle, but obviously eager to stay out of reach.

Her stratagem was futile, for when he downed the draft he wiped his mouth upon his cuff and held out his hand. "Kiss it!" we saw, rather than heard him order. She took his rough paw in her delicate gold hands and bent her sleek head over it, but he would not let her kiss its back. "Not that way!" he bade roughly, and obediently she turned it over and pressed her lips to its palm.

Why he demanded this peculiar form of homage I had no idea, but evidently de Grandin understood its implication, for I heard him mutter, "*Sale bête* — dirty beast!"

The bearded man threw back his head and laughed a laugh that must have filled the house with its bellow, then half playfully but wholly viciously he struck the girl across the

face with a back-handed blow that sent her reeling to a fall beside the tiled hearth of the fireplace. The demijohn slipped from her hand, and in a moment a dark stain of moisture spread across the stones.

We saw him beckon her imperiously, saw her rise trembling to her feet and slink toward him, her wide eyes fearful, her lips trembling. Nearer she crept, shaking her head from side to side, begging mutely for mercy, and when she was within arm's length he seized her as a pouncing beast might grasp its prey. As a terrier might shake a rat he shook her, swaying her slim shoulders till her head bobbed giddily and her short curls waved like wind-whipped bunting round her ears. Protesting helplessly she opened her mouth and the force with which he shook her drove her teeth together on her tongue so that a little stream of blood came from the corners of her mouth. Then, not content with this punishment, he struck her with his fist, knocking her to the floor, then raising her again that he might strike her down once more. Three times he hit her with his knotted fist, and every blow drew blood. When he was done he left her in a little crumpled heap beside the hearthstone, her slim gold hands held to her face and bright blood dripping from her nose, her lips and her bruised cheeks.

"*Cochon, pourceau, sale chameau!*" de Grandin whispered venomously. "*Pardieu*, he was a species of a stinking swine, that one!"

The big man wiped his mouth upon his sleeve once more and, swaying slightly from the effect of the potent apple-jack, made for the stairway up which the girl he had borne into the house had crept.

The picture before us began to fade, not growing dimmer but apparently dissolving like a cloud of steam before a current of air, and in a moment little dots and lines of color danced and moved across the luminous screen, forming figures like the prisms of a kaleidoscope, then gradually merging to depict another scene.

Not very different from its present aspect, save that its lawn was not so well kept, the front yard of the house spread before us. It was early evening, and from the marshes — long since filled in and built over — rose a soft, light mist, silvery, unearthly, utterly still. The trees that rimmed the highway were almost denuded of their foliage and stood out in sharp silhouette, pointing to the pale sky from which most of the stars had been wiped by a half-moon's light. An earlier wind had blown the fallen leaves across the bricked walk with its low box borders, and the man and woman walking away from us kicked them from their path, rustling them against their feet as children love to do in autumn. At the lower end of the footway they paused and as the girl turned her face up to her escort we recognized the young

woman we had seen borne into the house. The moonlight brought them into clear-cut definition. The man was young, about the girl's age, and bore a strong resemblance to her, obviously a family likeness. His clothes and linen were threadbare but scrupulously clean, and his lean drawn face showed the effect of high ambition and slender resources. What they said we had no way of knowing, but we saw her arms creep up around his neck, not passionately, but tenderly, like the tendrils of a vine, as she raised her lips for his kiss. A moment they stood thus in silent embrace, then she unclasped her arms from his neck and he turned away, walking down the moonlit high road with no backward glance and with squared shoulders, like a man who has made final, immutable decision.

Once more the scene was obscured, then took on new form, and we saw the white girl and the mulatress working feverishly packing a small nail-studded trunk. They folded linen underwear and sprinkled it with crumbled dry lavender, pressed a woolen dress down on the antique lingerie, added several pairs of cotton stockings and a pair of square-toed little buckled shoes. The box was packed and strapped, the girl ran to the door, but paused upon the threshold, the joy wiped from her face as sunlight disappears before a sudden cloud.

In the entrance stood the bearded man, and over one shoulder, as a butcher might have held a new-slaughtered calf, he bore the body of the young man we had seen before. Blood trickling from a scalp-wound told us how the boy had been bludgeoned, and on the barrel of the antique horse-pistol in the big man's right hand there was a smear of blood to which a few brown hairs adhered.

There was something utterly appalling in the big man's quietness. Methodically as if he followed a rehearsed plan he dropped the unconscious man on the bed, retraced his steps to the door and returned with three short lengths of iron chain which he proceeded to fasten round the necks of the two women and the swooning man.

Amazingly the women made no effort to resist but stood as dumbly and quiescently as well-trained horses waiting to be harnessed as he latched the fetters on their throats. Perhaps the memory of past beatings told them that submissiveness was wiser, perhaps they realized the hopelessness of entreaty or effort. It was very quickly accomplished, and in a moment the big man had shouldered the unconscious youth again, tucked the little trunk beneath his free arm, and nodded toward the door. Without a word of protest or entreaty the women went before him, holding the free ends of their neck chains in their hands as if to still their clinking.

We looked into a little room, perhaps some twelve feet square, stone-floored, stone-walled, stone-ceilinged. It was darker than a moonless midnight, but somehow we could distinguish objects. About the walls were small partitioned spaces rising four deep, tier on tier, like oversized pigeon-holes, and, each was closed with a stone slab in which a heavy ringbolt had been set. Something like a swarm of small red ants seemed crawling up the backs of my knees and my spine. One did not need to be an antiquarian to recognize the crypts of an old family tomb.

Something stirred in the darkness, and as I strained my eyes toward it I saw the huddled form of a woman. I knew it for a woman by the long red hair that hung upon its head, but otherwise, although it had been stripped of clothing, it was almost unclassifiable. Emaciation was so far advanced that she was little more than a mummy. Knee- and elbow-joints stood out against the staring skin like apples on broomsticks, the hip-bones showed like ploughshares each side the pelvis, the ribs were like the bars of a grating, and every tooth was outlined through the shrunken lips.

The creature bent its skull-face to the stone pavement and licked a little moisture from the trickle of a tiny spring-fed rivulet that crossed the flags, then tried to rouse itself to a sitting posture, tried vainly again, and sank back limply. Slowly, painfully, as if it fought paralysis, it edged across the cold damp stones of the floor, stretched out a bony, tendon-scored hand toward another thing that crouched against the farther wall.

This was — or had been — a man, but now it was no better than a skeleton held in articulation by the skin stretched drum-tight over it. It seemed to rouse to semi-consciousness by the other's movement, and tried desperately to reach the withered hand stretched toward it. In vain. The chains that tethered the whimpering woman-lich and her companion were barely long enough to stretch from their ring-bolts to the floor, leaving the captives just length of leash enough to lie on the floor, but not permitting them sufficient movement to reach each other, even when their arms were stretched to fullest extent.

And as we watched the prisoners struggle futilely to bring their dying hands together we saw something flutter feebly in the darkness at the rear of the tomb. Chained like the other two the golden-skinned mulatress lay against the wall, and constantly her head turned from side to side and her emaciated body shook with unremitting spasms.

"*Cordieu*, but it was monstrous, that!" de Grandin whispered grittily. "Not content with making them die horribly by slow starvation; not content with making it impossible for them so much as to join hands in their extremity, he chained that other poor one with them that they should be denied all privacy, even in the hour of death!"

He struck his hands together sharply. "*Monsieur!*" he called. "Monsieur Peteros!"

The gruesome scene before us faded as if it had been frescoed on wax melting in quick heat, and through the semi-darkness of the room there swirled a wraithlike cloud of gleaming vapor that hovered like a nimbus above the medium a moment, then, as if he had inhaled it, was absorbed by him. "Eh?" Peteros murmured sleepily. "Did I go into a trance? What did I say?"

"Not a word, *Monsieur*," de Grandin told him. "You were as dumb as an infant oyster, but through your help we are much wiser. Yes. Certainly. Stay here and rest, for you must be exhausted. The rest of us have duties to perform. Come, *mes amis*," he looked at me and the Jaquays in turn, "let us go to that abominable tomb, that never-to-be-quite-sufficiently-anathematized sepulchre. We are a century and more too late — we cannot rescue them, *hèlas*, but we can give them what they most desire. Of a surety."

With a crowbar we forced back the rust-bound iron door of the Tofte mausoleum and after standing back a moment for the outer air to enter de Grandin led the way into the tomb, playing the beam of his flashlight before him.

"*Voyez! Voilà que!*" he ordered as the shifting shaft of light stabbed through the murky darkness. Death lay at our feet. Arranged in orderly array as if they waited articulation by an osteologist were the bones of three skeletons. Dangling from the ring bolts of three stone-sealed crypts to the floor beside the skulls were lengths of rust-bitten iron chain. The disintegration of the prisoners' upper spinal columns had loosed the loops of iron latched about their throats. We had no difficulty determining their sex. Even if the widely-opened sciatic notches of the pelvic bones and the smoothly curved angular fronto-nasal articulation of the skulls had not denoted the female skeletons to de Grandin's practiced eye and mine the pitiful relics lying by two of the skulls would have told their story — the amethyst-set gold earrings of the white girl and the patina-encrusted copper loops that once had hung in the mulatress little ears.

The Frenchman stepped back, bowing as if he addressed three living people. "*Mes pauvres*," he announced softly, "we are come to give you release from your earth-bound state. Your pleas have been heard; you shall be together in what remains of the flesh. The evil man who boasted of his better, sounder sleep — *parbleu*, but Jules de Grandin makes a monkey out of him!"

"It is a case for the coroner," he told us as we walked back to the house. "We need not tell the things that we saw in the bedroom. The circumstances of the disappearance of Madame Tofte and Monsieur Van Brundt as they appear in the historical records, together with the advertisement crafty

old Monsieur Jacob broadcast for the return of the poor Celeste, will be sufficient to establish their identity. As to the manner of their death — *eh bien*, does it not proclaim itself? But certainly.”

He smiled grimly. “And that old hypocrite who lies so snugly in St. Chrysostom’s churchyard — though it is late in overtaking him his sin has found him out at last. The jury of the coroner cannot help but name him as the murderer of those poor ones.”

The dinner at the Berkeley-York had a huge success. *Consommé de tortue vert* with sherry, *buîtres François* with Chablis, *truite Margery* with Meursault, *coq au vin* with Nuits St. Georges and finally *crêpes Sussettes* with cointreau. As the waiter poured the coffee and Chartreuse I fully expected to hear de Grandin purr. “I suppose it’s your theory that the stone and timbers of Tofte House held a certain psychic quality derived from association with the tragedy of Marise Tofte and Merthou Van Brundt, or that these unhappy lovers in the stress of their emotion passed on lasting thought-emanations to their inanimate surroundings?” I asked him. “I’ve heard you say that dreams or visions can be evoked in psychically sensitive persons when they’re permitted to sleep in a room with a chip from a house where some atrocious crime has been committed, or—”

“I would not quite say that,” he interrupted with a smile as he took a morsel of pink peppermint between his teeth and sipped a little black coffee. “This, I think, is what we might call a genuine ghost story, one where the earthbound spirits of the dead, denied the rites of Christian burial, sought constantly for help from the living.

“Consider, if you please: That Madame Marise and Monsieur Merthou were about to elope, accompanied by the slave girl Celeste, we have no doubt at all. Also, after seeing what a *bête bas* she had for husband one cannot greatly blame her, especially as she was still in love with her cousin who seems to have been a quiet, amiable young man. Yes.

“Next, we know the naughty old Monsieur Jacob laid a

trap for them. He pretended to go on a long voyage, gave them barely time to renew love and make plans for eloping then *pouf!* swooped down on them like a cat on two luckless mice. The sad rest we know also.

“When he had chained them like brute beasts they died all miserably in the tomb, and their poor, starved bodies lay unburied. What then? Year after painful year they sought to tell their plight to those who came to live in that old house, but always they did fail. Those whom they begged for help were frightened and ran off.

“But finally these unhappy cousins who were thwarted in their love were visited by cousins fate had given to each other. And so it came about that we, with Monsieur Peteros’ assistance, found their pitiful remains, had their killer branded as a murderer, and after proper rites laid them in consecrated ground. Yes certainly.”

A grim expression settled on his lips. “That poor Celeste, the slave girl, she gave me some trouble,” he confided.

“How’s that?” asked Georgine Jaquay.

“The sexton of St. Chrysostom’s told me the ground was reserved for the burial of white people exclusively. ‘*Monsieur*,’ I say to him, ‘this are no woman, but a skeleton I seek to have interred here, and the skeleton of a young girl of color as white as that of a Caucasian. Besides, if you persist in your pig-odious refusal I shall have to tweak your far from handsome nose.’ *Tiens*, he let us bury her beside those whose death she had shared.”

Georgine Jaquay gave a short neighing laugh, the sort of laugh a person gives to keep from weeping, but in a moment tears glistened on her lashes. “Do you suppose it was because they were cousins, and George and I are cousins, that they finally found peace through us?” she asked.

He raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can achieve. “Who knows, *Madame*? It are entirely possible,” he answered. Then with one of his quick elfin grins, “Or possibly it were because you and *Monsieur* your husband had the good sense to consult Jules de Grandin. He is a very clever fellow, that one.”

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WEIRD Tales

JULY

15¢



"CATSPAWS"—a Jules de Grandin—SEABURY QUINN

Catspaws

WE HAD been late leaving the Medical Society meeting and the cold rain of the early evening had changed to a wet, sleet-spurred snow, hag-ridden by a bitter wind, when we came out into the street. At the southern entrance of the Park my car gave a sharp lurch as a report like a bursting electric bulb was followed by an angry hiss and the sound of vicious slapping on the roadway. “*Grand Dieu des porc,*” asked Jules de Grandin, “what in Satan’s name was that?”

I swerved the car to the curb and shut off my engine. “If you don’t know I haven’t the heart to tell you,” I answered.

He nodded sadly. “One might have guessed as much. And we have no spare tire, *naturellement?*”

“*Naturellement,*” I echoed. “Those things are pretty strictly rationed. We just came through a war, or hadn’t you heard?”

“It is the fortune of the dog we have. What should we do?” Then before I could make a sarcastic rejoinder, “One comprehends. It is that we walk?”

“It is,” I assured him as we dived into the Park’s darkness, heads bent against the weather.

The gale clutched at our hats, whipped our sleeves, lashed at our coats; snow gathered on our soles in hard inverted pyramids that made the going doubly hard, now and then a laden tree bough shook its frigid burden down on us.

“*Feu noir du diable,*” de Grandin cursed as a particularly vicious barrage of wet snow fell on him, “*quelle nuit sauvage!* If only — *morbleu,* another luckless pilgrim of the night! Observe her, Friend Trowbridge.”

I followed the direction of his pointing stick and saw a woman — a girl, really — fur-swathed from neck to knees, bareheaded and shod with high-heeled sandals, judging by her awkward gait, struggling with frantic haste over the rough hummocks of frozen slush. As she drew almost abreast of us I realized she was half moaning, half sobbing to herself as she ran.

“*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*” de Grandin touched the brim of his black felt hat, “may we be of service? You seem in trouble—”

“Oh—” she gave a little scream of surprise at his voice. “Oh, yes; yes. You can help me. *You can!*” Her voice rose to a pitch half an octave below hysteria. “Please help me, I’m—”

“*Tiens,* you have the nervousness unnecessarily, *Mademoiselle.* We shall take great pleasure in assisting you. What is it?”

“I—” she gulped sobbingly for breath — “I want to get to a trolley, a taxi, any way to get home in a hurry, please. I—”

“And so do we, *ma petite.*” he broke in, “but alas, there is no street car, bus or taxi to be had. If you will come with us to the other side of the Park—”

“Oh, no!” she declined fiercely. “Not that way. I’m afraid. Please don’t take me back that way. He’s there!”

“Eh?” he shot back sharply. “And who is ‘he,’ if one may ask?”

“That — that man!” she panted hoarsely, turning to resume her flight. “Oh, sir, please don’t take me back. I’m terribly afraid!” Her teeth began to chatter with mingled chill and fright.

“Be quiet, *Mademoiselle!*” he ordered. “This will not do. No, not at all. What is your trouble, why do you fear to retrace your steps? Is there anybody there two able-bodied, healthy men cannot protect you from?”

“I—” the girl began again, then seemed to take a grip upon her nerves. “No, of course I’m not afraid while I’m with you. I’ll go.” She swung round, catching step between us.

“I was going home from a party at a friend’s house,” she began, speaking hurriedly. “My — my young man had to catch a midnight train for Philadelphia and couldn’t take me, so I was waiting on the corner for a bus when a man drove by and asked me if I’d like a lift, and — like a fool! — I told him yes. I told him I was going to MacKenzie Boulevard, but he turned into the Park, and when we got down to the bottom of the hill he — oh, I was so terrified! I jumped out and began to run, and — and I’m afraid, sir; I’m terribly afraid of him!”

The light from one of the infrequent roadside lamps fell on de Grandin’s face and showed a look of mingled wonder and amusement. “One understands, but only partly, *Mademoiselle.* You were a very foolish little person to accept a ride from a stranger. Had you never heard that she who rides must all too often pay her passage? That the young man — one assumes he was young — should have proved a wolf was not astonishing, but you evaded him. He did not harm you. Why, then, are you so distraught, so terrified? Is it that—”

Her frightened exclamation cut through his question as her hands clenched on our arms with fear-strengthened fingers. “See! There are the lights of his car. He’s waiting for me — oh, I’m afraid!”

The Frenchman loosed her clutching fingers gently. “Look

to her, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I shall attend to this smasher.” Striding to the car parked at the roadside he addressed its unseen occupant. “*Monsieur*, this young woman tells us you have affronted her. Me, I do not like that kind of business. Have the goodness to descend *Monsieur*, and I shall take great pleasure in tweaking your so odious nose.”

No answer was forthcoming and he put a foot upon the running board. “I see you, miscreant. Silence will not give you protection. Descend and defend yourself—” He raised his head level with the face of the man at the car’s steering wheel. There was a rustle of snow-covered sleeve against the casing of the car window, and: “*Mordieu*, Friend Trowbridge, come and see,” he ordered as he fished into his pocket for his flashlight. “Look at him, if you please — and keep tight hold of the woman!”

I grasped the girl’s wrist and leant forward as the beam of his light pierced the darkness and fell back a step, my fingers tightening on her arm involuntarily.

Bolt-upright at the wheel of the roadster was a heavy-set blond young man, bare-headed, and with the collar of his ulster open at the throat. His left hand wore a heavy glove, I noticed, while his right which rested on the wheel, was bare. His light-blue eyes, probably always prominent were widely opened in an idiotic, fixed stare and fairly popping from his face. His mouth was gaping with a hang-jawed, imbecile expression, the tongue protruding slightly, and the chin resting on the fabric of his turned-back collar.

“Oh,” the girl beside me let out a shrill, squealing scream, “he’s dead!”

“*Comme un maquereau*,” de Grandin agreed laconically. “Nor did he die from overeating. Regard him, if you please, Friend Trowbridge.” Placing his hand on the young man’s sleek fair hair he moved it with a gentle rotary motion. The head beneath his hand followed its pressure as if it had been fastened to the shoulders by a loose-tensioned spring. “You agree with my diagnosis?” he asked.

“There certainly appears to be a fracture, probably at the third cervical vertebra,” I agreed, “but whether he died as a result of—”

“Perfectly,” he agreed. “The autopsy will disclose that.” Then, to the girl: “Was this why you were so afraid to retrace your steps, *Mademoiselle*?”

“I didn’t do it — truly I didn’t!” she answered in a thick-tongued voice. “He was alive — alive and laughing, when I ran away. The last thing I heard as I ran was his voice calling, ‘You won’t get far in this storm, sister. Come back when it gets too cold for you.’ Please, you must believe me!”

“H’m,” he snapped his flashlight off and climbed down from the running board. “I do believe you did not do it, *Mademoiselle*. You have not strength enough. But this is a

case for the coroner and the police. We must ask you to accompany us.”

“The police?” her voice was little more than a whisper, but freighted with as much fear as a scream. “Oh—no! You mustn’t have me arrested. I don’t know anything about it—” She choked on her denial and slumped against me, then slid to the snow unconscious.

“The typically feminine escape,” he murmured cynically. “Come, let us take her up, my friend. Here — so.” He grasped my wrists in his hands, forming a chair for the unconscious girl. “We shall bear her easier this way. She is no great weight.”

“That’s why I think she told the truth when she said she didn’t do it,” I replied as we trudged toward the exit of the Park. “She’s a frail little thing who could no more break a man’s neck than I could kick a hippopotamus’s ribs in.”

“True,” he agreed as he eased her dark head on his shoulder. “I think she tells the truth when she denies the actual killing, but someone killed him very thoroughly less than half an hour ago. It may well be that she knows more than she has told, and I propose to find out what she knows before we summon the police. If she is guilty she should suffer; if she is innocent it is our duty to protect her. *En tout cas* I propose to know the truth.”

Frail or not, the girl’s weight seemed to increase in geometrical progression as we trudged through the sticky snow. By the time we reached the Park gate I was thoroughly exhausted and the blinking lights of the taxi de Grandin hailed were like a lighthouse to a shipwrecked mariner to me.

We carried her into the house and laid her on the office couch, and while de Grandin poured a dose of aromatic ammonia in one glass and two ounces of sherry in another I unfastened her fur coat and laid it back. “I don’t believe we have a right to do this,” I began. “We’ve no official status, and no legal right to question her — good heavens!”

“*Comment*?” queried Jules de Grandin.

“Look here,” I ordered. “Her chest—” Beginning just below the inner extremity of her left clavicle and extending downward almost to the upper rondure of her left breast were three paralleling vertical incisions, superficial, little more than scratches, and deeper at beginning than at termination. They were about a half-inch from each other and their lips were roughened, the skin turned back like soil at the lips of a plough-furrow. Blood had run down them and dripped upon the bodice of her low-cut party frock, and the bodice itself had been torn and ripped so that the black lace of the bandeau that confined her rather slender bosom was exposed.

“*Morbleu*,” de Grandin bent across my shoulder to inspect

the scratches, “*Chose étrange!* If you did not know otherwise what would you say caused those wounds, Friend Trowbridge?”

I shook my head bewilderedly. “It’s past me. If they were smaller I’d say they’d been made by a cat—”

“*Tu parles, mon vieux* — you have said it. A cat and nothing else it was that made those scores in her so tender flesh, but what a cat! *Nom d’un pipe*, he must have been an ocelot at least, and yet—

“Ah, *Mademoiselle*, you waken?” he broke off as the girl’s lids fluttered. “That is good. Drink this.” He held the ammonia to her lips, and as she gulped it down regarded her with an unwinking stare. “You have not told us all, by any means,” he added as he handed her the sherry. “The young man lifts you — *non*, how do you say him — picks you up? Yes. When he has driven you into the *parc* he becomes forward. Yes. You leap from the *moteur* in outraged modesty and flee into the storm. Yes; certainly. So much you tell us; that much we know. But—” his eyes hardened and his voice grew cold — “you have not told us how your *toilette* became torn, nor how you suffered those wounds on your thorax. No, not at all. Our eyes and our experience say those wounds were inflicted by a cat — a very large, great cat, perhaps a panther or a wildcat. Our reason rejects the hypothesis. Yet,” he raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug, “*les voilà* — there we are!”

The girl shrank back as from a blow. “You wouldn’t believe me!”

“*Tenez, Mademoiselle*, you would be astonished at my credulity. Tell us just what happened, if you please, and omit nothing.”

She sipped the sherry gratefully, seeming to be marshalling her thoughts. “All I told you was the truth, the absolutely honest truth,” she answered slowly, “only, I didn’t tell you everything. I was afraid you’d say that I was lying, drunk or crazy; maybe all three. As I said, I was standing on the corner waiting for a bus when the young man drove past and asked if I’d like a lift. He seemed so nice and pleasant, and I was so cold and wretched, that I accepted his offer. Even when he turned into the Park I wasn’t too much worried. I’ve been around and know how to take care of myself. But when he stopped the car and leaned toward me I became frightened. Terrified. Have you ever seen a human face become a beast’s—”

“*Mordieu*, you say it—”

“No, I don’t mean that his features actually changed form; it was their expression. His eyes seemed positively gleaming in the dark and his lips snarled back from his teeth like those of a dog or cat, and he made the most horrifying noises in his throat. Not quite a growl, and yet — oh, I can’t describe it, but it terrified me so—”

“And then?” de Grandin prompted softly as she paused and swallowed nervously.

“I hadn’t noticed, but he’d drawn the glove from his right hand, and when he stretched it toward me *it had become a panther’s paw!*”

“*Cordieu*, how do you say, *Mademoiselle* — *la patte d’une panthère?*”

“I mean just what I say, sir. Literally. It was black and furry, with great curving claws, and he swung it at me with a sort of dreadful playfulness — like a cat that torments a mouse with mock gentleness, you know. Each time he moved it, it came nearer, and suddenly I felt the claws rip through my dress, and in another moment I felt a quick pain in my chest. Then I seemed to come awake all of a sudden — I’d been positively paralyzed with fear — and jumped out of the car. Just like I told you in the Park, he didn’t try to chase me, just sat there laughing and told me I’d not get far in the storm. Then I met you, and when we went back he was—”

Again she paused, and de Grandin supplied the ending. “Entirely dead, *parbleu*, with his neck most neatly broken.”

“Yes, sir. You do believe me, don’t you?” Her voice was piteous, but the big dark eyes she raised to his were even more so.

He tweaked the ends of his small wheat-blond mustache. “Perhaps I am a fool, *Mademoiselle*, but I believe you. However, it are more than barely possible the police would not share my *naïveté*. Accordingly, we shall say nothing to them of your part in this unfortunate affair. But since they must be apprised of the killing, I shall tend your hurts while Dr. Trowbridge calls them to impart the information.” He handed me a slip of paper with a number scribbled on it. “That is the number of the dead man’s car, Friend Trowbridge. Be kind enough to ask the good Costello to compare it with the license lists and tell us who the owner was and where he resided.”

“Costello speakin’,” came the well-known heavy voice when I had put my call through to headquarters. “That you, Dr. Trowbridge, sor? I wuz jist about to ring your house. What’s cookin’?”

“I’m not quite certain,” I replied. “Dr. de Grandin and I just ran across what seems to be a murder in Soldiers’ Park—”

“Howly jumpin’ Jehoshaphat, another? It’s nuts I’m goin’, sor; completely nuts, as th’ felley says. That’s the fourth one tonight, an’ I’m gittin’ so I dassen’t pick th’ tellyphone up for fear they’ll tell me there’s another. How’d your man git bumped off?”

“I’m not quite sure, but it looks like a broken neck—”

“It *looks* like it?” he roared. “Bedad, ye know right well

'tis nothin' else, sor! All their necks wuz broke. Everybody's neck is broke. I wish to Howly Patrick that me own wuz broke so's I didn't need to hear about these blokes wid broken necks, so I do! What'd ye say his number wuz? Thank ye. I'll be afther checkin' it wid th' files, an' be wid ye in ten minutes, more or less. Meantime I'll send a prowl car to pick up the auto an' th' body in th' Park."

I heard the surgery door close softly as I put the telephone down, and in a moment Jules de Grandin came into the office. "I painted her injuries with mercurochrome," he informed me. "They were superficial and showed no sign of sepsis, but I am puzzled. Yes, of course."

"Why 'of course'?" I demanded.

"Because they bore every evidence of large cat's claw-marks. Their edges were irregular, owing to the fact the skin had been forced back as the claws ripped through it, but a microscopic examination failed to disclose any foreign particles. This should not be. As you know, claws of animals, especially those of the cat family, are markedly concave on their under sides, and since the beast does not retract them completely when he walks a certain amount of foreign matter collects in the grooves. That is why a scratch-wound from a lion or leopard, or even a domestic pussy-cat, is always more or less septic. Hers were not. My friend, it was a most peculiar cat that gave her those scratches."

"Peculiar? I should say it was," I agreed. "I heard her tell you that his hand had changed into a panther's paw. You don't believe that gamine, do you? He probably made several passes at her with his bare hand, tore her dress and scratched her accidentally—"

"*Non*, that he did not, my friend. I did not begin to practice medicine last week, or even week before. I am too familiar with the marks of human nails to be mistaken. I do not say his hand turned to a paw; it is too early yet to affirm anything, but this I know. Those scratches on her thorax were not made by human nails. Moreover—"

"Where is she now?" I interrupted.

"Upon her homeward way, one hopes. I let her from the surgery door and went with her to the curb, where I stopped a taxi and put her into it—"

"But Costello will want to question her—"

"You did not tell him she was here?"

"No, but—"

"*Très bon*. That is good; that is entirely excellent. We shall not have her involved in the scandal. If it should transpire that we need her I know where to find her. Yes. I made her give me her address and verified it in the 'phone book before I released her. Meanwhile, what the good Costello does not know will do no harm to either him or Mademoiselle Upchurch. And so—"

The furious ringing of the front doorbell cut him short and in a minute Detective Lieutenant Costello stamped in, snow glinting on his overcoat and hat, and a most unhappy expression on his broad and usually good-natured face. "Good evenin', sors," he greeted as he hung his outside garments on the hall tree. "So it's another one o' those here broken neck murders ye'd be afther tellin' me about?"

"It is, indeed, my old one," answered Jules de Grandin with a grin. "You have the name and address of the one we found all killed to death in the Park?"

"Here 'tis, sor. John Percy Singletary, 1652 Atwater Drive, an'—"

"One moment, if you please," de Grandin hurried to the library and came back with a copy of *Who's Who*. "Ah, here is his *dossier*: 'Singletary, John Percy. Born Fairfield County, Massachusetts, July 16, 1917. Son George Angus and Martha Perry. Educated private schools and Harvard College; moved to Harrisonville, N.J., 1937; served in U. S. Army, CIB Theatre, 1943-44. Honorably discharged, CDD, 1945. Clubs, Lotus, Plumb Blossom, Explorers. Address, 1652 Atwater Drive, Harrisonville, N.J.' One sees, but dimly."

"What is it one sees, sor, dim or clear? From what ye've read I'd say this felley wuz one o' them rich willie-bhoys wid a lot more money than brains an' nothin' much to do but raise hell. His record shows he wuz run in a dozen times for speedin'. Why they didn't take his license up is more'n I can understand. I'm not weepin' any salty tears about his goin'. It's a dam' good riddance, if ye asks me, but — who kilt him? Who the' hell kilt him, an' why?"

De Grandin motioned toward the siphon and decanter. "Pour yourself a drink, my old and rare. The world will look much brighter when you have absorbed it. Meanwhile give me the names of those other three young men who were so unfortunate as to have their necks broken. Thank you," as Costello handed him the memorandum, "now, let us see—" He ruffled through the *Who's Who*, and, "*Dieu des porcs de Dieu des porcs de Dieu des cochons!*" he swore as he closed the book. '*Pas possible?*'"

"What's that, sor?"

"The *dossiers* of these so unfortunate young men, they are almost identical. The young Monsieur Singletary, whom we found defunct in the Park, Messieurs George William Cherry, Francis Agnew Marlow and Jonathan Smith Goforth were all about the same age and went to the same schools. Most likely they were classmates. Three of them served in the United States Army, one with the British, but all in the same theatre of operations, China-Burma-India, and at the same time. The manner of their several deaths was identical, the time almost the same. *Très bon*. What does it mean?"

"O.K., sor. I'll bite — hard. What does it mean?"

The little Frenchman shrugged. “*Hèlas*, I do not know. But there is more — much more — than meets the casual glance in this identity. Me, I shall think upon the matter, I shall make appropriate investigations. Already there begins to be a seeming pattern in the case. Consider, if you please. What do we know of them?” He leveled a forefinger like a pistol at Costello: “Were they killed because they were wealthy? Possibly, but not probably. Because they went to Harvard College? I have seen alumni of that institution I could gladly slay, but in this instance I doubt their *alma mater* has much bearing on the time and manner of their deaths. It might be possible they were killed because of military service, but that, I think, is merely incidental. *Très bon*. It would appear that there is still another factor. What is it?”

“I know th’ answer to that one, sor. It’s who kilt ’em, an’ why?”

“It is, indeed, my friend. Tell me of their deaths if you will be so kind.”

Costello checked the mortuary items off on thick fingers. “Young Cherry wuz found dead in th’ front yard o’ his house. He’d been out to a party an’ come home ’bout ten o’clock. Logan, th’ policeman on th’ beat, seen ’im layin’ in th’ yard an’ thought he wuz out cold until he took a closer look. Marlow lives at th’ Lotus Club, to which, as ye wuz afther sayin’, all of ’em belongs. He wuz found dead in bed when one o’ his friends called for him shortly afther eight o’clock tonight. Goforth wuz kilt — leastwise he wuz found dead — in th’ gents’ washroom o’ th’ Acme Theatre. All of ’em has broken necks, an’ there’s no marks on any of ’em. No finger bruises nor traces of a garrote. They hadn’t got no business to be dead accordin’ to th’ book, but they’re all dead as mutton, just th’ same.”

The Frenchman nodded. “Who was the friend who found young Monsieur Marlow murdered in his bed?”

“Felley be th’ name o’ Ambergrast. Lives on th’ same floor o’ th’ clubhouse. Went to call ’im to go out to some brawl in New York, an’ found him dead as yesterday’s newspaper.”

“One sees. Let us go all quickly and consult this Monsieur Ambergrast. It may be he can tell us something. It may be he, too, is among the list of those elected to have broken necks. Yes. Certainly.”

Wilfred Bailey Ambergrast, Jr., seemed typical of his class. A rather pallid young person, not necessarily a vicious sort, but obviously the much-pampered son of a rich father. He was, as Jules de Grandin later said, “one of those persons of whom a false impression may be produced if you attempt to describe him at all.”

He was plainly unnerved by his friend’s death and not

inclined to talk. “I can’t imagine who killed Tubby, or why,” he told us, staring moodily into his highball glass. “All I know I’ve told the police already. When I went to call him about eight o’clock this evening I found him lying half in, half out of bed.” He paused, took a long swallow from his glass and finished, “He was dead. His mouth was open and his eyes staring — God, it was awful!”

“*Monsieur*,” de Grandin looked at him with his unwinking cat-stare, “there would not be a possible connection between your friends’ deaths and your military service — in India or Burma, by example?”

“Eh?”

“*Précisément*. One understands you were attached to the Air Corps, not as flyers, but as meteorologists. In such employment you had leisure to visit certain little-known and unfrequented places, to mingle with those better left alone—”

Young Ambergrast looked up quickly. “How’d you guess it?” he demanded.

“I do not guess, *Monsieur*. I am Jules de Grandin. My business is to know things, especially things which I am not supposed to know. *Bien*. Now, where was it you made the acquaintance of—” he paused with lifted brows, inviting the young man to complete the sentence.

The boy nodded sulkily. “Since you know so much already you might as well get filled in on the rest. Tubby Goforth, Bill Cherry and Jack Singletary were stationed with me near Gontur. Frank Marlow was with the British — his father was a Canadian — but stationed near enough to us so we could get together when we had a few days’ leave. One day Jack told us there was something stirring at Stuartpuram. Sort o’ camp meetin’ of the Criminal Tribes who make their headquarters there. We took a *garry* over and got there after dark. The natives were marchin’ round and round a big mud-hut they called a temple, wavin’ torches and singin’ *mantras* to Bogiri, which is one of the avatars of Kali. While we were watchin’ the procession an old goof came siddlin’ up to us, and offered to sneak us into the temple for a rupee apiece. We took him up and he led us through a back way to a little room just back of a big mud image of the goddess.

“I don’t know just what we’d expected to see, but what we saw was disappointing. We’d been certain there’d be women there — *nautchnis* and that sort o’ thing; maybe some such goin’s-on as are carved on the walls of the Black Pagoda at Kanarak. Instead they were all men, and a lousy lot of crow-bait, too. One of ’em who seemed to be some sort of priest got up and harangued the meetin’ in Hindustani, which we couldn’t understand, of course, and presently he passed out what looked like a lot o’ black fur mittens to the congregation. After that the meetin’ broke up and we were just about to leave when old Whiskers who had passed us

into the temple showed up again. His English wasn't any too good, but finally we understood he was offerin' to sell us mittens like those we'd seen distributed. 'What good are they?' Jack wanted to know, and the old sinner laughed until we thought he'd have a spell of asthma. 'You like make yum-yum love to brown gal?' he asked, and when Jack nodded he laughed even more wheezily. 'You wear thesee glove an' show heem to brown gal, you not have trouble makin' yum-yum,' he promised. 'You geeve gal little scratch with heem and all is like you want.' So each of us bought a mitten for three rupees.

"When we examined 'em in the light we saw they were made of some sort of black fur and fitted with three claws made of bent horseshoe nails. How they'd operate as talismans in love-makin' we could not imagine, but next evenin' Tubby tried it, and it worked. He'd had a case on a Parsee girl for some time, but she'd stood him off. They're the aristocrats of India, those Parsees. Stand-offish as the devil. Most of 'em are rich and you can't buy or bribe 'em, and those who haven't money have enough pride to make up for it. So Tubby'd got just nowhere with the lady till the evenin' after we'd bought the mittens. He slipped the glove on his right hand and growled at her and scratched her lightly on the arm with it. It worked like magic, he told us. She was meek as Moses all evenin', and didn't seem to have a single 'No' in her vocabulary."

The little Frenchman nodded. "You have an explanation for this so strange phenomenon, *Monsieur*?"

"Well, sort of. In a few days we heard rumors of people — all sorts, men, women and children — bein' found in out of the way places and sometimes on the highway, all clawed up as if they'd been attacked by leopards. It had the police buffaloed, for nothing like it had been known before. The way we figured it was that the Crims had taken to these steel-clawed cat's-paws in place of their usual stranglin' towel, and had the population terrified, so when the girls saw our gloves and felt the scrape of the claws they figured we were members of the Criminal Tribes — you never know who is and who isn't mixed up with them, you know. They've got more disguises than Lon Chancy ever had; so the girls played safe by not antagonizin' us."

"One sees. And the estimable old scoundrel who sold you these cat's-paws?"

"Two days later he turned up strangled to death at the outskirts of his village. We assumed someone heard that he'd shown signs of sudden wealth — you know, he'd taken sixteen rupees from us, and that's a fortune to the average Indian peasant — and he'd been killed for it. I never heard of those birds turnin' on each other, though. Funny, ain't it?"

"Very funny. Very funny, indeed, *Monsieur*. But I doubt

that the old gentleman or your four friends found much humor in the situation."

"My four friends? D'ye mean that Jack and Frank—"

"Precisely, *Monsieur*. Of those who visited the temple that night and bought the cat's-paws from the old man, only you survive."

"But, good Lord, man; that means that maybe they're on my trail, too!"

"Unless I am much more mistaken than I think, you have stated the equation most exactly, *Monsieur*. Now, will you be good enough to show us Monsieur Marlow's room?"

"Humph," Costello growled as we entered the small neat bedroom. "It's jist like I wuz afther tellin' ye, sor. Th' felley as did this must ha' been a bird or sumpin'." He flung the window up and pointed. "We're up two flights o' stairs, a good eighteen foot from th' ground. Anybody who went out that winder would ha' had to have a parryshoot or wings or sumpin', an' as for gittin' in — how'd he make it? There's no drain pipe near th' winder for him to climb, an he couldn't ha' stood a ladder up against th' wall. Ye don't take ladders through th' streets widout attractin' attention, ye know. O' course, he might ha' lowered hisself from th' roof wid a rope, but how'd he git up there to do it? Th' lobby downstairs is full o' flunkies, an' guests an' members are passin' back an' forth all th' time. Since there's no adjoinin' buildin' he couldn't ha' com across th' roofs—"

"It is, as you have said, a mystery, my friend," de Grandin agreed, "but we are presently more concerned with who did these so strange murders than how he managed ingress to or egress from this room. It might be that — *mordieu*, I have the thought, I have the inspiration, me!"

"Sure, have ye, now, sor?" asked Costello mildly. "Maybe, jist for old times' sake ye'd be afther lettin' us in on it?"

"Assuredly, *mon ami, pourquoi pas?* Let us consult our friend Ram Chitra Das. He can tell us more in half an hour than we can guess in twenty-four. Await me here. I rush, I fly to telephone him."

Five minutes later he returned and beckoned to us. "We are in luck, *mes amis* Monsieur and Madame Das have just returned from the opera and not yet gone to bed. They will wait up for us. Come let us hasten to them. Meanwhile," he took Costello by the arm, led him a little way apart and whispered to him earnestly.

"O.K., sor," I heard the detective agree. "I'll do it, but it's most irreg'lar. They'll spring him before daylight."

"That will be time enough," de Grandin answered. "Go telephone headquarters and make haste; we have little time to lose."

"What was all the whispering about?" I asked as we set

out for New York. "What would be so irregular, and whom will they 'spring'?"

"The young Monsieur Ambergrast," de Grandin answered. "They get into locked rooms whose windows are entirely inaccessible, those ones. *Ha*, but I do not think that they can penetrate a jail. No, even they would find that difficult. So, since we cannot take the young man with us and dare not leave him in his room, we shall have him arrested as a material witness and lodge him safely in the *bastille* for a few hours. Of course he will obtain bail, but in the meantime we shall not have him on our conscience. No. Certainly. Quite not."

"Hullo, there, glad to see you!" Ram Chitra Das greeted as we trooped up the stairs to his second story walkup apartment in East Eighty-Sixth Street. "How are you, Dr. Trowbridge? Glad to meet you, Lieutenant Costello." He shook hands cordially and ushered us into a room which might have served as setting for a more than usually elaborate presentation of the Arabian Nights. The walls were eggshell white and hung with rugs as gorgeous as the colors of a hashish eater's dreams, across the floor of polished yellow pine were strewn the pelts of leopards, mountain wolves with platinum-hued fur, and, by the couch against the farther wall a tiger skin of vivid ebony and gold was laid. The place was redolent with a mixture of exotic scents, the fragrance of flowers, applewood burning in the fireplace and cigarette smoke.

In his dinner clothes and spotless linen our host looked anything but Oriental. He might have been a Spaniard or Italian with his sleek black hair, alert dark eyes and small, regular features, and his accent was decidedly reminiscent of Oxford.

The woman who rose from the couch and came forward to greet us was positively breath-taking in her loveliness. Tall, slender, rather flat-chested, she moved with a grace that seemed more a flowing than a walk, as if she had been wafted by an unfelt, silent breeze. Her skin was an incredibly beautiful shade of pale gold, smooth and iridescent, her hair, demurely parted in the middle and gathered in a great loose knot at the nape of her neck, was a dull black cloud. But it was the strange, exotic molding of her features that held our gaze. Her high forehead continued downward to her nose without the faintest indication of a curve — the blood of Alexander's Grecian conquerors of India must have flowed in her veins — and beneath thin, highly arched brows her eyes were pools of deep moss-agate green. Her mouth was wide, her lips thin lines of scarlet. She wore an evening dress of dull white silk cut with classic Greek simplicity and girdled at the waist with a cord of silver. About her right arm just above the elbow was a wide bracelet of platinum set

with emerald and rubies, and in her ears were emerald studs that picked up and accentuated the green of her eyes. Her whole appearance was one of superb, lithe grace.

"My dear," our host bowed formally as he presented us in turn, "Dr. de Grandin, Dr. Trowbridge, Lieutenant Costello. Gentlemen, my wife, Nairini, who but for a shockingly poor choice of husbands might now be Maharanee of Khandawah."

"*Tiens, Madame*," de Grandin murmured, as he raised her slim jeweled fingers to his lips, "in India or Iceland, Nepal or New York, you would be nothing less than queen!"

Her great eyes dwelt on him in green abstraction for a moment, then a smile came into them, and teeth like pearls showed between scarlet lips: I never saw a woman who did not smile at Jules de Grandin. "*Merci, Monsieur*," she murmured in a voice so deeply musical that it reminded me of the cooing of doves, "*vous me faites honneur!*"

"And now," Ram Chitra Das demanded as we seated ourselves, "what seems to be the matter? From your rather hurried message I gathered that you suspect Indian skullduggery of some sort?"

"Indeed, my friend, you have entirely right," de Grandin nodded solemnly. "Consider what we know and what we suspect, then see if you can add the key-word to our enigma."

The Indian made no comment as de Grandin outlined our problem, then, as the small Frenchman halted: "I think that your suspicions are well founded. These little stinkers stumbled onto something they had no business gettin' mixed up with, and the penalty they've been called upon to pay might have been foreseen by anybody who knows India and the Indians.

"You know, I suppose, that the Criminal Tribes of India number almost ten million members. They aren't just ordinary thieves and murderers and pickpockets; they're literally born criminals, just as you Americans are born Protestants or Catholics or Democrats or Republicans. Every child among them is hereditarily a criminal and is as such in the records of the Indian police. Stealin', murderin' and other criminal activity is as much a religious duty with them as giving alms to the poor is to the Jew, Christian or Moslem, and to fail in a career of crime is to lose caste.

"Loss of caste is serious to a Hindu. Something like excommunication to a medieval Christian — only more so. Spiritually it dooms him to countless reincarnations through unnumbered ages; physically it has drawbacks, too. If I were to return to my uncle's palace in Nepal I'd find myself a real nonentity. No servant would wait on me, no tradesman would sell me merchandise, no one but scavengers and street sweepers would dare speak to me. As for Nairini, who ran

away from her princely father to marry a casteless vagabond, if she went back they'd probably sew her up in a sack and dump her in the most convenient river.

"So much for that. You know, of course, that Hindu workmen have gone nearly everywhere — China, the Dutch Indies, and, of course, the British colonies in Africa. It appears some of these 'Crims,' as they are familiarly but not affectionately known to the Indian police, gravitated to Sierra Leone some time ago, and picked up a few tricks from the Leopard Men of the Protectorate and adjacent Liberia. Some of them went back to Mother India and introduced the innovation of the 'cat's-paw' — a fur glove studded with steel claws — to their contemporaries. I heard that there had been an outbreak of killin's in which the victims had apparently been mauled by leopards in the Madras Presidency a couple of years ago. That seems to be where these young men fit in. Unquestionably they visited a gatherin' of the Criminal Tribesmen when 'cat's-paws' were bein' distributed, and the old scoundrel who conducted them decided to turn a dishonest rupee by sellin' them the devilish paraphernalia.

"You remember what happened to him. Young Ambergrast thought it odd that Criminal Tribesmen should have turned on one of their fellows. It was only to have been expected. The fellow had, to all intents sold a lodge secret, and secret societies resent that sort of thing, some more vigorously than others. It seems that this particular renegade didn't live long to enjoy his perfidious gains.

"The *roomal* — the Thugs' stranglin' towel, you know — did for him, but there remained the matter of the young outlanders to be settled. By buyin' these 'cat's-paws' and employin' them not for legitimate crimes, but to terrorize unwillin' native girls into compliance, these young white men had put an affront on the whole criminal clan. They'd made the Crims 'lose face.' Loss of face is almost as bad as loss of caste in the East, and something drastic had to be done about it. Accordingly—" He raised his hands as if he looped a cord, then drew them together with a snapping motion. "*Exeunt omnes*, as Shakespearian stage directions say."

"Then ye think, sor," Costello began, but Das forestalled him.

"I'm almost sure of it, Lieutenant. The man or men entrusted with the job of giving these youngsters the happy dispatch is probably some member of the Criminal Tribes who has lost caste, and must regain it by their murder. He or they will stop at nothing, and if there are several of them killing, some will not deter the others, for they believe implicitly that the surest, quickest route to Paradise is to be killed while in the commission of a crime, just as they lose caste by being caught."

"An' have ye anny idee how th' thafe o' th' wor-rld gained entrance to th' pore young felley's room, sir? It looked to me as if 'twould take a bir-rd to break into it, or git out; but as ye say, they are a clever lot and may know some tricks we ain't hep to."

"I have a very definite idea, Lieutenant," Ram Chitra Das replied. "Where's Ambergrast at present?"

"In jail, an' safe, we hope."

"He's safer there than anywhere, but if we want to catch our birds we'll have to bait our trap. D'ye think he's managed to raise bail by this time?"

"I dunno, sor, but I'll tellyphone if ye'd like."

"That might be a good idea. Tell them to detain him on any sort of pretext till they hear from you, then send him back to his rooms in a squad car."

Ram Chitra Das, de Grandin and I crouched in an angle of the wall that ran along the alley back of the Lotus Club. The numbing cold gnawed at our bones like a starved dog, and as the sky began to lighten faintly in the east a sharp wind lent an extra sting to the air. "*Mille douleurs*," the little Frenchman murmured miserably, "one little hour more of this and Jules de Grandin is a stiffening corpse, *pardieu!*"

"Quiet, old thing!" Ram Chitra Das whispered. "We've invested so much time and discomfort already, it would be a shame to let him slip past us now. He's almost sure to come. Those johnnies waste no time and nearly always work in darkness. D'ye think Costello's on the job inside?"

"I left him and a plainclothes man in the room next to Ambergrast's," I answered. "They've left their door on a crack, and nothing bigger than a mouse can creep past them. If there's a squeak from Ambergrast's room they'll—"

"If the fellow we're expectin' gets into that room they'll hear no squeak," Ram Chitra Das broke in grimly. "Those Bagrees can clip an earring from a sleeping woman's head and never make her miss a snore, and when it comes to usin' the *roomal* — they can kill a man as quickly as a bullet, almost, and with no more noise than a fly walking on the ceiling. I've seen some of their work, and — by George, I think we're havin' company!"

Stepping noiselessly and sure-footedly as a cat on the frozen slush, a man was coming toward us. He was an undersized, emaciated fellow bundled in an overcoat much too large for him, and with a derby hat at least three sizes too big thrust incongruously down on his head. As nearly as I could determine he was dark-skinned, but I was certain that he was no Negro. For a moment he paused like a hound at fault, scanning the windows in the second story of the clubhouse, then walked unerringly to a spot beneath the partly opened window of the room where Ambergrast slept.

“Watch this,” Ram Chitra Das commanded in an almost soundless whisper. “If it’s what I think it’ll be, it’s goin’ to be good.”

The man came to a halt, drew a small flask from his pocket and uncorked it, letting some of its contents spill on the ground. “That’s the libation,” Das murmured. “They always pour a little out to Bhowanee as an offerin’ before they drink the sacred *mhowa* as a part of ceremonial murder.”

The fellow drained the contents of the flask and put the empty bottle in his pocket then, unconcernedly as a lad about to go swimming, stripped off his overcoat, his sweater, trousers and shoes, and stood in the raw winter wind unclothed save for a loin-cloth and his absurd derby. This was last of all to come off, and we saw he wore a close-wrapped turban of soiled white cloth under it.

“*Mordieu*, he mortifies the flesh, that one,” de Grandin whispered, but checked on a sharp breath as the dark-skinned man unwound a length of rope from his waist, coiled it on the frozen snow at his feet and bent above it, making swift, cryptic passes with his hands.

I knew I did not see it — yet there it was. Slowly, like a snake that wakes from torpor, the rope seemed to come alive. Its end stirred, twitched, rose a few inches, fell back to the ground, then reared once more, this time remaining up. Then inch by stealthy inch it rose, seeming to feel its way cautiously, until it stood as straight and stiff as a pole, one end upon the frozen ground the other less than a foot from Ambergrast’s window.

“*Grand Dieu des porcs*, it cannot be!” de Grandin whispered incredulously. “Me, I have heard of that rope trick a thousand times, but—”

“Seein’ is believin’, old chap,” Ram Chitra Das cut in with a low chuckle. “You’ve heard old, seasoned travelers say the rope trick is a fake and can’t really be done — but there it is, for you to make a note of in your diary.”

The little dark man had begun to climb the upright rope. Agilely as a monkey he went up hand over hand, and it seemed to me his toes were as prehensile as a monkey’s too, for instead of trying to twist his ankles in the cord to brace himself he grasped it with his feet.

He was opposite the partly opened window and was loosening the towel bound about his waist above the loin-cloth when Das stepped quickly forward, both hands raised and shouting, “*Darwaza bundo!*” in a strident voice.

The effect was electrical. The rope collapsed like a punctured balloon, and the man grasping it was hurled to the ice-covered bricks with crushing force. Half-way between the window and the ground he twisted in the air, both arms outspread, hands clutching futilely at nothingness, mouth squared in helpless, hopeless terror, turned end over end and

struck the icy pavement shoulders first.

“Grab him!” Ram Chitra Das shouted as he leaped upon the fallen body, snatched the towel from the man’s hand and began to knot it into a fetter. “Don’t bother,” he added disgustedly, as he rose and dusted snow from his knees. “He’s out cold as yesterday’s kipper.”

“And that is most indubitably that,” Ram Chitra Das informed us as we faced each other over coffee and sandwiches in the study. “I feared there might be several of ’em, but Sookdee Singh — our little Bagree playmate — tells me he did all those killin’s by his naughty little self. Quite an enterprisin’ young chap, I’d say.”

“Can you put credence in his word?” de Grandin asked.

“Ordinarily, no. This time, yes. A Bagree thinks no more of lyin’ than he does of breathin’, but when he dips his hand in blood and says, ‘May Bhowanee’s wrath consume me utterly if I tell not the truth,’ you can believe him. I borrowed a sponge from the hospital operatin’ room and made the beggar smear his finger in the blood and swear to tell the truth before I’d make him any promises.

“But what could ye promise him, sor?” Costello demanded. “We’ve got dead wood on ’im. He’ll take th’ rap for murther, sure as shootin’ —”

“I’m afraid not, Lieutenant. He was pretty badly smashed up in his fall, a fractured rib went through his lung, and the doctor at the hospital tells me he can’t last the day. That gave me my hold on him.”

“I don’t see how—” Costello began, but the Indian continued with a smile.

“Those Criminal Tribesmen are devout Hindus, although the ethics of their devotion may be open to question. However, they share one thing with their more honest co-religionists. They feel it a disgrace to be buried, cremation bein’ the only honorable method of disposin’ of their bodies. If their ashes are committed to the Ganges they are just that much nearer heaven — somethin’ like a Christian’s bein’ buried in consecrated ground, you know.

“That’s where I got my leverage. I promised him that if he told the truth and the whole truth — if he ‘came clean’, I believe is the way you Americans would put it — I’d see his body was cremated and his ashes shipped to India to be thrown in the Ganges. I couldn’t have offered him any greater inducement.”

“If it’s not a trade secret, would you mind telling me what it was you shouted to make that rope collapse?” I asked.

“Not at all. I said ‘*Darwaza bundo!*’ which means merely ‘Shut the door!’ in Hindustani. It didn’t really matter what I said you know. In order to perform his tricks an adept has to concentrate his whole mind on them, and the slightest deviation — even for a second — breaks the charm. The

shock of hearing himself suddenly addressed in his native tongue was so great that it diverted his attention. Only for a split-second, of course, but that was enough. Once the rope went soft, there was nothin' he could do about it till he had it coiled upon the ground once more and started his charm from the beginnin'."

"*Mon brave!*" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "My old and peerless one, *mon homme sensé*. *Parbleu*, I damn think next to Jules de Grandin you are the cleverest man alive! Come, let us drink to that!"

Lottë

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,” the orchestra leader stepped to the edge of his dais, “Pablo and Francesca.” On the heels of his announcement brass and woodwinds sounded a long chord, the hot erotic rhythm of a rumba started and a young man and woman glided out upon the dance floor of the Gold Room.

Jules de Grandin nibbled at a morsel of pink peppermint, washed it down with a sip of black coffee and wiped his lips with a quick brushing motion, taking care not to disturb a blond hair of his trimly-waxed mustache. “Come, Friend Trowbridge, if you are finished let us call for *l’addition* and depart,” he suggested. “Me, I have dined most excellently well, but this—” he glanced at the dancers circling on the polished oak — “*cela m’ennuie*. I am bored, me.”

I nodded sympathetically. When one is on the shadowed side of fifty and hasn’t danced in almost thirty years the tortions of a dance team leave him rather cold. Besides, the curtain at the Cartaret would rise in twenty minutes and a decent respect for the comfort of others demanded we be in our seats when the house lights lowered. “Right with you,” I agreed. “Soon as we can get that waiter’s eye—”

“*Grand Dieu des petits porcs verts!*” his exclamation slashed through my words. Some small bright object, a prism from the chandelier above the dance floor, I thought, had flashed down like a minuscule meteor and crashed like a missile against the sleekly pomaded hair of the male dancer.

With me at his heels the small Frenchman wove his way between the tables and slipped across the polished oak boards of the dance floor. The blow had been surprisingly heavy for so small a projectile, and the young man was unconscious when we reached him. “Do not make yourself uneasy, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin whispered to his distraught partner. “We are physicians. We shall give him the assistance. He cannot be hurt badly—

“*Hola, mon brave*,” he sank to his knees beside the young man. “You are making the recovery, no? Ah, that is good. That is very good, indeed!” as the youngster’s lids fluttered up and he attempted to rise. “*Non, restez tranquille*, you will be completely well in one small moment.” As a waiter passed he raised a finger. “A little brandy, if you please, and some ice water.”

“Lottë,” the patient whispered, then, recovering his poise, “What happened? Did I fall—”

“You did, indeed, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin assured as he held the pony of cognac to the young man’s lips, then dipped the napkin in the bowl of ice water and laid the cold

compress on the knot already forming over the boy’s right temporal bone. “So, rest easily a moment.” Methodically he took the patient’s pulse, pursed his lips, then nodded shortly. “No bones are broken, nor is the skin ruptured. I would not suggest that you dance again tonight, but if you continue to improve—”

Mr. Melton, the hotel manager, had elbowed his way through the circling crowd. “What happened?” he demanded. “Was he drunk? I won’t have drinkin’ among the help on duty or off. Get your traps packed and get out!” he ordered the young dancer curtly.

“*Monsieur*, I should not be too hasty were I in your most undoubtlessly tight shoes,” de Grandin advised coldly. “The young man was stricken by a pendant falling from the chandelier. Dr. Trowbridge and I both saw it, and if he should decide to take legal action—”

“Oh, there won’t be any trouble,” Melton interrupted hastily. “Everything will be all right. Feel up to finishing the act, Paul?”

“Yeh, I — I guess so,” answered the young man as he got to his feet a little unsteadily, shook his head like a fighter who has taken a heavy punch, and smiled reassuringly at his partner.

“*Très bien*,” de Grandin nodded. “I do not think that you have received much hurt, *Monsieur*, but if you are not well entirely in the morning you should see a physician. If—” he glanced coldly at Melton — “there should be complications with the hotel, do not hesitate to call on me for testimony.”

He handed a card to the young man, bowed formally to the girl and led the way from the dining room.

“Friend Trowbridge, it is that I am puzzled,” he confided as we drove toward the theatre.

“How’s that?” I answered.

“That young man, *Monsieur Pablo*. You did observe his injury, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

“Of course, it was a simple bruise of the right temporal region with moderate ecchymosis. Nothing serious, I’d say, though it was surprising that so light an object as a pendant from the chandelier could have caused so much injury. I’ve seen bruises like that made by clubs or blackjacks—”

“*Précisément*. You have right there, my friend. But did you see him take his hurt?”

“Now that you mention it, no. I saw the missile hurtle through the air and saw him stagger and fall, but—”

“*Exactement*. But did you note the relative positions of

Monsieur Pablo and the chandelier at the time?"

"No—o—"

"*Ah-ha!* That is enigma Number One. He was not under the fixture when he was struck. No. He was fifteen — possibly twenty — feet from it. The broken prism had to travel obliquely a distance of at least ten feet in order to strike him. What do you make from that, *hein?* Is it not against the laws of gravity?"

"You're sure?"

"But of course. Did not I see it?"

"It couldn't have been a strong draft—"

"*Mais non.* A wind sufficient to have hurled a bit of glass that distance, and with force enough to strike a man unconscious, would have to be of hurricane velocity."

"Ye-es. I suppose so."

"Indubitably. Moreover, when the so unfortunate young man revived from his swoon, what did he say?"

"I'm not sure, but it sounded like a woman's name — Lottë."

"You have entirely right, my old. And did it not seem to you he was frightened?"

"Well, now you speak of it, it did. But—"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. Now for enigma Number Two: The young man was unconscious from a sudden violent blow, *n'est-ce-pas?* That means he had sustained a shock, which as you know amounts to relaxation or abolition of the controlling influence the nervous system exercises over vital organic functions. Yes. Pulsation should have been slowed down, and respiration much retarded. But were they? Not at all, by damn it. *Au contraire*, they were very much accelerated. He was frightened, very badly frightened, that one."

"You may be right," I agreed as I jockeyed the car into the last remaining parking space before the theatre, — but it seems to me you're making an Alp out of an anthill."

"*Non,*" he muttered moodily as we paused in the kitchen for a goodnight snack, "I do not understand him, me."

"What the dickens are you maundering about?" I asked as I refilled his mug with beer. "At your confounded ghost-hunting again?"

"Not at all, by no means; quite the contrary," he denied, his mouth half full of cheese and biscuit, a foaming beer mug halfway to his lips. "This time I seek to dodge the specter, my friend. I wish to wipe my mind as blank as a dunce-schoolboy's slate, to dismiss all thought of the matter from my memory. But *hélas*, you know this Jules de Grandin. He annoys me. He is a very curious person. When a mystery presents itself it gnaws like a maggot at his brain, nor can he dislodge it till he has found its solution. *Ah bah,*" he shrugged his shoulders irritably. "I shall think of it no more.

Let the devil worry over it. Me, I have the craving for eight hours sleep, and if I wake before—"

The sharp, insistent clamor of the doorbell sawed through his words like an alarm clock shattering sleep, and I sighed in vexation as I glanced at my watch. "Half-past one, and some idiot with a bellyache comes for a dose of paregoric."

A girl was standing in the vestibule, a slim slip of a thing in lustrous furs with a pale face from which dark eyes looked, dilated and frightened. "Is Doctor — the French gentleman here?" she asked tremulously. "Étienne, the *mâitre d'hôtel* at the Gold Room said he knows about such things, and—"

"*Para servir á Vá. Señorita,*" broke in de Grandin in his best Spanish. In her changed costume, and with fright like a mask on her face, I had failed to recognize the girl, but as de Grandin spoke I realized she was the female member of the dance team we had seen at the Berkeley-York.

"Oh, sir," she knotted thin hands in a gesture of entreaty which somehow did not seem theatrical, "please help us! Étienne told us you know all about such things and — may I bring Paul in? He's waiting in the taxi."

For the first time I noticed a cab parked at the curb, and at de Grandin's nod she dashed across the porch and down the steps and front walk, the spool heels of her sling-back sandals clattering on the cement.

She leant into the cab's darkness a moment, then emerged slowly, helping a young man to climb from the machine, steadying him with both arms as he tottered drunkenly up the walk. "Let me," I offered, taking the unsteady man's free arm. "He must have had a greater shock than we'd supposed."

De Grandin seized the patient's other arm and motioned to the girl to precede us and open the consulting-room door. "So," he murmured as we eased the young man into an armchair. "That is good, *Señor.* Very good, indeed. Now, let us have a look — *que diable?*" With quick, practiced fingers he had felt the youngster's head, examining not only the discolored area on the right temple, but feeling for an evidence of skull-fracture or *contre-coup* lesion. "What is it, *Señor?* You seem in fair condition physically, yet—" Abruptly he lowered his hands, felt the boy's neck just below the hairline, then took the patient's right hand in his own. I noticed how the lad's slim fingers closed convulsively upon the Frenchman's, clinging to them as a drowning man might grasp at a twig. An interne could have diagnosed nervous exhaustion bordering on neurasthenia.

"Strychnine?" I suggested.

"Brandy," he corrected. "A large dose, if you please, at least four ounces, Friend Trowbridge. Five or six would be more better. Fear is gnawing at his nerves like a starved wolf. We must relax him, break his inhibitions down, before

we can determine what our treatment should be.”

I brought the cognac and de Grandin held the goblet to the patient’s mouth. “A little, so small sip,” he directed. “*Très bon*. Now another — and another. Let them prepare the way for that which follows. Now, all at once, *Señor*. Gulp him, swallow him. Down with him all!”

The patient made a face as if he had ingested raw quinine instead of old cognac, but his reaction to the liquor was almost instantaneous. The hands which had been tensely clasped on the chair arms relaxed gradually, color seeped into his pale cheeks, and the drawn lines round his mouth became a little slack.

De Grandin beamed with satisfaction. “*Esta mejor?*” he asked.

The young man looked at him and the ghost of a smile hovered on his lips. “You needn’t use that Spig talk to me, sir. I’m an American,” he answered.

“American? *Mon Dieu!* But your names—”

“Oh, that!” the girl broke in with the suspicion of a giggle. “Pablo and Francesca are just our stage names. We’re really Paul and Frances Fogarty.”

“Irish?”

“As Paddy’s pig, sir. Our accent — when we use it — is assumed for strictly business purposes, and is as phony as our stage names.”

The little Frenchman grinned delightedly. “*Parbleu*, you carry it off well, *mes amis*. One would swear you are from Argentina, or, perhaps Mexico.” He glanced appreciatively from one of them to the other.

They were, as he had said, extremely “South of the Border” in appearance. Paul Fogarty wore dinner clothes of extreme cut, trousers fitted snugly at the waist and hips with a series of vertical tucks and flowing to bell bottoms like those of a sailor, satin waistcoat drawn so tightly as to suggest a corset, and a jacket with sloping, close-fitting shoulders. His hair, worn rather long, was trained down his cheeks in sideburns and brushed straight back from the brow, plastered sleekly with pomade till it fitted his head like a skullcap of black patent leather.

The girl, too, was perfectly in character. Her hair was so intensely black it seemed to give off blue lights like a grackle’s throat and, defiant of the current fashion, it was cut short as a boy’s. Like a boy’s, too, it was parted far on the left side and plastered down with bandoline till it gleamed in the lamplight. Close-clipped mannish sideburns descended her cheeks before her ears and were rendered more conspicuous by the heavy pendants of green jade that dangled from the small pierced lobes almost to her shoulders. Her dull-black satin gown clung to her narrow figure with such sheath-tightness that it had to be slit at the sides to give her

room to step — and incidentally display slim, silk-smooth legs and miniature feet in high-arched sandals. The dress was long-sleeved and high-necked at the front, but left her back exposed almost down to the coccyx. The jade earrings and the synthetic emerald buckles of her sandals were her only ornaments, the carmine of her painted lips and the green lacquer on her toe and fingernails were the sole spots of color in her ensemble. She was not beautiful or even pretty. Her features were too small and too irregular, but she was seductive in a strange way. She had little animal appeal, but her slender, almost boyish body, pale, thin face and scarlet lips had an appeal at once attractive and almost terrifying, like that of the fabled sirens — Circe in a Paris frock, Medea with Rue de la Paix accessories.

“You are perhaps *Monsieur* and *Madame* Fogarty?” de Grandin asked, “or is it *Monsieur* and *Mademoiselle*?”

“*Monsieur* and *Madame*, if you want it that way,” the girl answered, as she gave him a languishing glance from dark eyes. Few women could resist de Grandin. “We’re husband and wife. That’s what’s the matter.”

“*Comment?*” he answered sharply. “The matter, *Madame*? Is it that you do not love each other?”

“No, sir, it’s not that. We love each other till it hurts, but—”

“*Ah-ha!* That twenty-times-accursed but! What is it, *Madame* Fogarty? Perhaps I can help you—”

“Did I say anything when I came out of it at the Gold Room?” young Fogarty cut in.

De Grandin turned to face him almost fiercely. “You did, indeed, *Monsieur*. You said, if I do not make the mistake, ‘Lottè’ I assumed at the time you called upon *Madame* your wife. A man does such things in the half light of returning consciousness sometimes.”

“That’s the answer,” Fogarty returned dryly. “I know it sounds as nutty as a pecan roll, but I’m — we’re both — convinced she’s at the bottom of the trouble. Étienne told us—”

“One moment, if you please,” de Grandin raised a slim white hand. “The estimable Étienne can wait. It is of yourselves I wish to know. Begin at the beginning if you please, *Monsieur*, and omit nothing. If we are to help you we must know all, and all does not imply a part, or even most, but everything. He dropped into a chair, lit a cigarette and crossed his knees, staring at our visitor like a cat at a rat-hole.

“Okay, sir, if you want my life history,” young Fogarty took a deep breath and an Irish grin broke through his carefully cultivated Latin exterior. “I’m a dancer; always been a dancer; never did anything else and never wanted to. Grampaw Donnally said that I was born with jingle-boxes in

both feet, and I guess he hit it right, for I've never seen the time when music didn't make me want to prance. Before I'd left kindergarten I could do an Irish jig as well as anyone, by the time I'd reached grade school I'd learned to imitate George M. Cohan, Frisco and Pat Rooney. I was on the program every time there was an entertainment at church or school, and by the time I'd reached fourteen I was copping prizes regularly at amateur nights in the vaudeville houses.

"But I was a lousy student, and nothing but the truant officers kept me in school till I was sixteen, then I ran away and shipped on a freighter for South America, jumped ship at Buenos Aires and hung around until I managed to get a job as bus boy in the Café 25 de Mayo. In six months I'd picked up enough Spanish to be promoted to waiter. One night I got the orchestra leader drunk and chiseled a dance job out of him.

"That started it. They billed me under the name of Pablo, as an exponent of *las Danzas de América del Norte*, and my act went over pretty well, especially my imitations of Frisco's soft-shoe routines. But I knew it couldn't last, so every *centavo* made above bare living expenses went into dancing lessons and I learned the works — tango, rumba, bolero, lulu-fardo, maxixe and seguidilla, as well as most of the folk dances. I even took some ballet instruction, but that, like fencing lessons, was more for poise than actual use. Within a year I spoke Argentine Spanish well enough to pass for a native — among foreigners — and had a spot in the floor show at El Centro. While I was working there a German vaudeville agent named Hanns Ewers saw me and offered me a job at the Café Zur Nekke in Berlin.

"It was there I met Lottë. I'd dropped into the Rixdorfer on my night off, thinking I might see some other act that would give me ideas, when she came on. I'd never seen anything like her. She was tall, tall as a tall man, slightly built, and with the small, cold, regular features that distinguish Saxon women from Prussians or Bavarians. In contrast to her cold, almost contemptuous face, her hair was flaming red. I don't mean russet or that shade of sepia we usually call red, but true flame-color, like molten copper in a crucible, and I knew instinctively that if she let it down it would reach to her knees. She had that white, almost transparent skin that sometimes goes with hair like that, and there was a bright, powdery dust of small gold freckles on her high cheekbones. Her eyes were a hot tortoise-shell, and in them I could see desire straining like a hound at the leash. There are people like that, you know. People to whom music, especially percussion, is intoxicating as an aphrodisiac, whose emotions almost burst the bounds of restraint when they dance. Lottë was one of them. She was drunk with the rhythm of the music, driven almost to frenzy by the movements of her own body.

"When she finished her turn, she saw me watching her and came over to my table. I don't know just how to describe it; it seemed as if we were two chemicals that needed only to be brought together to explode with a heat like a bursting atom bomb. A thrill that was as sharp as a pang of pain shot through me as she dropped into the chair opposite, it nearly lifted the hair on my head; I know it made me positively dizzy. It wasn't what you could call love at first sight; it wasn't love at all. It was something terrifying, like bewitchment, and I knew as I looked into her eyes she had it, too.

"For almost an hour we sat there drinking champagne mixed with cognac, and I don't believe in all that time either of us took his eyes off the other's. It was as if our gaze was magnetized. It wasn't that we didn't want to look away; we couldn't. When she finally rose to leave I followed her, walking like a drunken man, or one who has been hypnotized.

"Of course, we teamed up. Her contract at the Rixdorfer was about to finish the night I met her, and she joined me at the Café Zur Nekke."

Young Fogarty took a deep, trembling breath and shivered like a man on whom a sudden chilling wind has blown. "Have you ever been possessed, sir? I mean that literally. Most likely you haven't, so I can't hope to make you understand how utterly I became enslaved. Lottë dominated me as completely — more so — as she did her pet dachshund Fritz. To say that I had no more privacy than a goldfish would be understating it. I had to be with her constantly — every moment. Even when I went to shave or wash my hands I had to leave the bathroom door open that she might see me; I had to give up having my hair cut at the Adlon barber shop and have one of the male *coiffeurs* at the beauty shop she patronized cut it, so she could be with me, and watch me the whole time. If a woman, no matter how old, smiled at me or spoke she was vixenishly jealous; she even resented my exchanging a word with another man or a child, and had to be present while I talked our routines over with the bandleader.

"I couldn't stand it, no man could. It was worse than being in prison. It was like being sewn up in a strait-jacket and gradually strangled. I loved her — if you want to call the fierce, unreasoning enchantment I was under love — but at the same time I hated her, and the hate was growing stronger than the love.

"It wasn't long before she felt the same way about me. We'd be lying side by side, sometimes kissing, sometimes in each other's arms, sometimes only hand in hand, when suddenly she'd jump up, call me '*dumkopf*' or '*schlemmiel*' and give me a contemptuous kick, or spit on me and slap my

face. And when I'd leap up in a rage she'd fairly fling herself on me, twine both arms about me so I was helpless — for she was strong as a man in spite of her slenderness — and smother me with kisses.

“One of us surely would have killed the other if it had gone on much longer, but in 1940 the draft came and my number was one of the first called. ‘I have to go,’ I told her. ‘If I don’t I’ll be an outlaw.’

“She stormed and screamed hysterically, went to her knees before me. ‘Do anything you want with me,’ she begged. ‘Do you want to beat me? I’ll fetch the dog whip that I use on Fritz. Tear my skin with your teeth. Slash me with your razor — anything. Drink my blood; do whatever you care to, only don’t leave me. Let them take the others to make war on the Führer. Stay with me. We can fly together to the mountains where no one will ever find us. I’ll cook your food and wash your clothes and keep your house — be your servant, your slave — only don’t leave me, *liebchen!*’

“But this was my chance for escape, and I wasn’t letting it go by. ‘I’ve got to go,’ I repeated. ‘This is more than either — or both — of us, Lottë. It’s my country.’

“She threw her arms about my knees and pressed her cheeks against them, begging me to beat her, torture her, kill her, but not leave her, and when I finally managed to break free she fell face-forward on the floor and beat her forehead on it. The last I saw of her she lay full-length on the rug with her unbound red hair about her like a pool of blood, beating both fists on the carpet and screaming, ‘You shall not leave me, I’ll never let you go — never — never—*never!*’

“I was inducted as soon as I reached New York and went at once to training camp. Just before we sailed for England I met Frances at the USO. She was an entertainer, one of the best dancers I had ever seen, and when she heard I’d been a professional in civil life we were drawn together by our mutual interests.

“This time it was love, the real thing, not an unholy fascination.

“The entertainers weren’t allowed to date with soldiers, but she gave me her address, and we corresponded regularly. We were married the day after my discharge and formed a team, using the Spanish form of our names — Pablo and Francesca. Fran hasn’t been very well lately, and we’re planning a vacation as soon as we’ve saved enough. I was stone-broke after almost six years in the army, and it cost my separation pay plus the few war bonds I’d managed to accumulate to outfit us. Costumes are expensive and don’t wear very long.”

De Grandin nodded smiling. “I congratulate you on the thoroughness of your report, Monsieur Paul, but what of Fraulein Lottë? You said that you suspected her.”

“So I do, sir. Listen: I wanted to forget Lottë as I’d forget a bad dream, but she kept a constant stream of letters flowing to me till Pearl Harbor and our entrance into the war. They were all in the same tone, how she loved me, idolized me, worshiped me, how she counted every heartbeat till we were together again, and every one ended with, ‘You are mine and mine alone. I shall never let you go!’

“After we got in the war I lost touch with her, thank the Lord, and when I next heard of her it was through the Army scuttlebutt. The British had swooped down on Geirstein and caught the Jerries in the act of trying to liquidate three hundred prisoners before they could be freed to testify. From all accounts Geirstein was worse than either Buchenwald or Dachau, but like them it had both he- and she-devils in charge. The leader of the female *schwartzstaffelkorps* was a tall, red-headed woman said to be as beautiful as Helen of Troy and crueller than Countess Bathory. They laid more than two hundred deaths of helpless Jews and Poles and Czechs to her, but none of them had died outright, all died under torture supervised or actually inflicted by her. I was shocked but not too much surprised when I heard her name was Lottë Dalberg. Her father had been a *scharfrichter* or headsman, and I supposed she took naturally to the bloody work.

“She was tried and found guilty with the other members of the Geirstein staff. Two months ago we read she had been hanged.” Young Fogarty paused, swallowed twice and reached for the now-empty brandy glass.

“*Mais certainement*, but of course,” de Grandin volunteered and poured out a fresh potion of cognac. “And then?”

“Then it began. Fran and I were practicing a new routine. Come to think of it, it was the very day they hanged Lottë, but, of course, we didn’t know about that then. Suddenly the stool was jerked from under Tony. Anthony Nusbaum is pianist in the band at the Gold Room and plays for our rehearsals. It couldn’t have slipped. It was standing on a rug, not the bare floor, and Tony weighs at least two hundred pounds. If anything would hold that stool down as if it had been nailed he would, but there it was, halfway across the room, with Tony sitting on his fanny and looking surprised as a kid who’d just sat down on a pin put in his school seat.

“In a moment every pane of glass in the windows began rattling as if a gale were blowing, though we could see the trees dead still outside, and the light bulbs in the chandelier all popped. They didn’t go out, they burst and shattered, as if they’d been squeezed by an unseen hand.

“Fran was wearing rayon slacks with deep cuffs for practice, and had caught her heel in one of them, giving it a nasty rip. She’d had her sewing basket out to mend the tear and left a needle sticking in the spool of thread and there were half a dozen more in a paper packet. Not loose, but

stuck in the black paper, the way they come, you know. Just as the light bulbs popped those needles detached themselves and came darting through the air, every one of 'em sticking in my face. Six of 'em stuck half an inch into my cheeks and the threaded one thrust itself into my nose, trailing half a yard of linen string. You won't believe that, I know, but it's absolutely true."

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin assured him, "I believe you implicitly. Proceed with your *précis*, if you please."

"We haven't had much peace since, sir. Several times a day, and most especially at night, something like that occurs. Chairs, books, tables and even such heavy pieces of furniture as a piano are moved about, sometimes slowly, sometimes fairly thrown, and jewelry and other small objects are hurled through the air. The blankets are jerked off our beds while we're sleeping, our clothes are snatched off hangers and wadded on the wardrobe floor or tossed into the corners of the room, food is snatched off the table before us. Only yesterday the whole tablecloth was jerked away as we were eating breakfast, spilling food and dishes over us and the floor."

"*Bien oui*," de Grandin murmured. "Thus far it runs entirely true to pattern. What else, if you please?"

"Last night I wakened at the sound of something scratching. When I got up and lit the light I saw a sentence taking form upon the wall of the bedroom. There was no pencil — nothing that could make the letters visible — but the scratching kept up steadily as words were spelled out against the paint."

"You could read them? They were not cryptic, like those showing on the palace wall at the feast of Belshazzar?"

"Yes, sir, I could read them, all right," he said grimly. "I recognized the writing, too. I'd seen it often enough."

"Ah, and it said—"

"Just what I'd read in half a hundred letters from Lottë, the sentence with which she always ended: 'You are mine and mine alone. I shall never let you go.'"

"*Parbleu*," de Grandin began, but got no farther, for, apparently from the floor of the consulting room there came a deafening, clanging, banging racket, like a tin can bumping over cobbles at the tail of some luckless mongrel, and out of empty air, apparently some six feet overhead, burst a mocking, maniacal laugh.

The silence fairly beat upon our ears as the unholy racket stopped abruptly as it had begun, and Fogarty smiled bleakly. "You get used to it in time," he said wearily. "You saw that broken prism from the chandelier hit me tonight. You know it didn't fall on me; you know that it was thrown."

"I do, indeed, *Monsieur*."

"Then look at this." The boy stripped back his jacket cuff and shirt sleeve. On his bared forearm, apparently scratched with some sharp instrument, was an intricately wrought, but easily decipherable, monogram: "L.D." "Tonight she put her brand on me. Now see this." From his jacket pocket he drew out a folded handkerchief and spread it on the table before us. Smearred on the linen, apparently with lipstick, was a seventeen-word message: "Pablo you are mine to torment and to kill. I shall do both in my good time." The writing was bold, ill-formed, angular, the sort of writing one accustomed to use German script might use to write English.

"And this came—?" de Grandin arched the slim black brows which were such a vivid contrast to his blond hair and mustache.

"Tonight, after we'd done our last turn. Fran was making up her mouth when the lipstick was snatched out of her hand and the handkerchief from my breast pocket. Next instant handkerchief and lipstick were flung into the far corner of the dressing room. When we picked 'em up we found this."

"*Tiens*," the little Frenchman began, then, "*Sacré nom!*" as he ducked his head. With a sharp click the key had turned in the lock of the instrument case that stood by the farther wall, the glass door swung open and from the upper shelf a lancet rose, shot like an arrow from a bow in low parabola and sped whirring past his head, missing his cheek by the bare fraction of a centimeter as it flashed across the room to bury itself a full inch in the wall.

"*Nom de nom de nom de nom de sacré nom!*" he swore savagely. "No twenty-times-accursed *fantôme*, no never-quite-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized *lutin* shall throw a knife at Jules de Grandin and boast of the exploit. *Mademoiselle la Revenante*, I am annoyed with you. I take your gauntlet up. I accept your challenge, me. *Parbleu*, but we shall see who makes a monkey out of whom before this business is finished!"

He looked from one of us to the other, the sharp vertical wrinkles of a frown of concentration etched between his brows. "My friends, I think I have the diagnosis, but as to treatment, *tenez*, that is another matter. Friend Trowbridge, have you not noted one constant factor in these so untoward happenings?"

"Why—" I temporized. "Why—"

"Not why, but what," he corrected with a quick grin. "Think, concentrate, meditate, if you will be so kind."

"H'm. The only condition common to all these occurrences as Mr. Fogarty has related them seems to be that he and his wife have been together—"

"*Bravo! Bravissimo!*"

"But of course, that could have no earthly bearing on—"

"Name of a small blue man, has it not so? I tell you it is

diagnostic, my friend.”

“I fail to see—”

“*Précisément, exactement*; quite so. Permit that I instruct you. Across the Rhine in that dark country which has spewed war twice upon the world in one generation they have some words which are most expressive. Among them is *poltergeist*, which signifies a pelting ghost, a ghost which flings things round the house and plays the stupid, childish tricks. More often he is not a ghost at all in the true sense, he is some evil entity which plagues a man or more often a woman. Not for nothing did the old ones call the Devil Prince of the Powers of the Air, for there are very many evil things in the air which we can no more see than we can see the micro-organisms of disease. Yes, it is so.” He nodded solemn affirmation.

“This one, I damn think, however, are a true ghost, the earthbound spirit of a human creature tainted with the deadly sins of lust and murder. Also, it are a *poltergeist* of the first water.

“For why? Why should it not come back as an ordinary specter, sighing, weeping, wailing, crying, manifesting itself through the apperceptive senses rather than as a *poltergeist*, a pelter, a mover-around-of-furniture?”

“You ask it? *Pardieu*, I shall tell you! The usual, ordinary haunting-ghost may make a noise, often a most unpleasant noise, and sometimes, with or without the aid of a medium, manifest itself visually. It may raise the hair upon the head of the beholder, frighten him until he is well-nigh witless, but that appears to be about the limit of its powers. It does not fling crockery, it does not move the furniture about, it does not exercise the physical force. The *poltergeist* does so. You apprehend? You follow me? Of course.

“This Lottë Dalberg was a very wicked woman. She was a bloodstained wanton who paid with her life for her crimes. And death has not reformed her. She would torment, injure, perhaps kill the man who had escaped her in life. And in order that she may have power to exercise the *violence physique* she comes back as a *poltergeist*. Yes, certainly; of course.

“Very well, then. Experience with such things shows some agent is essential for the *poltergeist's* activities. The agent, who may be, and usually is entirely innocent of all evil intent, is almost always one possessing some physical or mental abnormality. She are often a young girl in her teens, less often a boy of the same age, sometimes an old or sick person, perhaps a cripple whose vitality is low.

“You begin to comprehend? Monsieur Fogarty has told us that *Madame* his wife is unwell, that they wait only to accumulate a little money before they take a long vacation. *Madame*,” he bowed to the girl, “you have consulted a physician? He has diagnosed your illness?”

“Yes,” tremulously, “he said I’m suffering from anemia. Things had gotten pretty bad for me before the war. Vaudeville had just about disappeared, there weren’t enough floor shows to give employment to a tenth of the dancers ‘at liberty.’ I had to take what I could get. I was a taxi dancer at the Posieland Dance Hall — five cents a dance and a ten percent commission on the drinks I vamped the patrons into buying. For more than a year I ate ten-cent breakfasts and luncheons; if I had enough to dine at the steam table at the Automat I thought I was in luck. Something has to give way when you starve all day and dance all night, you know, sir.”

“*Mordieu, tu parles, ma petite pauvre*,” he answered with a gleam of sympathy in his eyes. “You have said it, truly. But so it is. The so unpleasant workings of this naughty *poltergeist* undoubtedly are conditioned by your presence.”

“You mean—” there was stark panic in the girl’s cry — “you mean that I’m responsible—”

“Not at all, by no means, *Madame*. I mean the *poltergeist* works through, not with you. The movement of objects and the application of violence without the use of any physical force known to science is technically known as telekinesis. The *poltergeist* accomplishes it by means of in imponderable substance called teleplasm, which is akin to, though not the same as the ectoplasm or psychoplasm exuded by the medium at a spiritualistic séance. Now, neither the mind nor that discarnate entity we call a ghost for want of more exact terminology can affect matter without the influence of a human intermediary. You, *Madame*, are that. It is from you that this entirely detestable spirit-thing derives the necessary teleplasm. Yes.

“But should you blame yourself? *Bien non*. No more than the unfortunate householder whose home has been ravaged by a burglar. Indeed, the simile is apt. You have not given her the teleplasm; she has stolen it from you.”

“Then what are we to do? Must Paul and I separate—”

He held a slim hand up for silence. “Permit me, *Madame*. I think, I concentrate; I cogitate.”

At length: “I would suggest you spend the night apart, my friends. The farther the better. One of you should take the train for Philadelphia and stop at some hotel. The other should remain here. Tomorrow night, if all goes well, we shall attempt an experiment. I make no promises, but we shall see what we shall see. Yes. This Fraulein Lottë Dalberg has affronted me. She has thrown a knife at me. I am insulted, and I do not suffer insult placidly. If one thing fails we shall essay another, and another until we strike upon the proper one. Yes, I have said it, me.”

It was shortly after four o’clock next afternoon when we knocked at the door of the suite occupied by Paul and Frances Fogarty at the Berkeley-York. “And how were

things last night?" de Grandin asked as Paul let us in.

"A little better, thank you," answered Fogarty. "I went to Philadelphia as you suggested. Fran stayed here, and aside from a bad dream I had no trouble."

"A bad dream? Like what, Monsieur Paul?"

"I dreamed I was some place, I don't quite know where, but it was probably a mountain top, for everything was shrouded in a heavy mist, and yet there was a wind blowing. It was intensely cold, and I felt very lonely. At last I couldn't stand it any longer and called for Fran."

"And then?"

"I got no answer, but when I called a second time I saw a figure coming slowly toward me through the fog. When it came closer I saw it was Lottë. She was wearing a long scarlet robe, and her hair, as red as the silk of her gown, hung down about her. Her arms were bare, so were her head and feet, and every time she took a step a flash of flame came from the ground where she had trod, and a little puff of yellow smoke accompanied it. It had an odd, nose-tickling smell, like that you get when you put a match to your cigarette before the sulphur has quite burned away."

"U'm," Jules de Grandin commented. "One need not be a Freud or Jung or Stekel to interpret the symbolism of that dream. What next, if you please?"

"I tried to run away, but had no power to move. It was as if I'd suddenly been turned to stone. No, not quite that, either. It was more as if I'd suddenly been paralyzed. I was entirely conscious, but powerless to move. I couldn't even shut my eyes, or take them off her as she walked toward me with a kind of gloating smile on her face. But I could feel my heart beating and the breath hissing in my throat. A bird must feel something like that when a snake creeps up on it.

"She came up to me and put both hands on my shoulders, while she looked straight in my eyes. 'I'm burning, Pablo,' she told me, 'burning for you. Soon I shall burn with you.' Then she kissed me.

"I felt her mouth against my mouth and the light nip of her sharp teeth on my lips, and a mist as red as blood — red as her robe and her hair — blinded me. I felt as if I were sinking into some dream-scented fog, half conscious, half unconscious, like a patient on the operating table when the ether is applied and the doctor tells him to begin counting: One-two-three. Then suddenly the fog caught fire, and I was burning, too. Flames leaped and roared and hissed about me, stripping the skin off my flesh and the flesh from my bones. The agony of it was almost past endurance, and yet—yet—"

"*Précisément. Monsieur,*" de Grandin supplied. "And yet you found the torment in a sense delightful. Even the damned in hell have some pleasures. One takes it that you awoke then?"

"I woke up in what seemed a raging fever, yet I was

shaking as with a severe chill."

"And not one little minute too soon, either, *mon jeune*. Me, I think that was no ordinary dream you had. It was a vision, and one which might well have ended in disaster. Tell me," his face showed sudden concern, "you did not speak to her, you did not make her any promise, or declare your love or express rapture at the embrace?"

"No, sir."

"That is good. That is very fortunate, indeed. Poor, weak, finite human nature has its limitations, and the powers of hell are very strong. It seems that not content with doing you physical injury this vile one now would steal away your soul. She is a very naughty person, that one."

Abruptly he turned to Frances Fogarty. "*Madame!*"

"Yes, sir?"

"Attend me, if you please." From his waistcoat pocket he drew a short length of silken cord from which dangled a bright silver disc about the size of a dime. "See him," he ordered. "Is he not a pretty thing?"

Slowly, like a pendulum, he swung the bright disc back and forth. Frances watched it, fascinated. "Sleep, Madame Françoise," he commanded softly "Sleep. The clock is ticking; tick—tock; tick—tock. Slowly, very slowly, it is counting off the second, *ma petite*. Tick—tock. You are weary, very, very weary; you are tired, you long for sleep. Sleep is what you most desire, it is not? Tick—tock; tick—tock!"

The girl's eyes wavered back and forth following the arc of the bright disc, but as he droned his monotone they became heavy lidded, finally closed. Her slender bosom rose and fell convulsively a time or two, then regular soft breathing told us she was sleeping. He bent above her, pressing gentle fingers on her lids. "You are asleep, Madame Françoise?"

"I am asleep," she answered drowsily.

He turned from the girl to her husband "It is expedient that you join her, Monsieur Paul."

"You mean you want to hypnotize me?"

"Perfectly."

"O.K. I'll take a chance." He dropped into a chair beside his wife, settled his head comfortably and smiled tiredly. "Hope this works, sir," he muttered.

Once more de Grandin swung the shining silver disc, once more his soothing monotone commanded sleep. In something less than five minutes Paul was slumbering peacefully.

"Madame Françoise?" the Frenchman called softly. No answer came, and he repeated the summons. At last a sleepy little murmur like the whimper of a half-roused child responded. "The hypnosis is deep," he whispered, then aloud

to the girl, "I am your master am I not, Madame Françoise?"

"You are my master."

"You will obey my command?"

"I will obey you."

"Then I command you to forget all thought of Lottë Dalberg. Dismiss her from your mind and memory, utterly, completely, wholly. As far as you are concerned there was never any such person. Her name if heard will evoke no memories pleasant or unpleasant. It will be the name of a stranger, never heard before. You understand?"

"I understand."

"You will obey?"

A long pause followed, then: "Madame Françoise, who is Lottë Dalberg?" he asked sharply.

"Lottë Dalberg?" she said sleepily. "I never heard of her. Should I know her?"

"No, emphatically no, my little."

He swung round to the sleeping Paul and repeated the commands he had given Frances. Then, five minutes later, "Who was Lottë Dalberg, Monsieur Paul?" he asked.

"She was—" the young man seemed to grope for an answer, then, slowly, like one trying to recall a half-forgotten snatch of poetry — "she was a German girl whom I met in Berlin. I loved her — hated her—"

"*Non, par la barbe d'un bouc vert*, you shall not say it!" de Grandin cut in savagely. "Attend me, Monsieur Paul: She was no one. She never had existence. There was never such a person. Do you understand?"

"I—I think so."

"Good. Now, who was Lottë Dalberg, Monsieur Paul?"

"I don't know."

"Think; think hard, my Paul. Who was she? Do not you recall your days and nights together in Berlin, the kisses and the vows of never-dying love?"

"No."

"You cannot recall her?"

"Who?"

"What was her name?"

"Whose name?"

"*Très bien*." He turned to me, his little round blue eyes a gleam. "I damn think that does it—"

"What's that?" I interrupted, seizing him by the elbow and spinning him around. "There, on the wall?"

Something like a water-stain was forming on the green-painted plaster. It grew, expanded, lengthened, widened till it was the silhouette of a female figure standing on tiptoe facing us. Tiny lines of red like veins began to show within the outline of the stain. Some were heavy, some lighter, and together they traced out a pattern like a line drawing crudely executed in red pigment.

The thing was like a five-pointed star, the widely outspread legs its lower points, the upstretched, outspread arms its upper ones, the head, thrust forward, the apex. Now we could see the snaky locks of red hair rippling unbound down the brow and neck and shoulders, reaching almost to the knees; the long and tapered arms uplifted as in evocation, the wide-opened and staring eyes, glaring at us in malevolent fury.

"*Hola*," de Grandin greeted mockingly "*Comment vous portez-vous, aujourd'hui*, Fraulein Lottë? — how are you?"

The red-etched picture seemed to struggle to free itself from the wall. Grotesquely, horribly, it was like some enormous beetle enmeshed on a sheet of flypaper. He laughed sarcastically. "It is no use, *Fraulein*. Two dimensions are the most you can achieve; soon there will be none."

He dropped his bantering tone, and voice and eyes were hard as he proceeded: "Unquiet spirit of the unrepentant dead, go forth. You have said to the grave, 'Thou art my lover, in thy arms will I lie,' and to Death, 'Thou art my father and my mother.' The cord of memory and fear by which you held these ones is broken; your power over them is ended. Save in the memories of those who hate you and the records of the court that tried and sentenced you to death there is no thought or mention of your name. Oblivion has claimed you. You are swallowed up, wiped out; extinct. Now get you gone to that place prepared for you, and may your scarlet sins find pardon in the end. *Avaunt, be gone; te conjuro, abire ad tuum locum.*"

The simulacrum on the wall began to fade like a picture projected from a magic lantern when the light behind it dims, became a featureless shadow, a dull, amorphous stain — nothing.

"*Bien*," de Grandin dusted one hand on the other. "That is indubitably that, Friend Trowbridge."

To the sleeping couple he called softly: "*Monsieur and Madame*, sleep until the time has come to rise and work, but forget all that has transpired. You never heard of Lottë Dalberg, have no recollection of the persecution with which she plagued you, never have you seen or heard of Jules de Grandin or his friend Dr. Samuel Trowbridge. All, all has been forgotten, *mes amis. Adieu.*"

He opened the door softly and we stepped out into the hall.

"No," he denied as we finished dinner that night, "I would not call it intuition, my friend. It was rather tentative and impractical. Consider, if you please:

"This thing which haunted Monsieur Fogarty was in the nature of a *poltergeist*, but it were not a true one. While it moved furniture and hurled light objects it had none of the droll mischievousness of the true *poltergeist*, who, while he

often proves annoying, even dangerous, is a species of a ghostly clown who plays his Puckish tricks without much rhyme or reason. This naughty one had a very definite reason for everything she did; she was unquestionably bent on persecuting Monsieur Fogarty, perhaps eventually on killing him. Because she sought to do him physical injury by physical means she resorted to the form of *poltergeist*, and so the pattern of her actions — and her limitations — were those of that species of a ghost.

“Very well. We determined Madame Françoise was the agent through which the so wicked Fraulein Lottë operated, the reservoir of her supply of teleplasm without which she had no power for violence. *Très bien*. What then?”

“It is an axiom of the occultist that this teleplasm is what you call ideoplastic, that is, it takes its appearance, its seeming, from the thoughts of those among whom it operates. Both Monsieur and Madame Fogarty knew and hated Lottë Dalberg, and with excellent reason. That gave her a hold on their minds. When she appeared to Monsieur Paul in Philadelphia last night she was knocking at the door of his subconscious, seeking to insinuate herself into his brain as well as do him bodily injury through external force.

“Now, I ask me, ‘Jules de Grandin, are you afraid of the spirit of this most unpleasant young woman who has died upon the gallows for her murders and undoubtedly is most uncomfortable at present for her other sins?’ ‘Damn no, Jules de Grandin,’ I reply to me. ‘I am ashamed of you that you should ask such a question.’

“Very well, suppose we hypnotize this poor, tormented

couple, make them not afraid, even not aware, of Lottë Dalberg. What then?”

“Hypnotism, in the last analysis, is nothing but the substitution of the operator’s mind for that of the subject. In a measure, by fear and memory, the revenant had substituted her intelligence for that of Monsieur Paul and Madame Françoise. So what did I do? I thrust my mind into their brains, *pardieu*, and made them unafraid and even unaware of her. Thereafter, she had no place to go. She could not make them fear her, they had completely forgotten her. It was as if she had been trespassing in their brain-house when *pouf!* along comes Jules de Grandin and evicts her.

“But though they had forgotten her in their hypnotic sleep I had not. I thought of her, and there was still sufficient teleplasm to enable her to take feeble form as a picture on the wall. She was a fearsome, frightening sight, *n’est-ce-pas?* Ha, but she chose the wrong one for her frightening! Me, I told her which was what in no uncertain terms. I told her all her power was gone, that she was as forgotten as last year’s bird’s nest. Her last remaining ligamentary tie with earth was snapped. She had no place to go but outer darkness.”

“You don’t think she’ll come back?”

“I do not, my friend. What was it that she said to Monsieur Paul in his vision? ‘I burn’? *Parbleu*, I think that is exactly what she does.

“And me, I also burn. My throat is dry, my tongue is parched, my lips are all afire. Will you not have the goodness to refill my glass, Friend Trowbridge?”

Eyes in the Dark

“I AGREE entirely,” Jules de Grandin nodded vigorously. “Too many of our profession wear blinders. This prejudice against Chiropractic is pig-ignorant as that shown against anesthesia when Simpson introduced it, or the abuse heaped on your own illustrious Holmes when he contended puerperal fever is infectious. Me, I think — *mordieu*, watch him! He will not live to grow old that one!”

Dodging drunkenly from the curb, a man had run into the roadway almost directly in the path of our car, and, as I clamped my brakes on frenziedly, fell sprawling to the pavement.

He lay face downward on the asphalt when we reached him, both arms extended to full length like those of a diver when he hits the water, and no clothing-dummy flung into the street could have been limper. “I’m sure we didn’t hit him!” I exclaimed as we bent over the prostrate figure. “There was no jar—”

“You have right, my friend,” de Grandin cut in. “I saw him fall a full three feet from the wheels but” — he looked up bleakly — “nevertheless, he is dead.”

“Dead?” I echoed incredulously.

“*Comme un maquereau*,” he agreed. “Completely; utterly.”

“But—”

“I think that we had better save our butts for the inquest, Friend Trowbridge. It would be well if we called the police—”

“How? We can’t just leave him lying here, nor can we move him, and where would we find a telephone?”

He rose and dusted the knees of his trousers. “I think I see a gleam of light on that doorway. Perhaps they have a ‘phone.”

The neighborhood was strange to me. We had been visiting the Westervelt Clinic to observe the effect of a course of chiropractic treatments on a neurasthenic for whom potassium iodide and sodium salicylate had proved about as efficacious as so much distilled water. The old house occupied by the Clinic stood in what was little better than a slum and the old street through which we drove had seen better days, but not for a long time. Most of the houses were old brownstone fronts that had been elegant homes but now were shabby, run down at the heel, like gentlefolk in reduced circumstances. Signs announcing furnished rooms showed in most of the windows; on window-sills were half-filled milk bottles and the oddments common to “light housekeeping” apartments. Although it was but little after ten o’clock

no lights showed in the blank-eyed windows. Either everyone had gone to bed or residents of the block economized on electricity.

However, as I followed the line of his pointed finger I saw a faint gleam seeping from the house before which we had stopped. A dull pattern of reds and blues lay on its white marble stoop where light shone dimly through the little panels of its stained-glass door, and though the place showed the air of decay that sat like a blight on the neighborhood it seemed a little better than its mates. None of its window lights had been broken and patched, it bore no card announcing rooms to let; the very curtains which obscured the light within seemed to announce it still maintained some sort of aloofness from the forthright poverty of the locality.

I started toward the dimly lighted door, but a sharp ejaculation from de Grandin halted me. “What is it?”

He had turned the dead man’s face toward him and was staring at a small wound on the forehead with a look of fascination. “One cannot surely say,” he answered softly, “but— What do you make of him, *hein?*”

“Why, when he fell he struck his brow—”

“On what, one asks to know? What is there in the street on which he could have cut himself?” As I bent to inspect the wound he added: “And if he cut himself when he fell, why should his injury take this form, *hein?*” With a wisp of paper napkin from the glove compartment of the car he wiped the corpse’s brow, revealing not a straight or jagged cut, but three distinct incisions in the skin, clear-cut as if made with a needle or knife-point.

“Great Scott!” I exclaimed. “It looks like shorthand.”

“It does, indeed,” he agreed, “but it is not. Unless I miss my guess it is an Arabic inscription, perhaps Hindustani. I cannot be quite sure which.”

“Arabic — Hindustani?” I echoed incredulously. “What would that be doing on a man’s forehead—”

“*Tiens, mon vieux*, what would a man be doing falling dead in the street, with or without an inscription cut into his brow? *Le bon Dieu* knows, not I. Did not it seem to you he fled from something—”

“No, it didn’t,” I denied. “It seemed to me that he was drunk and didn’t know what he was doing. Certainly, he wasn’t watching his step—”

“Agreed,” he nodded. “Most certainly he had not his wits about him, but few people *in extremis* do. However, let us wait the findings of the coroner. Our first concern is to find a telephone.”

I jerked the silver-plated handle of the old-fashioned bell-pull vigorously, and from somewhere in the rear of the house came a responsive brassy tinkle, but no more. “*Grand Dieu des porcs,*” de Grandin swore, “are we to be kept waiting while they rise and make a toilette like that of Marie Antoinette? *Hola dans la maison!*” he supplemented my ring with a vigorous thump upon the walnut panel of the door. “Awake, arouse yourselves within!” he shouted, and as he struck the door a second time a light click sounded and the portal swung back under the impact of his knuckles.

I hesitated on the threshold, but de Grandin had no scruples about violating the householders’ privacy. “*Hola!*” he exclaimed again as he stepped over the sill. “Is there no one here to — *morbleu!*” he broke off, then, in a lower tone, “*Pas possible?* In such a neighborhood? *Regardez,* if you please, Friend Trowbridge.”

We stood upon the entrance of a wide, long hall with frescoed ceiling and tall doors of massive walnut letting off to right and left. In the softly diffused light of a bronze-shaded Oriental lamp it seemed unreal as a stage setting — Persian, Indian and Chinese rugs almost hid the polished planking of the floor, more rugs, glowing with jewel-colors shading from pale jade to deepest ruby, draped along the walls. Where the white and mahogany balustrade of a wide staircase curved upward a peacock screen had been set, and immediately in front of it was a carved divan of inlaid blackwood. By the divan stood a tabouret of Indian cedar inlaid with copper, and on it, still emitting a thin plume of steam, a tiny cup of eggshell porcelain rested. Over everything there hung a heavy, heady, almost drugging perfume — ambergris.

“*Tenez,*” de Grandin clicked his tongue against his teeth as he surveyed the apartment, “he is like a diamond set in brass or a pearl in a pig’s snout, a room like this in such a neighborhood, *n’est-ce-pas?* One wonders — *ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?*” His voice sank to a whisper as he nodded toward the stairway.

The blackwood divan just beneath the stairs was spread with leopard skin, and lying indolently on it was a woman, one arm extended toward us, wrist bent, hand drooping. Beneath her fingers coiled the brass stem of a *hookah* she had evidently let drop when she slipped off to sleep, and from the brass tobacco-cup that topped the cloisonné water-jar of the hubble-bubble the faintest coil of scented smoke ascended.

I had an odd feeling of unreality, a sort of this-can’t-possibly-be-true sensation as I looked at her. She matched her surroundings as perfectly as if she had been made up for a part, and the big, gorgeous, dimly lighted room were the stage on which she played it. Small she was, almost childishly so, and dainty as a sweetly molded porcelain figu-

rine. But her body was a woman’s, not a child’s. The turn of her bare arms, the firm rondure of her breasts, spoke full maturity. Her skin was golden with the warm, glow of sun-ripened fruit, her nose was small and slightly hawk-beaked, her forehead low and wide. Her hair was black and sooty, without luster, parted smoothly in the middle and drawn down like wings above her ears, and the pandanus-red mouth was full-lipped, sensual and petulant, suggesting quick transitions from gay laughter to storms of anger, like that of a willful child.

A short, tight bodice of plum-colored satin like a zouave jacket covered but in nowise concealed the luscious fullness of her bosoms, from waist to ankles she was encased in exaggeratedly full pantaloons of saffron-yellow muslin drawn in tightly at the bottoms and ending in a triple row of fluffy ruffles. About her neck and wrists and ankles circled strands of gold discs almost large as pennies set with uncut rubies and off-color diamonds, and from each plate hung a tiny golden sleigh-bell. In her left nostril was a hoop of gold large and heavy as a wedding ring, and balanced on the tip of one small foot was a green-velvet heel-less slipper thickly worked with gold embroidery and seed-pearls. Its mate had fallen to the rug-strewn floor, baring a tiny blue-veined foot the heel and sole and toes of which were stained bright red with henna.

“*Pardonnez-moi, Madame,*” de Grandin began, speaking softly so as not to waken her abruptly. “We regret the intrusion, but — *ah?*” We had been walking toward the sleeping woman, our footsteps soundless on the rug-spread floor, now we stood beside her. Her heavy-lashed, Kohl-shadowed lids were not quite closed. A little thread of white showed between them, and her petulantly sensuous mouth was lax and drooping at the corners, as though she was unutterably tired. “*Morbleu,*” he exclaimed, and his voice rasped as if his throat were sandy, “another?”

“How—” I began, but he shut me off impatiently. “*Par la barbe d’un bouc vert* do not you see it, my friend? There is something devilish here!” Scratched on the smooth, pale-amber skin of her forehead were the same shorthand-like characters we had found on the brow of the dead man in the street.

“What can it mean?” I wondered. “The wounds are fresh — the man, was still bleeding, this was probably made after death, for there’s no evidence of hemorrhage, but she can’t have been dead long. The coffee cup is still steaming, the *hookah* is smoking—”

“God and the devil know, not we, my friend,” the little Frenchmen answered. “This case is not for the coroner alone. It is a matter for the police and the public prosecutor. Unless I am far more mistaken than I think, this is a matter of murder.”

“You fellers do send in the damnedest cases,” complained Dr. Jason Parnell, the coroner’s physician. “I don’t mind ’em when they’re messed up some, or even when they’re ripe from bein’ in the Bay too long, but when they’re dead without a single, solitary reason—”

“How do you say?” de Grandin demanded. “Is it that you could not make a diagnosis?”

“That’s a rough outline of the plot. A first-year student knows that death begins in one of three ways: Coma, starting at the brain; asphyxia, beginning at the lungs, or syncope, commencing at the heart. Those bodies you found have no right to be dead. There’s absolutely nothing diagnostic. No trace of coma, syncope or asphyxia. The man had a slight touch of TB, but he’d have been good for another five years, anyway. The woman showed traces of drug-addiction, but nothing which could account for her death. Except for those dam’, insignificant scratches on their foreheads neither of ’em had a thing wrong with him; certainly nothing that the wildest stretch of imagination could call fatal. Hearts, lungs, brains all intact, no trace of any known poison, nothing serious the matter with ’em, except that they’re both dead as herrings.”

“Ye say there wuzn’t any trace o’ poison, sor?” Lieutenant Costello of the Homicide Bureau asked in disappointment. “Sure, that’s too bad entirely. I’d kind o’ built me case around them scratches on their foreheads—”

“I didn’t say there was no trace of poison,” Parnell denied tartly. “I said there was no trace of known poison. Generally speaking, poisons fall into three categories: corrosives, such as phenol or carbolic acid, hydrocyanic acid, or oxalic acid; hypnotics and antipyretics, such as the derivatives of opium, alcohol, chloroform and the like; and alkaloidals, which affect the central nervous system, among which many snake venoms are to be found. Usually we suspect some class of poison from the physical appearance of the body. From a general classification we descend to particulars, gradually eliminating one suspected toxin, then another, till we’ve narrowed our investigation down to the particular poison causing death. Like you, when I found nothing radically wrong with these peoples’ hearts or lungs or brains I suspected poison had been introduced into their systems through those scratches on their foreheads, but I drew a blank there, too.

“The area around the wounds should have been swollen, red and inflamed if snake venom had been introduced; these scratches seemed to have no effect on surrounding tissue, and specimens taken from them proved almost completely sterile. If one of the vegetable poisons such as curare had been injected symptoms similar to snake-bite would have been noticed, but as I said there were none. Furthermore, tests made on the blood and tissues yielded negative results.

None of the familiar reactions was noted. All this, of course, does not preclude the possibility of poisoning. It merely means no poison known to me was used.”

“Uh-huh,” agreed Costello doubtfully. “What’re ye goin’ to tell the jury wuz the cause o’ death, sor?”

Dr. Parnell drew out his wallet and extracted a ten-dollar bill which he laid on the desk before the policeman. “If you’ll tell me what I should tell ’em that’s yours, Lieutenant,” he offered.

“Tenez, my friends, I think we waste the time,” de Grandin broke in. “The key to this accursed mystery must lie under some doormat. Our task is to discover which one.”

“True fer ye, sor,” agreed Costello. “All we gotta do is find out why two people who didn’t die from any known cause is dead, an’ who kilt ’em, an’ why. After that it’s all simple. Where do we start turnin’ up them doormats ye was spakin’ of, I dunno?”

The little Frenchman took his narrow chin between his thumb and forefinger. “The markings on their brows are identical,” he murmured. “It they had been different it might have meant something, or nothing. Their identity undoubtlessly means something, also, but what?” Abruptly he turned on us, small, round blue eyes blazing almost angrily. “Why do we stand here?” he demanded. “Why do we not go to consult the good Ram Chitra Das at once, right away, immediately?”

“Well, well, this is an unexpected pleasure!” our Hindu friend greeted as we trooped into his apartment in East Eighty-Sixth Street. He and his charming wife were lunching on the tiny tiled terrace that let off of the dining room of their maisonette, a spot of grateful coolness in the sweltering city. A red-and-white striped awning kept the mid-September sun at bay, the tiled floor was a cool gray-green underfoot, at the terrace edge a row of scarlet geraniums nodded in the light breeze fanning in from the East River. The buhl table from which they ate was itself a museum piece, and the covered dishes of Georgian Sheffield plate were, I noted enviously, the kind about which antique dealers dream. Steam spiraled lazily from the swan’s-neck spout of a teapot under which a spirit lamp burned, iced grapefruit, chops, scrambled eggs and buttered toast had just been set before them, and at the far side of the table, beaded like the forehead of a farmhand on a summer day, a tall, inviting bottle of Rhine wine waited.

“Had luncheon?” asked our host. “Yes? That’s a pity. We’d love to have you join us, but perhaps you’d take a cup o’ tea?”

He smiled at the woman who sat facing us. “You remember Drs. Trowbridge and de Grandin, and Lieutenant Costello, my dear?”

Nairini inclined her head in a bow that included us jointly,

and there was something queenly in the movement. I knew that she had been an Indian prince's daughter who had eloped from her bridegroom's palace with Ram Chitra, Das, himself the grandson of a rajah and as engaging a scapegrace as ever backslid from the ancient Hindu faith and took service with His Britannic Majesty.

They were an oddly contrasting, yet completely complementary couple, these renegade children of Mother India. In his gray flannels with the bright stripes of his school tie in bold contrast, Ram Chitra Das looked anything but a Hindu. He might have been a Spaniard or Italian, perhaps a Basque or Portuguese, but there was nothing Oriental in his clear-olive complexion, his sleekly brushed black hair and humorous, alert dark eyes.

Nairini, on the contrary, could never have been mistaken for a Westerner. Her skin was an incredibly beautiful tan, as if it had been powdered with the finest gold, her eyes of deep, moss-agate green were set a trifle slantingly, and her hair, demurely parted in the middle and gathered in a great coil at the back was a dull black cloud. Her mouth was an extraordinary color, like the darker sort of strawberries. Her dress of block-printed linen, chocolate-brown on cocoa-tan, was sleeveless and reached to her ankles, about her waist was a girdle of amber beads as large as hazel nuts. There were bracelets of frail silver filigree on her wrists, jade-and-silver pendants hung in her ears; a soft, musical *cling-clong* sounded as she moved slightly, and we saw the slender bare ankles above her sandaled feet were ringed with heavy circlets of sand-molded silver.

With a grace that made the simple act seem like the art of a skilled dancer she poured tea for us, and Ram Chitra Das demanded, "I suppose you chaps are in trouble again? We never see you when the sailin's clear."

"Not so much in trouble as puzzled, my friend," de Grandin denied. "Last night Friend Trowbridge and I found two people dead without excuse."

Ram Chitra Das bent a mild frown upon the little Frenchman. "Let's see if I follow you. D'ye mean you'd no excuse for findin' 'em, or the late lamented had no adequate excuse for dyin'?"

"Both, *par les bois d'une hûtre!*" Briefly de Grandin sketched our adventure of the night before, ending with Parnell's failure to ascribe a cause of death.

"H'm." Ram Chitra Das helped himself to more scrambled egg and spread strawberry jam on his toast. "You say the scars on their foreheads looked like writin'? Sounds as if some o' my former fellow countrymen might have been up to tricks. Can you recall what the scars looked like?"

"By blue, I can, my friend. I have here an exact copy." The Frenchman drew a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to Ram Chitra Das.

"*Sivanavama!*" For a moment our host's hand shook as he looked at the sketch, but in a moment it had steadied.

Nairini's delicately arched brows rose a trifle higher. "What is it?" she asked in her clear, smooth contralto that somehow reminded me of the cooing of doves.

"I fear, old dear, that this is it." Her husband's voice was so casual that we knew he held hysteria in check by an effort as he passed the slip of paper to her.

"*Oom Parvati!*" The superb gentility that comes from hundreds of generations of royal blood stood Nairini in good stead, but in the sudden widening of her pupils and the quick expansion of her narrow nostrils we read fear.

"*Ah-ha!*" de Grandin barked. "You know him? You recognize him, *hein?*"

Ram Chitra Das nodded grimly. "We know him very well indeed."

"And what, if one may ask, does he mean, this writing?"

"Oh, the writing? Literally translated it means 'The Afghan.'"

"*Vraiment?* And who would this so odious Afghan be?"

Ram Chitra Das' dark eyes were serious as he turned them on de Grandin. "You know something about me," he returned. "You know my father was a prince's son who made a misalliance with a *nautchni* and went into a not too onerous exile as a consequence, you know about my education. I was brought up as a high caste Brahmin lad and in addition had some trainin' under fakirs who, as the saying goes, could 'teach tricks to a fox.' They certainly taught me some things that have come in very handy. My English education was interrupted by the World War, but when I came back from France I took my degree at Oxford and topped it off with a year at the Sorbonne."

The grin with which he broke his recital had something of a small-boy-at-the-circus quality. "So there I was, schooled Orientally and Occidentally, restless with the restlessness of all demobbed soldiers, and with not a blessed thing to do. My caste had been completely smashed by my trip across the ocean and such indiscretions as eating beef, and after fourteen years of European life in peace and war Brahma, Vishnu and Siva meant no more to me than Pegasus or Apollo, nor had I filled this vacuum of disbelief by embracing Christianity, though several parsons and the Lord knows how many nice old ladies had labored manfully to bring me into the fold. I didn't need to work, my income was sufficient for my needs and almost equal to my wants, but I was bored. Bored stiff. I got so tired of being just Ram Chitra Das, idler, that I took service with the Intelligence Section of the Indian Police.

"I don't think that I'm boastin' when I say they got a bargain in me. I spoke every dialect that's used between Colombo and Kabul, and since I owed allegiance to no

formal brand of religion and had no caste to be broken I could masquerade as a Hindu, Mohammedan, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh or Parsee without embarrassment. I gave 'em twenty-seven shillin's' worth for every pound they paid me. Besides, I had a lot of fun."

Then suddenly he drew his brows down and the whole aspect of his face changed. "They gave me an assignment to keep an eye on Karowlee Sahib, the *perskwa* of Bahadupore. He was a tricky old cuss, this Raja Karowlee, somewhere about fifty, more wives than any other possessions — though they said he used about ten pecks o' diamonds for playthings. When he's not thinkin' of women it's treason; makin' deals with Russia or the Afghans, anyone who'll play his game and give him a leg up with his schemes. That's how he got his nickname, The Afghan. He'd spent almost a year up north o' Kabul tryin' to sell one of those Afghan *amirs* the idea of comin' down and botherin' the Raja while he pulled off his local revolution, and when he came back he had a pack o' Afghan wolfhounds, a lot less money than he took away, and his beard dyed red with henna, Afghan fashion. He'd had no luck with the hillmen, though. Seems the *amir's* son had served with the British and seen the R.A.P. in action. He wasn't havin' any trouble with *those* babies.

"Well, as I was sayin', I was up Bahadupore way, posin' as a free-lance soldier and servin' as a lieutenant in Karowlee's guard when word comes that the Princess Mihri Nairini — that means Nairini the Beloved — was comin' up from Bhutanistan, where her father was in the king business in a small way, to marry this old reprobate Karowlee. Women didn't mean much to me in those days. I'd been petted by the English ladies and the French girls were nice to me, too, but I'd never seen one who could lure me into exchangin' ridin' boots and polo mallet for slippers and a pipe. Besides, I'd absorbed European ideas. This Princess Nairini was a 'native,' probably ate with her fingers and couldn't read or write. I'd seen her kind a thousand times, and the more I saw of 'em the more I thought my pater had the right idea when he married a *nautchni*. Then—" he paused with a slow, reminiscent smile, and Nairini cut in softly:

"Then I captured him."

"*Qu'est-ce donc?*" de Grandin demanded. "How do you say, *Madame?*"

She smiled at him and two deep dimples showed in her cheeks, a merrily incongruous combination with her exotic eyes. "There'd been every kind of merrymaking in the palace for three days, and I was almost tired to death. I'd slipped away from my attendants and gone down to the garden to sit by the lotus pool when I saw someone coming toward me in

the moonlight. He wore the red tunic and gold-and-red turban of an officer in Karowlee's Guard, and was very beautiful. He carried a light cane with which he switched the heads off of the flowers bordering the path. Flowers always seemed like living, sentient things to me, not merely vegetables, and I couldn't bear to see him behead them. 'Stop that!' I ordered sharply, and he halted as if he had walked into a brick wall."

"Why not?" demanded Ram Chitra Das. "There I was, attendin' to my gardin', when a *hour*i out o' the False Prophet's Paradise tells me to stop it. High caste Hindu women, like *Muslimmi*, observe *purdah*, you know — veil themselves before strange men. This girl wore no veil, but plainly she was neither a *nautchni* nor a palace servant. 'Who are you?' I asked and she told me, 'Your future queen who orders you to cease destroyin' her flowers.'

"That started it. The next night I was there, and the next night after that. So was she, and we had other things to talk about than flowers. I was windin' up my tour of duty, about ready to sneak back to headquarters, and when I left Nairini went with me.

"One understands," de Grandin grinned delightedly with a Frenchman's innate appreciation of romance. "And then?"

Ram Chitra Das grinned back. "Since then it's been a game o' tag. Karowlee's a revengeful old devil, and I rather think we made him lose face by elopin'. Two or three times his agents almost got us. Once I found a cobra in my bath in Calcutta where no cobra had a right to be; scorpions have appeared mysteriously in my boots, I nearly stopped a bullet one night when Nairini and I were ridin' outside Bombay. When they transferred me to duty in London, smellin' out sedition among Indian sailors in the neighborhood of East India Dock Road, I thought we'd shaken off pursuit, but one night — we were livin' in St. James' Park where you'd no more look for a Hindu than for a rich man in heaven — what should turn up in our bed but a krait, a little cousin to the cobra, less than a tenth his size and more than twenty times as deadly. Then we knew the heat was on again, as you say in America."

De Grandin nodded. "And you associate this brand upon the dead ones' foreheads with Karowlee Sahib?"

"Definitely. He's known as The Afghan from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas. Furthermore, elopements from his household ain't as rare as might be expected. His women are so numerous that he can't give 'em much attention. They get bored, and in India as in Ireland or Idaho there are always Boy Scouts ready to do their good deed by entertainin' bored wives. Sometimes these johnnies get serious and marry the gals — at least they run off with 'em.

"Usually Karowlee Sahib calls the turn on 'em before they

get far. A year ago his agents killed a young Parsee who'd offered his protection to one of his runaway women, and disfigured the girl so that she committed suicide. That was in the outskirts of Benares, but instances of his revenge have been reported in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. We know from personal experience he can reach across the ocean. I think it altogether likely the man who dropped dead before your car and the woman you found dead in the house were victims of his vengeance.

De Grandin stroked his little wheat-blond mustache gently, then gave its ends a sudden savage tug. "Would you come with us to inspect these defunct ones?" he asked. "It may be you might recognize them."

"Be glad to, old chap. I doubt I'll know 'em, but we might find out something, and I've more than a mere academic interest in this case. My dear," he turned to Nairini, "I think you'd better come along. With Karowlee's playmates on the loose I'd feel much safer if I had you in sight—"

"Why not pack a bag and stop at my house?" I suggested. "You'll be nearer to your base of operations there, and in no greater danger—"

"Thank you, Dr. Trowbridge," he accepted. "If Karowlee's agents are in Harrisonville we'll force their hand by movin' in on 'em. Might as well have a showdown now as later."

"And did you find out anything helpful?" de Grandin asked Ram Chitra Das that evening after dinner as Nairini, looking if possible more beautiful than ever in a white dinner dress embroidered at the hem with golden lotuses, poured coffee for us in the drawing room.

"Quite," answered the Indian. "I skipped down to the morgue as you suggested and had a look at the *corpora delicti*. I didn't recognize the woman, but the man was William Archer Thurmond, much better known to the Criminal Investigation Department as 'The Snapper,' from his playful little habit of snapping up any unconsidered trifle left lying about. I got in touch with a friend at New Delhi by radio telephone, and he tells me 'The Snapper' was last heard of in Bahadupore. That seems to match up. Evidently he was fascinated by the lady's charms, and quite as evidently she was one of Karowlee's women. They probably eloped, and if I know 'The Snapper' she took something more than herself from the palace when she kept the rendezvous. Probably a quart or two of pearls or diamonds. So Karowlee wrote two more names down in his black books, and it seems his agents scored a double first this time."

"I agree," Jules de Grandin nodded. "For our part Friend Costello and I ransacked the neighborhood of the strange deaths, ringing every doorbell in the street, and found out

that a Hindu gentleman named Basanta Roy took a room not far from the house where the dead woman was found."

"Humph," grunted Ram Chitra Das, "Basanta Roy, eh? There are about three hundred and twenty million people in India, accordin' to latest reports, and not less than five million of 'em are named Basanta Roy. Might as well be John Smith in London or Sam Cohen in New York, as far as identification goes."

"Nevertheless," de Grandin persisted, "this Monsieur Roy took lodgings in Thornapple Street. He was by all accounts a very old gentleman who wore a long white beard and kept much to himself, going out only after dark. He spoke English very well, but with an accent. Last night he came back to his room a little before midnight, paid two weeks' rent in lieu of notice, and decamped with bag and baggage."

"Aye?" Ram Chitra Das replied. "That may mean one of several things. Either he's satisfied with his job and gone back to India, or he's shifted operations from New Jersey to New York, hopin' to catch us off guard — eh? Oh, yes, dear, quite!"

Nairini had slipped the cap from her lipstick and leaned across the coffee table as if to rearrange the cups, in reality to scrawl on the mahogany with the cosmetic pencil:

"CAREFUL—ONE LISTENS AT THE WINDOW"

"As I was sayin'," Ram Chitra Das recommenced, but de Grandin interrupted. "Why do we not have some music, my friends? We have all night to talk about the case, let us defer our discussion till later. Will not you play for us, *Madame*? Your music? But of course, I shall be delighted to fetch it."

He hurried from the room and Nairini crossed to the piano, seated herself before the instrument and began to play softly, a slow, haunting tune pitched in a minor key, the heart-broken lament of an Afridi lover. The notes sank till they were no more than a soft murmur under her fingers. She bent forward toward the keyboard as if listening, waiting for something violent and dramatic.

"Trowbridge, Costello, Ram Chitra Das — *à moi!*" the little Frenchman's hail came from the garden. "I have him, me!"

We rushed through the French windows, vaulted down into the garden from the veranda and saw what seemed a vague, amorphous shadow draw suddenly in two parts, and heard de Grandin's jubilant announcement, "*C'est fini, mes amis*. He was a slippery eel, this one, but Jules de Grandin knows the fisherman's tricks. Yes, certainly."

From the midst of my Paul Scarlets he dragged something which upon inspection proved to be a small, gray-bearded man in a bad state of disrepair. Scratches from rose-thorns

criss-crossed his face, his neat white-linen suit was soiled with black earth from the rose bed, the beautiful pale-green turban which had covered his shaved head had been jerked off to form a fetter for his hands.

“Go forward, thou!” the Frenchman ordered as he gave his captive a shove. “By blue, the one who tries to drive a knife in Jules de Grandin’s ribs must get up before sunrise!”

“Well, as I live and breathe, if it’s not Ajeit Swami!” exclaimed Ram Chitra Das as he inspected our prisoner. “Salaam, most reverend *Guru*. We must apologize for your reception, but as this gentleman has said, it is not thought good taste to try to stab a person in America.” He gave a quick look at the knife de Grandin had dropped on the surgery table, and, “He didn’t scratch you with this thing, did he?” he asked anxiously.

“Scratch me — me, Jules de Grandin?” snapped back the small Frenchman. “*Mordieu*, if you and I were not such friends I should be made to be insulted! Have I not said that he who would stab me—”

“Yes, yes; of course. Quite so. I’m glad he didn’t nick you, though. I’ve seen these toad-prickers in action up Darjeeling way. Look.” Taking up the short, curve-bladed dagger he grasped its handle in a quick grip, and from the tip of the steel shot a needle-fine jet of almost colorless liquid which hardened into a jellylike substance almost as soon as it struck the porcelain top of the examination table. “Ingenious little tool, eh, what?” he asked. “That’s krait venom, my friend, if anyone should happen to ask you. One touch of it and you’re a dead pigeon.”

“Name of a small blue man, now I am angry!” exclaimed Jules de Grandin. “He has no sportsmanship, that one.”

“I’ll say he hasn’t,” agreed Ram Chitra Das. “The famous American formula of never giving a sucker an even break was developed by gentlemen of his profession several generations before Gautama Buddha came to spread the Light in Asia.”

Abruptly he dropped his bantering manner. “The question is, what’s to be done with him?”

“Why not let me run him in, sor?” volunteered Costello. “We can hold him on a charge of assault wid a dangerous weapon, an’ suspicion o’ murther—”

“No go,” Ram Chitra Das shook his head. “It’s true he tried to stab Dr. de Grandin, but it’s also true Dr. de Grandin attacked him. As for the murder charge, no judge in the country would listen to it. The coroner’s physician can’t assign a cause of death. How’d we ever manage to connect him with those killin’s in Thornapple Street?”

“Then ye’re sure they wuz killin’s, not natural deaths?” Costello responded.

“Sure?” The Indian grinned at him, then turned to the prisoner. “You polished off ‘The Snapper’ and his girl friend

in great shape, didn’t you, Swami?”

The old man smiled at him almost benignly. “The power of the eye, Nana Sahib—”

“No names!” cut in the other sharply. “I’m just Ram Chitra Das, if you please.”

“So be it,” acquiesced the old man. “I cast the power of the eye on them and they died.”

“H’m.”

“*Que diable?*” demanded de Grandin. “Is it that he claims to have the Evil Eye?”

“Something like that,” answered the Indian. Then, to me. “Have you some safe place we can stow him temporarily, Dr. Trowbridge?”

I thought a moment, then, “The garage?” I hazarded. “The car’s out front, and we could shut him up there for a while.”

“How about the windows?”

“There’s only one, and I had bars put on that during the tire shortage when burglaries became so numerous.”

“Good enough. Would you mind staying with Nairini — just in case — while we put this bird in his cage? Be with you in a moment.”

“But that can’t be, sor,” I heard Costello remonstrate as they returned from securing the prisoner in the garage. “It’s agin the order o’ nature!”

“*Non, mon Lieutenant*, it are entirely possible, I do assure you,” Jules de Grandin answered. “Ask good Friend Trowbridge if you doubt us.”

“Could it be, sor?” dutifully complied Costello. “They’re afther tellin’ me a man can hypnotize hisself to death.”

“What?” I demanded incredulously. “Hypnotize—”

“Perfectly, my old one,” broke in de Grandin. “It are entirely possible. Ram Chitra Das affirms it, and while I think it unlikely, I think it could be so.”

I turned from one of them to the other in confusion. “What in heaven’s name is all this about?”

“Just this, sir,” answered Ram Chitra Das, “this Swami Ajeit Singh is one of Raja Karowlee’s chief wonder-workers. He’s a skilled fakir, an adept at every brand o’ magic known in India, and, of course, an expert hypnotist. He probably never heard of Baird or Mesmer, and never studied even elementary psychology, but when it comes to practical ability as a hypnotist I doubt if any of your best professionals could hold a candle to him.

“I take it you’ve seen experiments in hypnotism performed in the psychological laboratory or on the stage?”

I nodded, wondering what was coming next.

“Very well, sir. You’ve seen the operator make the subject become rigid, so that if his head is placed on one chair and his feet on another weights can be piled on his stomach to a degree he could not possibly support in consciousness?”

“Yes, I’ve seen that.”

“Have you seen an operator make the blood go from one arm and run into the other till the skin threatens to burst?”

“Yes.”

“And blood come through the skin as if a wound had been inflicted?”

“Yes,” I nodded.

“And have not you seen the operator tell the subject to decrease his pulse-beat?” interjected Jules de Grandin. “Have not you seen pulsation at the hypnotist’s command sink from eighty beats a minute to sixty, fifty, or even forty?”

“Ye-es,” I agreed doubtfully. “I seem to recall such a demonstration in Baltimore some years ago, but—”

“No buts, if you will be so kind. I ask you as a man of science, Friend Trowbridge, if it is possible to tell the human heart — which as we know is an involuntary muscle and takes no orders from the conscious mind — to beat more slowly, is it not possible to tell it to cease beating altogether?”

“Well, I—”

“Do not evade the logic of the question, if you please, my friend. You have admitted seeing pulsation slowed down, even though the action of the heart is altogether involuntary. If it can be slowed down by hypnotic suggestion, why can not it be stopped entirely?”

I saw the logical conclusion of his premises, but was not ready to capitulate. “How could the operator, by which I suppose you mean Ajeit Swami, gain control of his subjects?” I demanded. “We all agree that acquiescence is the prime factor in successful hypnotism. The subject must be willing—”

“*Non, dix mille fois, non!*” he disagreed. “Consent is not at all necessary. All that is required is a lack of opposition. That is why we use the lights, the mirrors, the upraised forefinger — anything to fix the subject’s attention and divert him from a state of rebellion, from thinking ‘I will not be hypnotized.’”

“Consider, if you please: This Ajeit Singh Swami is a skilled hypnotist, as are all of his kind. He has a reputation as a wonder-worker throughout Northern India. Is it not so? Of course. Very well, then. The more his reputation grows the greater is his power. People fear him. They believe that he can do much more than he can in reality. They feel — by blue, they know — that it is useless to resist what they call his magic and we call his hypnotic power.

“*Très bon.* Where are we now? We are in the house in Thornapple Street occupied by Monsieur Snapper and his little pretty lady friend of unknown name. We see them sitting in that big, so lovely hall, in pleasant conversation. Perhaps they smoke the *hookah* together, it had more than

one mouth-piece. Perhaps they drink the after dinner coffee. Perhaps they just make the love. She seemed to me the sort of person to whom it would not be difficult to whisper sweet nothings. *Ha*, they have fled across the ocean to America; they have buried themselves in a semi-slum. They fancy themselves immune from pursuit. They feel secure. Yes. And then, all suddenly, comes the Swami Ajeit Singh, the emissary of Karowlee Sahib, and tells them he is there to work his master’s vengeance on them. Are they startled? *Parbleu*, they are what you call petrified. They know him, they fear him; they are powerless to resist him as the poor silly rabbit that sees the serpent slithering toward him. *Morbleu*, their chicken — *non*, their goose — is cooked! Yes, certainly; of course.

“The woman falls into a trance at once when Swami Ajeit bids her sleep. He bids her heart beat more slowly, miss a beat, cease beating altogether. Yes. So it is. Monsieur Snapper, being English and a little stronger in the will, does not succumb so quickly. He resists a so little moment, hears the Swami bid the woman die, sees her expire, and he feels the uselessness of struggling; yet he does struggle — a little. When the Swami puts the brand of The Afghan on his forehead it rouses him, he still has the vitality to rise and try to flee.

“But he runs poorly, weakly. We saw him run across the sidewalk, and thought that he was drunk because he staggered so. *Hélas*, it was not so. He ran to sure and certain death, that one. With each step that he ran his mind repeated, ‘Die—die—die!’ When he had reached the curb he was no better than a running corpse. We saw him fall into the street. We did not know it, but we saw him die. The command to his heart to stop had followed him from the house to the street, it was impossible for him to outrun it as it would be for a horse to outrun his tail. Yes, it are indubitably so. It are not strange the good Parnell could find no cause of death. Those so unfortunate ones did not die; they merely ceased to live.”

“I’m not convinced,” I told him, “but even if we grant your argument, what are you going to do about it? You don’t think any jury would convict him on such testimony, do you?”

“I’m afraid he’s got us in a forked stick,” Ram Chitra Das admitted. “He couldn’t work his hypnotism on Nairini or me, of course. We’re too well versed in such things; but there are other little tricks he might try on us. I’d feel a lot more comfortable if he were out of the way. By Minakshi—”

The little Frenchman’s short laugh broke through his sentence. “*Cordieu*, my friend, you have supplied the answer, I damn think!”

“What d’ye mean—”

“Your mention of Minakshi, the Fish-Eyed Goddess. Once when I was at Pondicherry I made the pilgrimage to Madura to witness the annual nuptials of Siva and Minakshi of the amethyst and emerald eyes — ‘The Fish-Eyed One’ as she is known throughout India. I saw her image carried in a splendid bridal car, observed the great jeweled eyes in her serene face and said to me, ‘Jules de Grandin, there is danger in those eyes of hers. A man might gaze too long at them and lose himself completely; become hypnotized. Does not the legend say even great Siva is enmeshed when he looks into them? There may be factual foundation for that legend, Jules de Grandin.’ And so I looked away. I am a brave man, me, but I take no unnecessary chances. No.”

Ram Chitra Das raised puzzled brows, but Costello was more forthright. “Is it completely daft ye’ve gone, sor?” he demanded.

“Daft — crazy?” answered Jules de Grandin with one of his quick elfin grins. “But yes, completely crazy, *mon Lieutenant* — crazy like the fox. Await me here, if you will be so kind.” He hurried from the room and Costello turned to us with a Lord-save-my-sanity expression.

“What’re ye goin’ to do wid a leprechaun like that?” he asked helplessly. “Sometimes I think he’s nutty as a fruitcake, then zowie! up he comes wid a idee that knocks ye for a loop.”

The patter of de Grandin’s feet came from the hall and he bounced into the room with upraised hands. “Observe them, if you please, *mes enfants!*” he commanded. “Are they not superb?” Between the thumb and finger of each hand he held a disc of colored glass, its periphery marked by a zone of greenish-brown, its center by a dot of black. I recognized them as the glass eyes from a white bear rug that I had purchased in a thoughtless moment years before and relegated to the attic long since.

“What—” I began, but he cut me off with such a smug grin that I could have kicked him.

“*Regardez-moi,*” he ordered. From his jacket pocket he produced a lead tube which I recognized as the container of some luminous paint with which I’d had the house number marked some time before in order that late-calling patients could see it more easily. Squeezing a bit of the paint paste on the tip of a match he proceeded to overlay the cornea of the glass eyes with it, working with that neat, swift precision which distinguished everything he did.

“Turn out the lights, if you please,” he directed, and as I complied we were plunged in Stygian darkness, for the lamps had been extinguished in the dining room and no moonlight filtered through the windows. “Observe me, closely, if you please,” his command came through the dark, and as we watched twin spots of luminance began to glow,

at first faintly, then with sharper definition, finally with a greenish-toned infernal blaze that seemed to give off wisps of smoke as if its fire fed on itself and needed no other fuel.

“Howly Moses!” exclaimed Costello. “Who’d ’a’ thought it?”

The lights blazed on again and I let my breath out with a jerk, nor was it till then that I realized I’d been holding it. “You see?” he asked. “Are they not truly fascinating?”

“Call it that if ye wish, sor,” answered Costello: “I got another name for it.”

“Precisely, *mon lieutenant*. So will he.”

“He, sor? Who?”

“That wicked old man now incarcerated in Friend Trowbridge’s garage. The one who tried to stab me with a poisoned dagger. Tonight we perform a most interesting experiment. We shall see how wickedness is turned against itself, how the power of suggestion may be made to rebound on him who exercises it for evil. Yes.

“Will you be kind enough to bring him from the garage?” he asked Costello and Ram Chitra Das.

“And now my old and very wicked one,” he told the fakir when they had brought him into the drawing room, “you killed Monsieur the Snapper and his little pretty lady companion by the power of the eye. Is it not so?”

“It is so,” replied the old man with a smile of such supreme self-satisfaction that it was little less than a smirk. “Moreover, I am safe from any harm your laws can do me. No judge sahib in your country would believe I have the power—”

“*Précisément, mon vieux et mangé des vers,* but we believe — and so do you. Anon we put you in a sure, safe place, and presently there comes another who will share the darkness with you. Think on her and be afraid. Remember into whose eyes even great Siva may not look without loss of his will. Bid the blood run slow and slower in your veins, the heart beat weak and weaker in your breast until it beats no more.”

He turned abruptly on his heel and left the room, but in a moment he returned and whispered to Costello and Ram Chitra Das, “Take him all quickly into the garage, my friends, and bind him so his face is toward the window. I have fixed the eyes against the wall beneath the sill.”

“S’pose he won’t look at ’em, sor?” Costello asked when he and the Indian returned from securing the prisoner. “He might shut his eyes or turn his head away—”

“We need not make ourselves uneasy on that score,” de Grandin replied. “Human nature being what it is, a man can no more help turning his eyes toward a point of light in a dark room than he can keep from snapping his lids shut when someone pokes a finger at his face. Also, you recall how you were fascinated by the glow of those eyes in the

dark. You knew what they were, yet you felt fear; he has no warning. He was told only, 'Presently another comes.' When he has been in the dark a few moments the eyes will begin glowing, it will be as if one came from outside — whether from outside the garage or from another world he will not know.

"But do you seriously think a man can command himself to stop living?" I asked.

"Perfectly," de Grandin cut in "This Ajeit Swami may be a wise man, he may think he understands a great variety of things, but also he is very superstitious. He believes in magic. His is no coldly scientific mind. I planted the seed in his brain before they took him out. Fear — fear of the unknown, which is the greatest fear of all — will do the rest. We know the *ju-ju* of the African witch-doctor is powerless against the European because he does not believe in it, but even the educated native has active or latent superstitious dread of witchcraft, and in consequence, when he is told a spell has been put on him, he weakens, wastes away and dies, purely through the power of suggestion and the working of ingrained belief and fear. Yes, it is so."

Somewhat later he glanced at his watch and put down his

glass. "An hour. It is time, I think, my friends. Come, let us go all quietly to the garage and observe what we shall observe."

Shortly after noon next day we ran into Dr. Parnell. "Hey, you fellers been up to some more monkey-business?" he demanded.

"Business of the monkey?" Jules de Grandin's face was blank as a brick wall "How do you mean, *cher collègue*?"

Parnell eyed us suspiciously. "Well, I wouldn't put it past you two. The police found a dead man in the street not far from Trowbridge's this morning about three o'clock, and—"

"Yes, and—" de Grandin prompted as Parnell came to a pause.

"And I'd say he died of heart failure except for one thing."

"And what is that one so small thing, if you please?"

"There's nothing wrong with his heart. It's sound as a dollar."

"*Tenez*," de Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache, "perhaps he auto-hypnotized himself to death, *cher collègue*. Will not you join us in a drink? You look as if you could use one, as *le bon Dieu* knows I can and shall."

Clair de Lune

MY FRIEND de Grandin turned to me, brows raised, lips pursed as if about to whistle. “*Comment?*” he demanded. “What is that you say?”

“You understand me perfectly,” I grinned back. “I said that if I didn’t know you for a case-hardened misogynist I’d think you contemplated an *affaire* with that woman. You’ve hardly taken your eyes off her since we came here.”

The laugh lights gleamed in his small, round, blue eyes and he tweaked the ends of his diminutive wheat-blond mustache like a tomcat combing his whiskers after an especially toothsome meal. “*Eh, bien*, my old and rare, she interests me—”

“So I gathered—”

“And is she not one *bonne bouchée* to merit anybody’s interest, I demand to know?”

“She is,” I admitted. “She’s utterly exquisite, but the way you’ve ogled her, like a moonstruck calf—”

“Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. de Grandin!” Miss Templeton, the resort’s hostess and all ’round promoter of good times, came fairly dancing toward us across the hotel veranda, “I’m so thrilled!”

“Indeed, *Mademoiselle?*” de Grandin rose and gave her a particularly engaging smile. “One is rejoiced to hear it. What is the cause of your so happy quivering.

“It’s Madelon Leroy!” In ordinary conversation thrilled, delighted laughter seemed about to break through everything Dot Templeton said, and her sentences were punctuated exclusively with exclamation points. Now she positively talked in italics. “She’s coming to our dance tonight! You know, she’s been so *frightfully* exclusive since she came here — said she came down to the shore to rest and didn’t want to meet a soul. But’s she’s relented, and will hold an informal reception just before the hop—”

“*Tiens*, but this is of the interest, truly,” he cut in. “You may count upon our presence at the *soirée*, *Mademoiselle*. But of course.”

As Dot danced off to spread glad tidings of great joy to other guests he glanced down at his wrist. “*Mon Dieu*, friend Trowbridge,” he exclaimed, “it is almost one o’clock, and we have not yet lunched. Come, let us hasten to the dining room. Me, I am almost starved. I faint, I perish! I am vilely hungry.”

Two tables away from us, where a gentle breeze fanned through a long window facing the ocean, Madelon Leroy sat at luncheon, cool, almost contemptuous of the looks leveled

at her. She was, as Jules de Grandin had remarked, a *bonne bouchée* deserving anyone’s attention. Her first performance in the name part of Eric Maxwell’s *Clair de Lune* had set the critics raving, not only over her talent as an actress, but over her exquisite, faery beauty, her delicate fragility that seemed almost other-worldly. When, after a phenomenally long run on Broadway she refused flatly to consider Hollywood’s most tempting offers, she stirred up a maelstrom of publicity that set theatrical press agents raving mad. Artists were permitted to sketch her, but she steadfastly refused to be photographed, and to thwart ambitious camera fiends and newsmen she went veiled demurely as a nun or odalisk when she appeared in public. *Clair de Lune* had closed for the summer, and its mysterious, lovely star was resting by the sea when Jules de Grandin and I checked in at the Adlon.

Covertly I studied her above the margin of my menu; de Grandin made no pretense of detachment, but stared at her as no one but a Frenchman can stare without giving offense. She was a lovely thing to look at, with her dead-white, almost transparent skin, her spun-gold hair, unbobbed, that made a halo of glory around her small head, and great, trustful-seeming eyes of soft, cerulean blue. There was a sort of fairylike, almost angelic fragility about her arching, slender neck and delicately cut profile, and though she was not really small she seemed so, for she was slender and small-boned, not like a Watteau shepherdess, but like a little girl, and every move she made was graceful and unhurried as grain bending in the wind. With her fragile fairness outlined against the window she was like some princess from a fairy tale come wondrously to life, the very spirit and epitome of all the fair, frail heroines of poetry.

“*Une belle créature, n’est-ce-pas?*” de Grandin asked as the waiter appeared to take our order, and he lost all interest in our fair neighbor. Women to him were blossoms brightening the pathway of life, but food — and drink — “*mon Dieu*,” as he was wont to say, “they are that without which life is impossible!”

Miss Leroy held court like a princess at the reception preceding the ball that evening. If she had seemed captivating in the shadowed recess of the dining room, or on the wide veranda of the hotel, or emerging from the ocean in white satin bathing suit, dripping and lovely as a naiad, she was positively ravishing that night. More than ever she seemed like a being from another world in a sleeveless gown of clinging, white silk jersey that followed every curve and

small roundness of her daintily moulded figure. It was belted at the waist with a gold cord whose tasselled ends hung almost to the floor, and as its hem swept back occasionally we caught fleeting glimpses of the little gilded sandals strapped to her bare feet.

Her pale-gold hair was done in a loose knot and tied with a fillet of narrow, white ribbon. About her left arm, just above the elbow, was a broad, gold bracelet chased with a Grecian motif, otherwise she wore no jewelry or ornaments.

She should have been completely charming, altogether lovely, but there was something vaguely repellent about her. Perhaps it was her slow and rather condescending smile that held no trace of warmth or human friendliness, perhaps it was the odd expression of her eyes — knowing, weary, rather sad, as if from their first opening they had seen people were a tiresome race, and hardly worth the effort of a second glance. Or possibly it might have been the eyes themselves, for despite her skillful makeup and the pains obviously taken with her by beauticians there was a fine lacework of wrinkles at their outer corners, and the lids were rubbed to the sheen of old silk with a faintly greenish eye-shadow; certainly not the lids of a woman in her twenties, or even in her middle thirties.

“Dr. Trowbridge,” she extended a hand small and slender as a child’s, rosy-tipped and fragile as a white iris, and, “Dr. de Grandin,” as the little Frenchman clicked his heels before her.

“*Enchanté, Mademoiselle,*” he bowed above the little hand and raised it to his lips, “*mais je suis très heureux de vous voir!* — but I am fortunate to meet you!”

There is no way of putting it in words, but as de Grandin straightened, he and Madelon Leroy looked squarely in each other’s eyes, and while nothing moved in either of their faces something vague, intangible as air, yet perceptible as a chill, seemed forming round them like an envelope of cold vapor. For just an instant each took stock of the other, wary as a fencer measuring his opponent or a boxer feeling out his adversary, and I had the feeling they were like two chemicals that waited only the addition of a catalytic agent to explode them in a devastating detonation. Then the next guest was presented and we passed on, but I felt as if we had stepped back into normal summer temperature from a chilled refrigerator.

“Whatever—” I began, but the advent of Mazie Schaeffer interrupted my query.

“Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, isn’t she *adorable?*” asked Mazie. “She’s the most beautiful, the most wonderful actress in the world! There never was another like her. I’ve heard Dad and Mumsie talk about Maude Adams and Bernhardt and Duse, but Madelon Leroy — she’s really tops! D’ye remember her in the last scene of *Clair de Lune*, where she says goodbye

to her lover at the convent gate, then stands there — just stands there in the moonlight, saying nothing, but you can fairly see her heart breaking?”

De Grandin grinned engagingly at Mazie. “Perhaps it is that she has had much time to perfect her art, *Mademoiselle*—”

“Time?” Mazie echoed almost shrilly. “How could she have had time? She’s just a girl — hardly more than a child. I’m twenty-one in August, and I’ll bet she’s two years my junior. It isn’t time or talent, Dr. de Grandin, it’s genius, sheer genius. Only one woman in a generation has it, and she has it — in spades! — for hers.”

The little Frenchman studied her attentively. “You have perhaps met her?”

“Met her?” Mazie seemed upon the point of swooning, and her hands went to her bosom as if she would quiet a tumultuous heart. “Oh, *yes*. She was lovely to me — told me I might come to her suite for tea tomorrow—”

“*Mon Dieu!*” de Grandin exploded. “So soon? Do you mean it, *Mademoiselle?*”

“Yes, isn’t it too wonderful? Much, much too fearfully wonderful to have happened to anyone like me!”

“You speak correctly,” he agreed with a nod. “Fearfully wonderful is right. *Bon soir, Mademoiselle.*”

“Now,” I demanded as we left the crowded ballroom and went out on the wide, breeze-swept veranda, “what’s it all mean?”

“I only wish I knew,” he answered somberly.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake,” I was nettled and made no attempt to hide it, “don’t be so devilishly mysterious! I know there’s something between you and that woman — I could fairly feel it when you met. But what—”

“I only wish I knew,” he repeated almost morosely. “To suspect is one thing, to know is something else again, and I, *hélas!* have no more than a naked suspicion. To say what gnaws my mind like a maggot might do a grave injustice to an innocent one. *Au contraire*, to keep silent may cause great and lasting injury to another. *Parbleu*, my friend, I know not what to do. I am entirely miserable.”

I glanced at my watch. “We might try going to bed. It’s after eleven, and we go back tomorrow morning. This will be our last sure chance of a night’s sleep. No patients to rouse us at all sorts of unholy hours—”

“No babies to be ushered in, no *viellards* to be erased out of the world,” he agreed with a chuckle. “I think you have right, my old one. Let us lose our troubles in our dreams.”

Next morning as, preceded by two bellboys with our traps, we were about to leave the hotel, I stepped aside to make way for two women headed for the beach. The first was middle-aged, with long, sharp nose and small, sharp eyes,

dark-haired, swarthy-skinned, with little strands of gray in her black hair and the white linen cap of a maid on her head. Her uniform was stiff, black bombazine and set off by a white apron and cuffs. Across her arm draped a huge, fluffy bath towel. She looked formidable to me, the sort of person who had seen much better days and had at last retired from a world that used her shabbily to commune secretly with ineffectual devils.

Behind her, muffled like an Arab woman in a hooded robe of white terry cloth, a smaller figure shuffled in wooden beach clogs. The fingers of one hand protruded from a fold of the robe as she clutched it about her, and I noted they were red-tipped, with long, sharp-pointed nails, and thin almost to the point of desiccation. Beneath the muffling hood of the robe we caught a glimpse of her face. It was Madelon Leroy's, but so altered that it bore hardly any semblance to that of the radiant being of the night before. She was pale as Mardi moonlight, and the delicate, small hollows underneath her cheekbones were accentuated till her countenance seemed positively ghastly. Her narrow lips, a little parted, seemed almost withered, and about her nose there was a pinched, drawn look, while her large sky-hued eyes seemed even larger, yet seemed to have receded in her head. Her whole face seemed instinct with longing, yet a longing that was impersonal. The only thing unchanged about her was her grace of movement, for she walked with an effortless, gliding step, turning her flat hips only slightly.

"*Grand Dieu!*" I heard de Grandin murmur, then, as she passed he bowed and raised his hand to his hat brim in salute. "*Mademoiselle!*"

She passed as if he had not been there, her deep-set, cavernous eyes fixed on the sunlit beach where little wavelets wove a line of lacy ruffles on the sand.

"Good heavens," I exclaimed as we proceeded to our waiting car, "she looks ten — twenty — years older. What do you make of it?"

He faced me somberly. "I do not quite know, Friend Trowbridge. List night I entertained suspicion. Today I have the almost-certainty. Tomorrow I may know exactly, but by tomorrow it may be too late."

"What are you driving at?" I demanded. "All this mystery about—"

"Do you remember this quotation?" he countered: "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?*"

I thought a moment. "Isn't that what Voltaire said about history — 'the more it changes, the more it is the same?'"

"It is," he agreed with another sober nod, and never did he state a greater truth. Once more I damn think history is about to repeat, and with what tragic consequences none can say."

"Tragic consequences? To whom?"

"*On ne sait pas?*" he raised his narrow shoulders in a

shrug. "Who can say where lightning designs to strike, my old?"

We had been home from the shore a week or so, and I was just preparing to call it a day when the office telephone began to stutter. "Sam, this is Jane Schaeffer," came the troubled hail across the wire. "Can you come over right away?"

"What's wrong?" I temporized. The day had been a hot and tiring one, and Nora McGinnis had prepared veal with sweet and sour sauce. I was in no mood to drive two miles, miss my evening cocktail and sit down to a spoiled dinner.

"It's Mazie. She seems so much worse—"

"Worse?" I echoed. "She seemed all right when I saw her down at the shore. Lively as a cricket—"

"That's just it. She was well and healthy as a pony when she came home, but she's been acting so queerly, and getting weaker every day. I'm afraid it's consumption or leukemia, or something—"

"Now, take it easy," I advised. "Mazie can't dance every night till three o'clock and I play tennis every afternoon without something giving way. Give her some toast and tea for dinner, put her to bed, and see she stays there all night, then bring her round to see me in the morning—"

"Sam Trowbridge, listen to me! My child is dying — and not dying on her feet, either, and you tell me to give her toast and tea! You get right in your car this minute and come over, or—"

"All right," I placated. "Put her to bed, and I'll—"

"She's in bed now, you great booby. That's what I've been trying to tell you. She hasn't been up all day. She's too weak—"

"Why didn't you say so at first?" I interrupted rather unreasonably. "Hold everything. I'll be right over—"

"What presents itself, *mon vieux?*" de Grandin appeared at the office door, a beaded cocktail shaker in his hand. "Do not say that you must leave. The martinis are at the perfect state of chilliness—"

"Not now," I refused sadly. "Jane Schaeffer just called to say Mazie's in a bad way. So weak she couldn't rise this morning—"

"*Feu noir du diable* — black fire of Satan! Is it that small happy one who is selected as the victim? *Morbleu*, I should have apprehended it—"

"What's that?" I interrupted sharply. "What d'ye know—"

"*Hélas*, I know nothing. Not a thing, by blue! But if what I have good reason to damn suspect is true — come, let us hasten, let us fly, let us rush with all celerity to attend her! Dinner? Fie upon dinner! We have other things to think of, us."

Her mother had not overstated Mazie's condition. We found her in a state of semi-coma, with sharp concavities beneath her cheekbones and violet crescents underneath her eyes. The eyes themselves were bright as if with fever, but the hand I took in mine was cold as a dead thing, and when I read my clinical thermometer I saw it registered a scant eighty, while her pulse was thin and reedy, beating less than seventy slow, feeble strokes a minute. She rolled her head listlessly as I dropped into a chair beside the bed, and the smile she offered me was a thin ghost of her infectious grin which did no more than move her lips a little and never reached her eyes.

"What's going on here?" I demanded, noting how the epidermis of her hand seemed dry and roughened, almost as if it were chapped. "What have they been doing to my girl?"

The lids drooped sleepily above the feverishly bright eyes and she murmured in a voice so weak that I could not catch her reply. "What?" I asked.

"Le — let me go — I must — I have to—" she begged in a feeble whisper. "She'll be expecting me — she needs me—"

"Delirium?" I whispered, but de Grandin shook his head in negation.

"I do not think so, my friend. She is weak, yes; very weak, but not irrational. No, I would not say it. Cannot you read the symptoms?"

"If it weren't that we saw her horse-strong and well fed as an alderman less than two weeks ago, I'd say she is the victim of primary starvation. I saw cases showing all these symptoms after World War I when I was with the Belgian Relief—"

"Your wisdom and experience have not deserted you, my old one. It is that she starves — at least she is undernourished, and we would be advised to prescribe nux vomica for her, but first to see that she has strong beef tea with sherry in it, and after that some egg and milk with a little brandy—"

"But how could she possibly have developed such an advanced case of malnutrition in these few days—"

"Ha, yes, by damn it! That is for us to find out."

"What is it?" asked Jane Schaeffer as we came down the stairs. "Do you think she could have picked up an infection at the shore?"

De Grandin pursed his lips and took his chin between his thumb and forefinger. "*Pas possible, Madame*. How long has she been thus?"

"Almost since the day she came back. She met Madelon Leroy the actress at the shore, and developed one of those desperate girl-crushes on her. She's spent practically every waking moment with Miss Leroy, and — let's see, was it the second or the third day? — I think it was the third day she

called on her since she came home almost exhausted and went right to bed. Next morning she seemed weak and listless, rose about noon, ate a big brunch, and went right back to Miss Leroy's. That night she came home almost in collapse and every day she's seemed to grow weaker."

He eyed her sharply. "You say her appetite is excellent?"

"Excellent? It's stupendous. You don't think she could have a malignant tapeworm, do you, or some such parasite—"

He nodded thoughtfully. "I think she might, indeed, *Madame*." Then, with what seemed to me like irrelevance: "This Miss Leroy, where is it that she lives, if you please?"

"She took a suite at the Zachary Taylor. Why she chose to stay here rather than New York I can't imagine—"

"Perhaps there are those who can, *Madame Schaeffer*. So. Very good. She took up quarters at the Hotel Taylor, and—"

"And Mazie's been to see her every day."

"*Très bon*. One understands, in part, at least. Your daughter's illness is not hopeless, but it is far more serious than we had at first suspected. We shall send her to the Sidewell Sanatorium at once, and there she is to have complete bed rest with a nurse constantly beside her. On no account are you to say where she has gone, *Madame*, and she must have no visitors. None. You comprehend?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Yes? But—"

"Miss Leroy has called her twice today, and seemed concerned when she heard Mazie could not get up. If she should call to see—"

"I said no visitors, *Madame*. It is an order, if you please."

"I hope you know what you're doing," I grumbled as we left the Schaeffer house. "I can't find fault with your diagnosis or treatment, but why be so mysterious about it? If you know something—"

"Alas, my friend, that is just what I do not," he admitted. "It is not that I make the mystery purposely; it is that I am ignorant. Me, I am like a blind man teased by naughty little boys. I reach this way and that for my tormentors, but nothing can my reaching fingers grasp. You recall that we were speaking of the way that history repeats itself?"

"Yes, the morning we left the shore."

"Quite yes. Now, listen carefully, my friend. What I shall say may not make sense, but then, again, it may. Consider:

"More years ago than I like to remember I went to the *Théâtre Français* to see one called Madelon Larue. She was the toast of Paris, that one, for in an age when we were prim and prosy by today's standards she made bold to dance *au naturelle*. *Parbleu*, I thought myself a sad dog when I went to see her!" He nodded gravely. "She was very beautiful, her; not beautiful like Venus or Minerva, but like Hebe or

Clytie, with a dainty, almost childlike loveliness, and an artlessness that made her nudity a thing of beauty rather than of passion. *Eh bien*, my *gran'père* — may the sod lie lightly on him! — had been a gay dog in his day, also. He was summering near Narbonne that year, and when I went to visit him and partake of his excellent Chateau Neuf and told him I had seen Larue he was amazed.

“For why? Because, *parbleu*, it seems that in the days of the Second Empire there had been an actress who was also the toast of Paris, one Madelon Larose. She, too, had danced *à découvert* before the gilded youth who flocked about the Third Napoleon. He had seen her, worshiped her from afar, been willing to lay down his life for her. He told me of her fragile, childlike beauty that set men’s hearts and brains ablaze and when he finished telling I knew Madelon Larose and Madelon Larue were either one and the same or mother and daughter. *Ha*, but he told me something else, my *gran'père*. Yes. He was a lawyer physician, that one, and as such connected with the *préfecture de police*.”

“This Madelon Larose, her of the fragile, childlike beauty, began to age all suddenly. Within the space of one small month she grew ten — twenty — years older. In sixty days she was so old and feeble she could no longer appear on the stage. Then, I ask you, what happened?”

“She retired,” I suggested ironically.

“Not she, by blue! She engaged a secretary and companion, a fine upstanding Breton girl and — attend me carefully, if you please — within two months the girl was dead, apparently of starvation, and Madelon Larose was once more dancing *sans chemise* to the infinite delight of the young men of Paris. Yes.

“There was a scandal, naturally. The police and the *Sûreté* made investigations. Of course. But when all had been pried into they were no wiser than before. The girl had been a strong and healthy wench. The girl was dead, apparently of inanition; Larose had seemed upon the point of dissolution from old age; now she was young and strong and lovelier than ever. That was all. One does not base a criminal prosecution on such evidence. *Enfin*, the girl was buried decently in *Père Lachaise*, and Larose — at the suggestion of the police — betook herself to Italy. What she did there is anybody’s guess.

“Now, let us match my story with my *gran'père*’s: It was in 1905 I saw Larue perform. Five years later, when I had become a member of *la faculté de médecine légale*, I learned she had been smitten with a strange disease, an illness that caused her to age a decade in a week; in two weeks she was no more able to appear upon the stage. Then, I ask to know, what happened? *Parbleu*, I shall tell you, me!

“She hired a *masseuse*, a strong and healthy young woman of robust physique. In two weeks that one died — apparently

from starvation — and Larue, *mordieu*, she bloomed again, if not quite like the rose, at least like the lily.

“I was assigned as assistant to the *juge d’instruction* in the case. We did investigate most thoroughly. Oh, yes. And what did we discover, I damn ask? This, only this, *morbleu*: The girl had been a strong and healthy young person. Now she was dead, apparently of inanition. Larue had seemed upon the point of dissolution from some strange and nameless wasting disease. Now she was young and strong and very beautiful again. *C’est tout*. One does not base a criminal prosecution on such evidence. *Enfin*, the poor young *masseuse* was recently interred in Saint Supplice, and Larue — at the suggestion of the police — went to Buenos Aires. What she did there is anybody’s guess.

“Now, let us see what we have. It may not amount to proof, but at least it is evidence: Larose, Larue, Leroy; the names are rather similar, although admittedly not identical. One Madelon Larose who is apparently about to die of some strange wasting malady — perhaps old age — makes contact with a vigorous young woman and regains health and apparent youth while the younger person perishes, sucked dry as an orange. That is in 1867. A generation later a woman called Madelon Larue who fits the description of Larose perfectly is stricken ill with precisely the same sort of sickness, and regains her health as Larose had done, leaving behind her the starved, worn-out remnant of a young, strong, vigorous woman with whom she had been associated. That is in 1910. Now in our time a woman named Madelon Leroy—”

“But this is utterly fantastic!” I objected. “You’re assuming the whole thing. How can you possibly identify Madelon Leroy with those two—”

“Attend me for a little so small moment,” he broke in. “You will recall that when Leroy first came under our notice I appeared interested?”

“You certainly did. You hardly took your eyes off her—”

“*Précisément*. Because of why? Because, *parbleu*, the moment I first saw her I said to me, ‘Jules de Grandin, where have you seen that one before?’ And, ‘Jules de Grandin,’ I reply to me, ‘do not try to fool yourself. You know very well where you first saw her. She is Madelon Larue who thrilled you when she danced *nu comme la main* at the *Théâtre Français* when you were in your salad days. Again you saw her, and her charm and beauty had not faded, when you made inquiry of the so strange death of her young, healthy *masseuse*. Do not you remember, Jules de Grandin?’

“‘I do,’ I told me.

“‘Very well, then, Jules de Grandin,’ I continue cross-examining me, ‘what are this so little pretty lady doing here today, apparently no older than she was in 1910 — or 1905? You have grown older, all your friends have aged since then,

is she alone in all the world a human evergreen, a creature ageless as the moonlight?"

"The devil knows the answer, not I, Jules de Grandin," I tell me.

"And so, what happens next, I ask you? There is a grand soirée, and Mademoiselle Leroy gives audience to her public. We meet, we look into each other's eyes, we recognize each other, *pardieu!* In me she sees the *juge d'instruction* who caused her much embarrassment so many years ago. In her I see — what shall I say? At any rate we recognize each other, nor are we happy in the mutual recognition. No. Of course."

Next afternoon when we went to the sanitorium to see Mazie we found her much improved, but still weak and restless. "Please, when may I leave?" she asked. "I've an engagement that I really ought to keep, and I feel so marvelously better—"

"Precisely, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin agreed. "You are much better. Presently you shall be all well if you remain here, soak up nourishment *comme une éponge* and—"

"But—"

"But?" he repeated, eyebrows raised in mild interrogation. "What is the 'but', if you please?"

"It's Madelon Leroy, sir. I was helping her—"

"One does not doubt it," he assented grimly. "How?"

"She said my youth and strength renewed her courage to go on — she's really on the verge of a breakdown, you know — and just having me visit her meant so much—"

The stern look on his face halted her. "Why, what's the matter?" she faltered.

"Attend me, *Mademoiselle*. Just what transpired on your visits to this person's suite at the hotel?"

"Why, nothing, really. *Madelon* — she lets me call her that — isn't it wonderful? — is so fatigued she hardly speaks. Just lies on a *chaise* lounge in the most fascinating *négligées* and has me hold her hand and read to her. Then we have tea and take a little nap with her cuddled in my arms like a baby. Sometimes she smiles in her sleep, and when she does she's like an angel having heavenly dreams."

"And you have joy in this friendship, *hein?*"

"Oh, yes, sir. It's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

He smiled at her as he rose. "*Bien*. It will be a happy memory to you in the years to come, I am convinced. Meanwhile, we have others to attend, and if you gain in strength as you have done, in a few days—"

"But Madelon?"

"We shall see her and explain all, *ma petite*. Yes, of course."

"Oh, will you? How good of you!" Mazie gave him back

an answering smile and nestled down to sleep as sweetly as a child.

"Miss Leroy's maid called three times today," Jane Schaeffer told us when we stopped at her house on our way from the sanitorium. "It seems her mistress is quite ill, and very anxious to see Mazie—"

"One can imagine," Jules de Grandin agreed dryly.

"So — she seems so fond of the dear child and asked for her so piteously — I finally gave in and told her where you'd sent Mazie—"

"You *what?*" De Grandin seemed to have some difficulty in swallowing, as if he'd taken a morsel of hot food in his mouth.

"Why, what's wrong about that? I thought—"

"There you make the mistake, *Madame*. If you had thought you would have remembered that we strictly forbade all visitors. We shall do what we can, and do it quickly as may be, but if we fail the fault is yours. *Bon jour, Madame!*" He clicked his heels together and bowed formally, his manner several degrees below freezing. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, we have duties to perform, duties that will not bear postponement."

Once on the pavement he exploded like a bursting rocket. "*Nom d'un chat de nom d'un chien de nom d'un coq!* We can defend ourselves against our ill-intentioned enemies; from chuckle-headed friends there is no refuge, *pardieu!* Come, my old one, speed is most essential."

"Where to?" I asked as I started the engine.

"To the sanitorium, by blue! If we make rushing-haste we may not be too late."

The blue ridge of the Orange Mountains drowsed in the distance through the heat-haze of the summer afternoon, and the gray highway reeled out behind us like a paid-out ribbon. "Faster, faster!" he urged. "It is that we must hasten, Friend Trowbridge."

Half a mile or so ahead a big black car, so elegant it might have belonged to a mortician, sped toward the sanitorium, and his small blue eyes lighted as he described it. "Hers!" he exclaimed. "If we can pass her all may yet be well. Cannot you squeeze more speed from the *moteur?*"

I bore down on the accelerator and the needle crawled across the dial of the speedometer. Sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five — the distance between us and our quarry melted with each revolution of the wheels.

The chauffeur of the other car must have seen us in his rear-view mirror, or perhaps his passenger espied us. At any rate he put on speed, drew steadily away from us and vanished round the turn of the road in a swirling cloud of dust and exhaust-smoke.

“*Parbleu, pardieu, par la barbe d’un porc vert!*” swore de Grandin. “It is that she outruns us; she makes a monkey of—”

The scream of futilely-applied brakes and clash of splintering glass cut his complaint short, and as I braked to round the curve we saw the big black sedan sprawled upon its side, wheels spinning crazily, windshield and windows spider-webbed with cracks, and lenses smashed from its lights. Already a thin trail of smoke was spiraling from its motor. “*Triomphe!*” he cried as he leaped from my car and raced toward the wrecked vehicle. “Into our hands she has been delivered, my friend!”

The chauffeur was wedged in behind his wheel, unconscious but not bleeding, and in the tonneau two female forms huddled, a large woman in somber black whom I recognized as Miss Leroy’s maid, and, swathed in veilings till she looked like a gray ghost, the diminutive form of Madelon Leroy. “Look to him, Friend Trowbridge,” he ordered as he wrenched at the handle of the rear door. I shall make it my affair to extricate the women.” With a mighty heave he drew the fainting maid from the wreck, dragged her to a place of safety and dived back to lift Madelon Leroy out.

I had managed to drag the chauffeur to a cleared space in the roadside woodland, and not a moment too soon, for a broad sheet of flame whipped suddenly from the wrecked sedan, and in a moment its gas tank exploded like a bomb, strewing specks of fire and shattered glass and metal everywhere. “By George, that was a near thing!” I panted as I emerged from the shelter I had taken behind a tree. “If we’d been ten seconds later they would all have been cremated.”

He nodded, almost absent-mindedly. “If you will watch beside them I shall seek a telephone to call an ambulance, my friend.... they are in need of care, these ones, especially Mademoiselle Leroy. You have the weight at Mercy Hospital?”

“What d’ye mean—”

“The influence, the — how do you say him? — drag? If it can be arranged to have them given separate rooms it would be very beneficial to all parties concerned.”

We sat beside her bed in Mercy Hospital. The chauffeur and maid had been given semi-private rooms, and under his direction Madelon Leroy had been assigned a private suite on the top floor. The sun was going down, a ball of crimson in a sea of swirling rose, and a little breeze played prankishly with the white curtains at the window. If we had not known her identity neither of us could have recognized the woman in the bed as lovely, glamorous Madelon Leroy.

Her face was livid, almost green, and the mortuary outlines of her skull were visible through her taut skin — the hollow temples, pitted eye-orbits, pinched, strangely

shortened nose, projecting jawline, jutting superciliary ridges. Some azure veinlets in the bluish whiteness of her cheeks accentuated her pallor, giving her face a strange, waxen look, the ears were almost transparent, and all trace of fullness had gone from the lips that drew back from the small, white, even teeth as if she fought for breath. “Mazie,” she called in a thin, weak whisper, “where are you, dear? Come, it is time for our nap. Take me in your arms, dear; hold me close to your strong, youthful body—”

De Grandin rose and leaned across the bed, looking down at her not as a doctor looks at his patient, nor even as a man may look at a suffering woman, but with the cold impersonality the executioner might show as he looks at the condemned. “Larose, Larue, Leroy — whatever name you choose to call yourself — you are at last at the end of the road. There are no victims to renew your pseudo-youth. By yourself you came into the world — *le bon Dieu* only knows how many years ago — and by yourself you leave it. Yes.”

The woman looked at him with dull, lack-luster eyes, and gradual recognition came into her withered face. “You!” she exclaimed in a panic-stricken, small voice. “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?”

“*Tu parles, ma vieille,*” he replied nonchalantly. “You have said so, old woman. I have found thee. I was not there to keep thee from absorbing life from that poor one in 1910, nor could I stand between thee and that pitiful young girl in the days of the Third Napoleon, but this time I am here. Quite yes. Your time runs out; the end approaches.”

“Be pitiful,” she begged tremulously. “Have mercy, little cruel man. I am an *artiste*, a great actress. My art makes thousands happy. For years I have brought joy to those whose lives were *triste* and dull. Compared to me, what are those others — those farm women, those merchants’ daughters, those offspring of the *bourgeoisie*? I am *Clair de Lune* — moonlight on soft-flowing water, the sweet promise of love unfulfilled—”

“*Tiens*, I think the moon is setting, *Mademoiselle*,” he interrupted dryly. “if you would have a priest—”

“*Nigaud, bête, sot!*” she whispered, and her whisper was a muted scream. “O fool and son of imbecile parents, I want no priest to whine his lying promise of repentance and redemption in my ears. Give me my youth and beauty once again, bring me a fair, fresh maiden—”

She broke off as she saw the hard gleam in his eyes, and, so weak that she could scarcely find the breath to force the epithets between her graying lips, she cursed him with a nastiness that would have brought a blush to a Marseilles fishwife.

He took her tirade calmly, neither smiling nor angered, but with an air of detachment such as he might have shown while examining a new sort of germ-life through a

microscope. “Thou beast, thou dog, thou swine! Thou species of a stinking camel — thou misbegotten offspring of an alley cat and a night-demon,” she whispered stridently.

Physicians grow accustomed to the sight of death. At first it’s hard to witness dissolution, but in our grim trade we become case-hardened. Yet even with the years of training and experience behind me I could not forebear a shudder at the change that came over her. The bluish whiteness of her skin turned mottled green, as if already putrefactive microorganisms were at work there, wrinkles etched themselves across her face like cracks in shattering ice, the luster of her pale-gold hair faded to a muddy yellow, and the hands that plucked at the bedclothes were like the withered talons of a dead and desiccated bird. She raised her head from the pillow, and we saw her eyes were red-rimmed and rheumy, empty of all sight as those of an old woman from whom age has stolen every faculty. Abruptly she sat up, bending at the waist like a hinged doll, pressed both shriveled hands against her withered bosom, gave a short, yelping cough like that of a hurt animal. Then she fell back and lay still.

There was no sound in the death chamber. No sound came through the opened windows. The world was still and breathless in the quiet of the sunset.

Nora McGinnis had done more than merely well by us, and dinner had been such a meal as gourmets love to dream of. Veal simmered in a sweet and sour sauce, tiny dumplings light as cirrus clouds, and for dessert small pancakes wrapped round cheese or apricot and prune jelly. De Grandin drained his coffee cup, grinned like a cherub playing truant from celestial school, and raised his glass of Chartreuse *vert* to savor its sharp, spicy aroma.

“Oh, no, my friend,” he told me, “I have not an explanation for it. It is like electricity, one of those things about which we may understand a great deal, yet about which we actually know nothing. As I told you, I recognized her at first sight, yet was not willing to admit the evidence of my own eyes until she recognized me. Then I knew that we faced something evil, something altogether outside usual experience, but not necessarily what you would call supernatural. She was like a vampire, only different, that one. The vampire has a life-in-death, it is dead, yet undead. She were entirely alive, and likely to remain that way as long as she could find fresh victims. In some way — only the good God and the devil know how — she acquired the ability to absorb the vitality, the life-force, from young and vigorous women, taking from them all they had to give, leaving them but empty, sucked-out husks that perished from sheer weakness, while she went on with renewed youth and vigor.”

He paused, lit a cigar, and: “You know it is quite generally

believed that if a child sleeps with an aged person or an invalid he loses his vitality to his bedfellow. In the book of Kings we read how David, King of Israel, when he was old and very weak, was strengthened in that manner. The process she employed was something like that, only much accentuated.

“In 1867 she took sixty days to slip from seeming-youth to advanced age. In 1910 the process took but two weeks or ten days; this summer she was fair and seeming-young one night, next morning she seemed more than middle-aged. How many times between my *gran-père’s* day and ours she did renew her youth and life by draining poor unfortunate young girls of theirs we cannot say. She was in Italy and South America and *le bon Dieu* only knows where else during that time. But one thing seems certain: With each succeeding renewal of her youth she became just a little weaker. Eventually she would have reached the point where old age struck her all at once, and there would not have been time to find a victim from whom she could absorb vitality. However, that is merely idle speculation. Mademoiselle Mazie had been selected as her victim this time, and if we had not been upon the scene — *eh bien*, I think there would have been another grave in the churchyard, and Mademoiselle Leroy would have reopened in her play this fall. Yes, certainly.

“You ask to know some more?” he added as I made no comment.

“One or two things puzzle me,” I confessed. “First, I’m wondering if there were any connection between her unnatural ability to refresh herself at others’ expense and her refusal to be photographed. Or do you think that was merely for the sake of publicity?”

He studied the question a moment, then: “I do not, my friend. The camera’s eye is sharper than ours. Skilled makeup may deceive the human eye, the camera lens sees through it and shows every little so small imperfection. It may well be that she did fear to have her picture taken for that reason. You comprehend?”

I nodded. “One thing more. That afternoon you told Mazie that you were sure the memory of her friendship with the Leroy woman would always be a thing to cherish. You knew the cold and spider-like nature of the woman; how she sucked her victims dry so pitilessly, yet—”

“I knew it, yes,” he broke in, “and so do you, now; but she did not. She was attached to this strange, beautiful freak; she adored her with the ardor no one but a young, impressionable girl can have for an older, more sophisticated woman. Had I told her the whole truth not only would she have refused to believe me, she would have had an ideal shattered. It is far, far better that she keep that ideal, that she remain in happy ignorance of the true quality of the person she called

friend, and cherish her memory forever. Why take something beautiful away from her, when by merely keeping silence we can give her happy recollections?"

Once more I nodded. "It's hard to believe all this, even though I saw it," I confessed. "I'm willing to accept your thesis, but it did seem hard to let her die that way, even though—"

"Believe me, my friend," he cut in, "she was no really-truly woman. Did not you hear what she said of herself

before she died, that she was *clair de lune* — moonlight — completely ageless and without passion? She was egotism carried to illogical conclusion, a being whose self-love transcended every other thought and purpose. A queer, strange thing she was, without a sense of right or wrong, or justice or injustice, like a faun or fairy or some grotesque creature out of an old book of magic."

He drained the last sip of his liqueur and passed the empty glass to me. "If you will be so kind, my friend."

Vampire Kith and Kin

“AND I DON’T mind admitting that the case has got my goat,” young Dr. McCormick told me unhappily. “I’ve never seen another like it, and can’t find anyone who has. Will you come have a look at her tomorrow, sir? Perhaps I’d better turn the case over to you entirely—”

“Oh, no, you don’t!” I told him. “If you want to call me into consultation I’ll be glad to help in any way I can, though I’m just a general practitioner, and this seems like a case for a specialist; but if you think it’s hopeless — well, I’m hanged if I’ll let you hand me the bag to hold. Signing death certificates for other doctors’ patients isn’t my idea of recreation—”

“Oh, no, sir!” McCormick’s sharp denial bordered on hysteria. “It’s not like that, at all. It’s a matter of professional ethics. My personal interest — you see — oh, hang it, sir! — I’m in love with my patient. I can’t observe her objectively any more, can’t regard her illness as a case; can’t even see her as a woman. She’s *the* woman; the one woman in the world for me, and I’m afraid I might overlook a symptom that might lead me to a cure. When you begin to see a body that’s functioning faultily not as a defective piece of physical mechanism, but as a beloved woman, your value as a scientist is impaired. When every indication of unfavorable prognosis throws you into panic—”

“I understand, my boy,” I interrupted. “The rule that makes us call in other doctors for our families is a wise one. Sometimes I think the physician, like the priest, should remain celibate. I’ll be glad to look in on your patient—”

“And so shall I, if you permit it,” Jules de Grandin added as he stepped into the study. “Your pardon, *Monsieur*,” he apologized to McCormick, “but I could not help hear what you said to Friend Trowbridge as I came down the hall. It was not that I eavesdropped, but” — he raised one shoulder in a Gallic shrug — “*je n’ai que faire de vous dire*.”

I made the necessary introductions and the little Frenchman dropped into a chair, then crossed his hands in his lap and stared fixedly at my visitor. “Say on, *Monsieur*,” he ordered. “Tell me of this case which has deprived you of the goat.”

“I’ll try to be as clinical as possible,” McCormick responded. “Her name is Anastasia Pappalukas; age twenty-three, unmarried. And” — his voice took on a sandy grittiness — “she’s dying; dying for no earthly reason except that she is.”

De Grandin nodded. “You have made the tentative

diagnosis?”

“A dozen of ’em, sir, and they’re all wrong. The only thing I’m certain of is that she’s fading like a wilting flower, and nothing I can do seems any use.”

“*Pardonnez-moi*, I do not mean to be too obvious, but sometimes we are blinded by our very nearness to a case. You have not discounted the possibility of latent TB?”

McCormick gave a short, chiding laugh. “I have not, sir; nor anemia nor any other likely ailment. Her sputum tests are all negative, so are her X-rays. Her temperature is nearly always normal; I’ve made repeated blood counts, and while she’s just below the million mark the deficiency isn’t great enough to cause concern. About her only objective symptoms are progressive loss of weight and increasing pallor; subjectively she complains of loss of appetite, slight headaches in the morning and profound lassitude. Lately she’s been troubled by nightmares; says she’s afraid to go to sleep for fear of ’em.”

“U’m? One sees. And how long has this condition obtained?”

“I’m not quite sure, sir. I’ve had the case about three months, but how long she’d been ill before they called me I can’t say. I don’t know much about her background; you see, I’d never met her till they called me. It seems she’s been in what we used to call ‘a decline’ for some time, but you know how vague laymen are. She might have started downhill long before they called me, and not become aware of her condition till her illness had progressed beyond the hope of successful treatment.”

He paused a moment, then, “Have you ever heard of a disease called *gusel vereni*?” he asked.

“*Mon Dieu!*” the Frenchman exploded. “Where did you hear of him, *Monsieur*, if you please?”

“I ran across the term for the first time last night, sir. I stopped at the County Medical Society library on my way from Anastasia’s and happened to pick up a copy of Wolfgang Wholbrück’s *Medicine in the Near East*. I don’t know what made me consult the book, except that Anastasia is a Greek — her family came here in ’21 as refugees from Smyrna after Greece had lost the war with Turkey — and I was fairly desperate for a clue — any kind of clue — to her condition.”

“H’m’m’m’m,” de Grandin made one of those odd noises, half grunt, half whinny, which no one but a Frenchman can produce. “And what did you learn of *gusel vereni*, if you

please?”

McCormick answered like a schoolboy repeating a lesson: “According to Wholbrück it is a disease of unknown origin to which Greeks, Turks, Armenians and kindred peoples seem peculiarly vulnerable, and which seldom or never attacks Western Europeans. All attempts to isolate its causative factor have failed. Objectively its symptoms parallel those of pulmonary tuberculosis, that is, there is progressive loss of weight and stamina, though there is neither fever nor a cough. It is sometimes called ‘the Angels’ Disease’ because the patient loses nothing of his looks as it progresses, and women often seem to become more beautiful as the end approaches. It is painless, progressive and incurable—”

“And Jules de Grandin knows about him, by blue! Oh, yes. He has seen him at his dreadful worst, and better than the *Herr-doktor* Wholbrück he knows what causes him!

“Come, my friends, let us go see this Grecian lady who may be a victim of this so strange malady. Right away, all quickly, if you please.”

“You said you know the cause of this disease?” I whispered as we drove to our mystery patient’s house.

He nodded somberly. “Perhaps I spoke with too much haste, my friend. In Greece and in the Turkish hospitals I have seen him and had him explained to me at great length, but—”

“But did you ever see a cure?” I persisted.

“*Hélas*, no,” he admitted. “But perhaps that was because the patients’ broth was spoiled by an excess of cooks.”

“What d’ye mean? Too many doctors?”

“Perhaps; perhaps too few priests.”

“Too few — whatever are you driving at?”

“I wish I had a ready answer, my old one. The best that I can do is guess, and though I am a very clever fellow I sometimes guess wrong.”

“But what did you mean by ‘too few priests?’”

“Just this: In Greece, as elsewhere in the Near and Middle East, the patina of modernity is only a thin coating laid upon an ancient culture. For the most part their physicians have been trained at Vienna or Heidelberg, great scientific institutions where the god of words has been enthroned in the high place once sacred to the Word of God. Therefore they believe what they see, or what some *Herr-professor* tells them he has seen, and nothing else. The priesthood, on the contrary, have been nourished on the *vin du pais*, as one might say. They remember and to some extent give cedence to the ancient beliefs of the people.”

“What’s all that got to do with—”

“Just this: The priests contend the malady is spiritual in origin; the doctors hold that it, like all else, is completely

physical. Left to themselves the *papas* would have attempted treatment by spiritual means, but they were not allowed to do so. And so the patients died. You see?”

“You mean it was another instance of conflict between science and religion?”

“*Mais non*; by no means. There is no conflict between true science and true religion. It is our faulty definition of the terms that breeds the conflict, my friend. All religions are things of the spirit, but all things of the spirit are not necessarily religious. All physical things are subject to the laws of science, but science may concern itself with things not wholly physical, and if it fails to do so it is not entirely scientific.”

“I don’t think I quite follow you,” I admitted. “If you’d be a little more specific—”

“*Bien. Bon*,” he broke in. “You do not understand. Neither, to tell the whole truth, do I. Let us start in mutual blindness and see who first discerns the light. Meanwhile, it seems, we are arrived.”

The small house in Van Amburg Street where Philammon Pappalukas lived with his motherless daughter was neat as the proverbial pin. It stood flush with the street, only three low marble steps topped by a narrow landing separating it from the sidewalk, and the front door led directly into a living room which occupied the entire width of the building. Mr. Pappalukas greeted us without enthusiasm. He was a small man, slim and attractive, with hair almost completely gray and a small white mustache. His face showed lines of worry and his shoulders sagged, not with defeat but with an angle that betokened resigned acquiescence.

“Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. de Grandin,” he acknowledged McCormick’s introduction, then, in answer to our guide’s inquiry, “No, there doesn’t seem to be much change. I think the end is very near, now, Marshall. I’ve seen such cases before—”

“And so have I, *Monsieur*,” de Grandin interrupted. “May we see this one, if you please?”

Our host gave him a rather weary look, as if to say, “Of course, if you insist, but it won’t do any good,” then led us to the bedroom where our patient lay.

She was a pretty little woman with a wealth of softly curling black hair, soft brown eyes almost disproportionately large, a rather small but very full-lipped mouth and a sweet, yielding chin cleft by a deep dimple. Except for her bright lipstick the only color in her face was centered round her eyes where violet shadows gathered in the hollows. “Thank you, Marshall;” she responded to young McCormick’s inquiry, “I don’t feel much better; I’m so tired, dear, so cruelly tired.”

Our physical examination told us nothing, or, to be more

exact, served only to confirm McCormick's report. Her temperature and pulse were normal and her skin was neither dry nor moist, but exactly as a healthy person's skin should be. Fremitus was no more than usual; upon percussion we could find no evidence of impaired resonance, and our stethoscopes disclosed no trace of mucous rales. Whatever her illness might be, I was prepared to stake my reputation it was not tuberculosis.

De Grandin showed no disappointment. He was cheerful, and with something more than the conventional "bedside manner," as he dropped into a chair and took her hand in his, his finger resting lightly on her pulse. "They tell me that you dream, *ma chère*," he announced. "Of what is it that you dream all unhappily?"

A thin wash of blood showed in her face, to be succeeded by a pallor even more pronounced than before. "I—I'd rather not discuss my dreams, sir," she answered, and it seemed to me a look of fear came in her eyes. "I—"

"No matter, my small one," he broke in with a quick, reassuring smile. "Some things are better left unsaid, even in the sick room or confessional."

He drew a notebook from his pocket and poised a silver pencil over it. "And when was it you first began to feel these spells of weakness, if you please?"

"I—" she began, then faltered, drew a long breath and fell silent.

"Yes?" he prompted. "You were saying—"

"I—I can't remember, sir."

His narrow black brows rose in Saracenic arches at her answer, but he made no comment. Instead, across his shoulder he asked me, "Will you be good enough to move the light, Friend Trowbridge? I find it difficult to see my notes."

Obediently I moved the bedside lamp until he nodded satisfaction with its place, and as I stepped back I noticed that the light fell directly on the silver pencil with which he appeared to be scribbling furiously, but with which he was actually making aimless circles.

"*Morbleu*, but he is bright, is he not, *Mademoiselle*?" he asked the girl as he held up the pencil. "Does he not shine like sunlight on clear water?"

She looked at the small shiny rod and as she did so he twirled it more quickly, then gradually decreased its speed until it revolved slowly, then swung back and forth like a pendulum. "Observe him closely, if you please," he ordered in a soft monotone. "Behold how he sways like a young tree in the wind, a tired, a very tired young tree that seeks to rest all quietly. It is a sleepy little tree, a very tired and sleepy little tree, almost as tired and sleepy as you, *ma petite*." His voice sank low and lower, and his words took on a slurred

and almost singsong tone. It might have been a lullaby cradle-song to lure her into slumber, and as he kept repeating the slow, almost senseless phrases I saw her lids quiver for a moment, seem to fight to remain up, then slowly, almost reluctantly, fold across her big brown eyes.

"Ah, so!" he murmured as he rose and placed his thumbs upon her brow, stroking it toward the temples with a soft massaging motion. "So, my little poor one, you will rest, *n'est-ce-pas*?" For several moments he continued stroking her forehead, then, "Now, *Mademoiselle*, you are prepared to tell me when it was you first began to feel sensations of this tiredness, *hein*?"

"It was last autumn," she responded weakly. Her words came slowly, feebly, wearily, in a voice so tired that it might have been that of an old woman. "It was last autumn in November — All Souls' Day—"

"*Parbleu*, do you say so? And what had you been doing, if you please?"

"I'd been out to the cemetery to visit Timon's grave. Poor Timon! I could not love him, but he loved me—" Her voice sank lower and lower, like that of a radio when the rheostat is turned off slowly.

"Do you say so? And who was Timon, and why did you go to his grave?"

"Timon Kokinis," she began then stopped as a knock sounded from the ceiling just above her bed, as if a clenched fist had struck the plaster.

"Ah, yes, one sees; and this Monsieur Kokinis, he was — *grand Dieu*, my friends, look to her!"

"*Oh!*" The girl's sharp exclamation had been like the cry of a hurt animal and she caught her breath in a gasp as she began to tremble in a clonic spasm, quivering from throat to feet as if in the throes of a galvanic shock. Her hands, which had been meekly folded on her bosom, wreathed themselves together as if in mortal terror, her eyes forced open as if she were being throttled, then turned up underneath their lids till only a thin thread of white was visible. Her lips writhed back and her tongue thrust out.

"Good God!" cried McCormick. "Hold her. Dr. Trowbridge — watch her mouth; don't let her bite her tongue!" He snatched his kit up, hurried to the bathroom and came back with a filled hypo. "Easy! Easy does it," he soothed as he sponged her arm with alcohol, took up a fold of skin and thrust the needle in.

For something like a minute she continued struggling, then the morphine took effect and she subsided with a tired sigh.

"*Parbleu*, I thought it was *le petit mal* at first!" de Grandin murmured as he dropped the girl's quiescent hands.

"You *thought*?" McCormick shot back. "You know damn well it was, don't you? If that's not epilepsy I never saw a

case—”

“Then you have never seen one, my friend,” broke in the small Frenchman. “This seizure, if its origin were physical, was much more like hysteria than epilepsy. Consider, if you please: There was no epileptic cry or groan preceding the spasm, and while she ran her tongue out, there was no attempt to bite it.” He looked down at the drugged girl pityingly. “*Ma pauvre*,” he said in a low voice. “*Ma pauvre belle créature!*”

McCormick looked at him challengingly. “What d’ye mean, if the origin of her seizure were physical?” he demanded.

De Grandin fixed him with a long, unwinking stare, and nothing moved in his face. At last, “There are more things in heaven and earth, and most especially on earth, than medical philosophy is willing to admit, *mon jeune ami*,” he answered in a level, toneless voice. “Attend her, if you please,” he added as he moved toward the door. “I think that Friend Trowbridge and I have done all that we can at present, and further inquiries are necessary for our diagnosis. If anything untoward occurs do not delay to telephone us; we shall be in readiness.”

“Maybe you know what you’re doing,” I whispered as we went down the stairs, “but I’m completely at sea—”

“I, too, am tossed upon a chartless ocean of doubt,” he confessed, “but in the distance I think that I see a small, clear light. Let us see if Monsieur Pappalukas can assist us in obtaining our bearings.

“Tell me, *Monsieur*,” he demanded as we joined our patient’s father in the downstairs room, “this Timon Kokinis, who was he?”

“Timon Kokinis?”

“*Précisément, Monsieur*, have I not said so?”

“He was a childhood friend of Anastasia’s. His parents escaped from Smyrna with my wife and me when the American destroyers took us from the burning city. He and she were born in this country and grew up together. We Greeks are rather clannish, you know, and prefer to marry in our own nationality, so when the children showed a fondness for each other his father and I naturally assumed they’d marry.”

“Perfectly, *Monsieur*. We make such arrangements in France, too; but the happy consummation of your plans was frustrated by the young man’s death?”

“Not quite, Dr. de Grandin. Timon was a wild lad, rather too fond of the bottle, and with a hard streak of cruelty in him. He was two years Anna’s senior, and almost from babyhood seemed to think he owned her. When they went to grammar school it was she who carried both their books, not the other way around, as usually happens, and if he did not

feel like doing his homework, which he seldom did, he made her do it for him, then meet him at his house early enough for him to copy it. If she displeased him he would beat her. More than once she came home with a blackened eye where he had struck her in the face with his fist.

“By the time they reached high school he had become completely possessive. She was afraid to look at another boy or even have an intimate girl friend.”

“Afraid, *Monsieur*?”

“Yes, sir; literally. Timon was an athlete, a four-letter man, and more than a match for any of his classmates. If he caught Anna at the soda fountain with another boy he did not hesitate to slap her face, then beat her escort unmercifully.”

“*Mordieu*, and you permitted this?”

Mr. Pappalukas raised his brows and drew the corners of his mouth down. “The Levantine does not regard such things as Western Europeans and Americans do, sir. With us it is the woman’s place to serve, the man’s to command. Perhaps it is the relic of centuries of Turkish oppression, but—”

“And *Mademoiselle* your daughter? She was born here, grew up here. Surely she had no such Oriental ideas?”

Once more Mr. Pappalukas made that odd grimace that seemed almost a facial shrug. “Anna had been brought up in a Greek household, Dr. de Grandin, and Timon was conspicuously handsome — like one of our old demigods. From infancy she had been led to expect she would marry him—”

“But ultimately there was a break?”

“Yes, sir; ultimately. I don’t think Anna ever loved Timon. She accepted the thought of their marriage as she might have accepted him as a brother, because there was no help for it, but notwithstanding her strict rearing and his possessive attitude she began to rebel before she was through high school. When war came and he joined the Army she broke away completely. We could not very well object to her engaging in Red Cross activities, and the contacts that she made in the work changed her attitude entirely. When Timon came back she told him she would not honor the engagement his father and I had made for them in infancy.”

“And Monsieur Timon, how did he take her rebellion?”

“He flew into a rage and beat her so severely that she was in bed a week. Then I took sides with her, and the engagement was definitely broken. When I refused to force her to marry him he called a curse down on her, saying she should surely die a prey to a *vrykolakas*, which is to say—”

“One comprehends, *Monsieur*. And afterwards?”

“After that he shot himself.”

De Grandin’s little round blue eyes lit up with that sharp light I knew portended action. “One understands, in part, at least, *Monsieur*. You have been very helpful. It now remains for us to find a way to circumvent that curse.”

“Then” — Mr. Pappalukas’ voice trembled — “you think

my daughter's illness is no natural thing?"

The little Frenchman gave a noncommittal shrug. "I would not go so far as that. We sometimes draw the limits of the natural too close. I am persuaded that she suffers from no infection known to biologists, and equally convinced her illness will not yield to ordinary medicine. *Eh bien*, since that is so we must resort to extraordinary means. The good young Dr. McCormick is with her, and will keep us posted as to her condition. Meantime, we shall do what we can—"

"Ah, but what can you do?" Mr. Pappalukas broke in. "You admit that medicine is powerless—"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur*, but did you hear me say that Jules de Grandin is helpless? *Mais non*, it is quite otherwise, I do assure you. I am of infinite resourcefulness, me, and if I do not find a way to aid your charming daughter I shall be astonished. Yes, certainly."

"I suppose you've worked out a theory?" I ventured as we drove toward home.

"Not quite a theory; let us rather say an hypothesis," he answered. "To begin, the young McCormick gave us a clue when he told us he had read Wholbrück. I know that one, me; I have read him carefully and cursed him roundly."

"Cursed him? Why?"

"Because he is a fool, by blue; because he will not believe what he sees. He is like the rustic who visited the zoo and on beholding a rhinoceros declared that notwithstanding he was looking at him there was no such animal. Consider, if you please: Time out of mind it has been believed in the Levant that *gusel vereni*, sometimes called 'the Angels' Disease,' sometimes 'the false consumption,' is not an illness in the usual sense of the term, but the result of demoniacal possession. In olden days it was more common, but in our time it is met often enough for Wholbrück to have made mention of it. And what does he say of it, I ask you? That its cause is unknown, and biochemistry is unable to isolate its infective agent. You see, he willfully shuts his eyes to the possibility of anything but physical causation. He will not even go so far as to say, 'It is believed by the peasants to be caused by demoniacal possession.' Not he! He says simply that its cause is unknown. *Parbleu*, a fool he is, a bigoted, blind fool."

"You mean you think that Anastasia is possessed by a demon?" I asked incredulously.

"Not necessarily. It would be sufficient if she thought herself possessed."

"If she thought — good Lord, man, what are you driving at?"

"Just this, my old one: Thoughts are very potent things. The African witch-doctor tells the native of the Congo, 'I

have put a spell on you,' and straightway the poor fellow sickens, grows weak and dies. In Polynesia the same thing occurs. We have innumerable instances of natives being 'prayed to death' by pagan priests despite the efforts of the missionaries to prevent it. Have not our doctors borne repeated testimony of the potency of voodoo magic in Haiti, and does not the Pennsylvania farmer believe that a hex put on him can cause illness, even death? But of course.

"Very well, then. Let us assume Mademoiselle Anna believes herself possessed, believes that she, as the old saying has it, is 'called;' that she must surely fade away and die, and nothing can be done about it. Why should she not die in such circumstances? It is not difficult to think yourself into an illness, even a fatal one, as you know from experience with hypochondriacs in your practice."

"That's so," I admitted, "but why should she think herself possessed?"

"Because of Monsieur Timon the Deceased. He cursed her, then committed suicide. In many parts of Greece it is still thought that suicides become *vrykolakas* at death, and you will recall he swore she should be destroyed by such an one."

"What the devil is a *vrykolakas*?"

"He is a species of vampire, not a true one, but something quite similar. The vampire is an animated corpse who steals forth from his grave to suck the blood of his victims. The *vrykolakas* is a disembodied spirit who subtly drains his victim of vitality, and he, my friend, is said to be the cause of *gusel vereni*.

"*Très bon*, let us review the evidence: First, we have a long and intimate association between a boy and girl. The boy is cruel and arrogant, almost, if not quite, sadistic in his attitude toward the girl. He dominates her completely, ordering her about as a harsh master might a dog. All this predisposes her to subservience and docility and makes her malleable to his will. At last she revolts, but her self-assertion is a shallow thing; deep down she feels that he is master. No matter, he hurls a curse at her, then destroys himself.

"She is extremely suggestible — did not you notice how quickly she sank into hypnosis this evening? *Bien. Bon*. The thought — the gnawing fear — of his curse has been planted in her mind like the seed of some malignant plant. Perhaps it does not germinate at once; perhaps it lies there in her mental soil awaiting circumstances favorable to gestation.

"Then what occurs, I ask to know? She visits his grave on All Souls' Day, she calls him to remembrance, perhaps she feels responsible for his self-murder, reproaches herself, thinks of him — How does she think of him, one wonders? Is it pityingly, as for one who died for love of her, or is it

fearfully, as of one who placed a curse on her? A curse is very dreadful to the Greeks, my friend, and not a thing to be lightly regarded.

“And then what happens? Thinking of her almost-lifelong servitude to him she goes home, broods upon his tragic, violent death and on the curse he put upon her — that she should die a victim to a *vrykolakas*. *Barbe d’un poisson*, it has been said, ‘As a man thinketh so is he;’ it can be said with even greater truth of a woman. Our poor young Mademoiselle Anna goes to bed and slowly pines away, and nothing medicine can do will help her.” He sat back, crossed his hands upon the knob of his stick and looked at me with the air of a man who has propounded an unanswerable proposition.

As always, I rose to the bait. “You say her case is hopeless—”

“*Non, non, mon vieux*, I said that nothing medicine can do will help her, not that Jules de Grandin is impotent.”

“Then what do you propose doing—”

He glanced at his watch. “First I shall ask you to set me down here. I go to collect *matériel de siège*. In half an hour I shall join you, then” — he grinned one of his quick elfin grins — “we shall see what we shall see, if anything.”

He was punctual to the minute, and immensely pleased with himself as he laid a miscellany of packages on the study table. “These,” he announced as he held up two small silver censers, “are for your use, and the young McCormick’s, my old one.”

“Our use?” I echoed. “What’re we to do with ’em?”

“Swing them, *par la barbe d’un singe jaune*. I have filled them full of *Mandragora autumnalis*, which was esteemed a very potent drug by the old ones, for it is said that Solomon the Wise made use of it to compel djinn and devil to obey him. And Josephus Flavius declares that at the smell of it the demons which possess a man take flight—”

“Surely,” I scoffed, “you don’t believe such utter nonsense!”

From another parcel he drew a wide-mouthed bottle of what seemed like black or very dark amethyst glass, stoppered with a wax disc on which were impressed the letters I.X.N. “It is the prison into which I mean to drive him,” he explained.

“Eh? The prison—”

“*Précisément. La Bastille*. In the Levant, where such things are, they believe evil spirits can be forced or lured into a bottle, and—”

“You’re amazing!” I guffawed. “To think of grown men going through such mummery. I’ll have trouble keeping a straight face—”

“Perhaps,” he agreed, and the flatness of his voice might

have betokened embarrassment or irony, “and then again, you may not. Are we ready? *Très bien, Allons-vous-en.*”

Anastasia was sleeping as we tiptoed into her sick room. “How is she?” de Grandin whispered. “Is there any change, any indication of nightmare?”

“Not yet,” McCormick answered. “I don’t think the morphia has worn off yet.”

“Good. Attend me, both of you, if you please.” He drew the little silver censers from his portmanteau and laid them on the bedside table. “Anon the visitant will come, and we must be prepared for him. When I give the signal strike matches and ignite the incense in these thuribles, then march about the room while you swing them toward Mademoiselle Anna. Friend Trowbridge, you will march clockwise, from left to right; Friend McCormick, you will proceed counterclockwise. It would be better if you maintained complete silence, but if you must speak do not raise your voices. *Comprenez-vous?*”

“You spoke of a visitant,” I whispered. “D’ye mean when and if Anna has a nightmare?”

“*Peut-être que oui, peut-être que non* — perhaps yes; perhaps no,” he responded. “In such a case as this — *tonnerre de Dieu*, regard her, if you please!”

The sleeping girl stirred restlessly and turned her head upon the pillow with a small protesting moan like that a sleepy child gives when wakened. “Quick, *mes amis*, set your censers glowing, commence the promenade!” he ordered.

Our matches bared in unison, and the powder in the censers took fire instantly, glowing redly and emitting pungent clouds of bitter-sweet smoke.

De Grandin laid the wide-mouthed bottle on the dressing table, set its wax cork beside it, and took his station near the girl’s bed, gazing earnestly into her face.

She moaned again, made a small whimpering sound; then her lips parted and she raised her hands and thrust her head forward, as if she saw an ecstatic vision through her fast-closed lids. Her pale cheeks flushed, she moved her hands gently downward, as if stroking the face of one who bent above her, and a tremor shook her slender form as her slim bosom rose and fell with avid, quick breathing. Her lips opened and closed slowly, in a pantomime of blissful kissing, and a deep sigh issued from between her milk-white teeth; her breath came short and jerkily in quick exhausted gasps.

“*Grand Dieu, l’incube!*” de Grandin whispered almost wonderingly.

“Yes, it’s an incubus, a nightmare!” I agreed. “Quick, waken her, de Grandin, this sort of thing can lead to erotomania!”

“Be silent!” he commanded sharply. “I did not say *an* incubus, but *the* incubus. This is no nightmare, my friend, no mere erotic boiling-up of the unconscious in a dream. It is *la séduction* — the wooing of a living woman by a thing from beyond—”

“Dr. de Grandin, look behind you, man, for God’s sake!” McCormick’s warning came in a thick, strangled voice. “It — it’s—”

A ripping, tearing sound came from the window at the far end of the room, and from its rod one of the scrim curtains came fluttering, not as if falling of its own weight, nor yet as if wafted by a wind, but purposefully, sentiently, consciously, as if it were imbued with a life of its own.

We saw the flimsy fabric take on curves and form, as if it were a cerecloth draped loosely on a lich — there was the outline of the head, a sacklike rounded protuberance above the line of the shoulders, and from the right and left drooped fluttering wings of cloth as if they swayed downward from outspread arms, while as the thing came forward with a stealthy, creeping motion we saw its lower portion swirl and advance and retreat alternately, as if it fluttered against moving legs. Yet there was nothing — absolutely nothing — under it. Through the loosely-woven scrim we saw the light shine; when it moved between us and the dresser we could see the furniture through the meshes.

“*Grande cornes de Satan*, have you come to try conclusions with me, *Monsieur Sans Visage*?” asked Jules de Grandin in a hard, gritty voice. He stood upon his toes, his body bent as if he were about to take off in a run or spring upon the fluttering horror that came oscillating toward him, thrust a hand into his jacket pocket and drew out a small, shining object.

It was a little golden thing, a tiny reliquary of old hammered gold set with amethyst, so small a man could hide it like a coin in the hollow of his hand, and to it was attached a slender chain of golden links scarce thicker than a thread. He paid the gold chain out until the ikon hung from it like a pendulum, and with a quick move of his hand swung it toward the advancing form. “Accursed of God,” his voice, though low, was harsh and strident as a battle-cry, “rejected of the earth, I bid thee stand, *in nomine Domini!*”

The ghastly, fluttering thing seemed to give back a step, as if it had encountered a quick blast of wind, and we could see its folds stretch tightly over something — though we knew that there was nothing there.

“*Conjuro te*,” the little Frenchman whispered. “*Conjuro te, sclerastissime, retro — retro! Abire ad locum tuum!*”

The sheet-formed thing seemed hesitating, fluttered back a step, lost height and seeming-substance. As de Grandin advanced on it we could see it shrink. The curtain-hem which

had been clear six inches from the floor when it first started forward now almost swept the broadloom carpet.

“Back, foul emanation from the tomb — back, revenant of the self-slain, into the place appointed for thee!” His command was harsh, inexorable, and the imponderable sheeted thing gave ground before him.

Perhaps it was a minute, perhaps ten — or an hour — that they dueled thus, but the little Frenchman’s fiercely repeated injunction seemed resistless, inch by fractions of an inch the ceremented horror retreated, losing stature as it fled. By the time it reached the dressing table where the blackglass bottle lay it might have draped upon a two-year-old child instead of on a giant as at first.

There was a sudden swishing sound, like that made by a sword whipped through the air, and all at once the curtain fell upon the floor in an innocuous heap, while inside the darkly purple glass of the bottle showed something thicker than a vapor but less substantial than a liquid, something an obscene toad-belly gray that squirmed and writhed and pullulated like a knot of captive worms.

“*Misère de Dieu*, I have thee, naughty fellow!” Holding the small reliquary at the bottle’s mouth with his left hand, de Grandin forced the wax stopper in place with his right, stepped back, restored the ikon to his pocket and mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief. “*Pardieu*, but it was touch and go, my friends,” he told us with a relieved sigh. “I was not certain I could master him when we began our combat.” He took a deep breath, wiped his forehead again, then grinned at us, a little wearily. “*Morbleu*, but I am tired, me,” he confessed. “Like the horse of the plough at sunset. Yes.” He leant against the dresser, and for a moment I thought he would fall, but he recovered himself with a visible effort and smiled at McCormick.

“Look to your sweetheart, *mon brave*,” he ordered. “She will have need of you, both as a lover and physician, but — she will get well. Do not doubt it.”

Anastasia lay upon her back, her arms outstretched to right and left as if she had been crucified upon the bed, her breath coming in hot, fevered gasps, tears welling from beneath her closed lids. “Go to her, *mon jeune*,” the Frenchman bade. “Bend over her; *pardieu*, awaken her with kisses as the Prince did wake the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood! Yes, certainly. A man is young but once, and youth and love come back no more; you cannot hoard them as a miser does his gold.”

He plucked me by the sleeve. “Come, let us go, my friend,” he whispered. “What have we to do with such things? Besides, there is a final duty to perform.”

With the dark-glass bottle underneath his arm he led the way down to the basement. “Will you be good enough to open the furnace?” he asked, and as I complied he heaved

the bottle into the firebox. It landed on the bed of glowing coals and rolled an inch or so, then burst with a report like that of a smashed electric light bulb, and a sharp hissing followed while a cloud of milky vapor spiraled toward the flue. I sickened as the acrid odor of incinerating flesh assailed my nostrils.

“It was this way, my friend,” he told me some two hours later in the study. “I was of two minds concerning Mademoiselle Anna’s illness; you of only one.”

“Say that again,” I ordered. “I don’t think I quite understand.”

He took a deep breath, swallowed once, and began again, speaking slowly “You were sure she suffered a psychoneurotic condition; I was not convinced of it. Undoubtedly a good case could be made for either hypothesis, or both. She was neurotic, beyond question, she was extremely suggestible; she had been dominated since infancy by the naughty Kokinis person. Also, she had been brought up on Greek folklore, and knew the legends of the *vrykolakas* as English children know the rhymes of Mother Goose or French children their *contes de fées*. She might have scorned and derided them, but what we learn to believe in childhood we never quite succeed in disbelieving. *Bien. Très bon.* It were entirely plausible that she should have been impressed by his self-murder and the curse he put upon her, that she should be haunted and deprived of life by a *vrykolakas*. Yes, of course.

“In a neurasthenic state of hypochondria she might indeed have wasted away and finally perished. That she should have dreams of the lover she had spurned, dreams in which he wooed her and she had not power to withstand his importunities, is likewise possible. Even nice young people have erotic dreams, and a highly nervous state is conducive to them.

“You recall she would not tell us what she dreamed? How she blushed when questioned concerning her nightmares? That was clear proof that she did in dreamland what she would not think of doing in a conscious state.

“Very well. The spasm she suffered when she was about to tell us of this Kokinis person was another link in the chain of evidence. It was a nervous blocking of consciousness, a refusal to talk on a painful subject — what the psychiatrists refer to as a complex; a sort of mental traffic jam caused by a series of highly emotionally accented ideas in a repressed state.

“So far a good case for psychopathological illness has been made out; but as yet we lack complete proof. And what disproved it, or at least gave reason for suspecting that some super-physical agent — something you would call the supernatural — intervened?

“Listen, I shall tell you: When she was seized with that spasm there came a sound of knocking on the ceiling of her room. Her nerves — her disturbed psyche — could have caused the spasm, but not the knocking on the ceiling. Not at all, by no means. That was caused by something else, something outside her.

“What was the something that had caused it? *Qui sait* — who knows? Ghosts and spirits, all kinds of discarnate entities, are notoriously fond of announcing their presence by rappings on the walls and furniture. Hence the knocking might have been the visiting-card of such an one; again it might not.

“Accordingly I drew my line of battle up in two ranks. If what you assumed were true, and her illness was caused by psychic disturbance, we had a chance to master it by going through the show of exorcising the entity she thought possessed her, and making her believe she was cleansed of it.

“So far, so good. But what if it were a real ghostly thing that persecuted her? We should need more than a dumb-show to conquer that, *n’est-ce-pas?* So I prepared for him, also. I had a long talk with Father Zaimis, pastor of the Greek Church of St. Basil. He is a native-born Greek, and knew what I was talking of when I told him I suspected Mademoiselle Anna was the victim of a *vrykolakas*. He did not think I was outside my head when I requested that he lend me two small censers and a reliquary of St. Cyril, who was so justly famous for his conflicts with unholy spirits. Also, he prepared with his own hands the stopper for my bottle, and in it put a tiny filing from the reliquary. Thus armed, I was prepared for all eventualities.”

“But whatever gave you the idea of imprisoning the *vry* — the whatever-you-call-it — in a bottle?” I demanded. “I never heard of that before.”

“*Parbleu*, my friend, I fear that there are many things of which you have not heard,” he grinned at me. “Have the goodness to attend me for one little so small minute.”

From the bookshelf he drew a yellow-bound volume stamped in gold letters, *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin*, by Montague Summers. Leafing through it, he stopped at page 208 and began reading:

“There is yet another method of abolishing a vampire — that of bottling him. There are certain persons who make a profession of this; and their mode of procedure is as follows: The sorcerer armed with a picture of some saint lies in ambush until he sees the vampire pass, when he pursues him with his ikon; the poor *Obour* takes refuge in a tree or on the roof of a house, but his persecutor follows him with the talisman, driving him from all shelter in the direction of a bottle specially prepared, in which is placed some of the vampire’s favorite food. Having no other

resource, he enters the prison, and is immediately fastened down with a cork, on the interior of which is a fragment of the ikon. The bottle is then thrown into the fire, and the vampire disappears for ever.'

"You observed the color of that bottle?" he asked. "I had coated his interior with a mixture of gelatine and chicken's blood, of which all vampires are inordinately fond, if they can not obtain the blood of humans. *Eh bien*, I hope he enjoyed his last meal, though I did not give him much time to digest it."

"But see here," I persisted, "if you can pen an evil spirit in a bottle—"

"*Ah bah*, my friend, why continue harping on that single note? At present I am much more interested in releasing good spirits from their bottles." He poured himself a generous portion of cognac, drained it at a single gulp, then refilled his glass. "The first drink was for my great thirst," he told me solemnly. "Now that that has been assuaged, I drink for pleasure." He took a long, appreciative sip, and set the glass down on the coffee table, gazing at it fondly.

Conscience Maketh Cowards

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

— *Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1.*

LIEUTENANT JEREMIAH COSTELLO of the homicide squad refilled his coffee cup, drained it in two gargantuan gulps, and tilted the silex pot over it again. “No, sor, Dr. de Grandin,” he reported, “I’m not exactly satisfied with th’ findin’s. It *looks* like suicide, I’ll grant, but there’s many a wolf — four- or two-legged — as, looks as innocent as any lamb at first glance, too. Here’s th’ setup: This felly is supposed to have committed suicide by jumpin’ out o’ th’ sixth storey winder, an’ to make assurance doubly sure, as th’ felly says, he tied th’ cord o’ his bathrobe round his neck before he jumped. But, says Dr. Parnell, th’ coroner’s physician, th’ cord broke an’ he was precipitated to th’ courtyard. O.K., says I. Could be. But there’s more here than meets th’ eye; leastwise, Dr. Parnell’s eye.

“You’ve seen throttlin’ cases, I dunno?” he raised his almost copper-colored brows inquiringly.

De Grandin nodded. “Many of them, my old one.”

“Just so, sor. An’ ye’ll be rememberin’ that in most o’ them th’ hyoid bone is fractured an’ th’ larynx cart’lages is broken, whereas in hangin’ you don’t often find this?”

“*Justement*,” the little Frenchman nodded.

“Well, sor, every sign was present. If I ever seen a throttlin’ case, this was one. I’m thinkin’ that they choked him ’fore they swung him from th’ winder, An’ here’s another thing: Th’ cord by which he hung before he fell down to the cement o’ th’ courtyard hadn’t frayed out gradual-like. It was clean-cut as if a knife or scissors snipped it off.”

“*Vraiment?* And what does Dr. Parnell say to this, *mon lieutenant?*”

“He brushes it aside. Says th’ fractures o’ th’ hyoid bone an’ larynx could ’a’ been made when th’ felly hit th’ ground — which I ain’t disputin’ — an’ th’ cord could just as well ’a’ broken clean as frayed out, which is also possible, but” — he stabbed a thick, strong forefinger at de Grandin — “What gits me goat is that all these signs an’ tokens manifestin’ homicide ’stead o’ suicide should be present, yet th’ coroner’s physician bulls th’ jury into bringin’ a verdict o’ self-murder.”

Jules de Grandin tapped a cigarette against his thumbnail, set it alight and blew smoke through his nostrils. “And what do you propose doing, my old and rare one?”

The Irishman raised ponderous shoulders in a gesture of futility. “What can I do, sor? Officially th’ case is closed. Th’ felly died by his own hand, an’ that’s th’ end o’ it. All th’ same, I’ll be afther doin’ some gum-shoein’ on me own. If someone’s done a murder it’s me job to find it out, an’ afther that it’s up to th’ judge an’ state’s attorney—”

The cachinnation of the office telephone broke in, and I rose to answer it. “It’s for you, Lieutenant.” I said, and:

“Yes?” Costello challenged. “Oha? At 1515 Belvedere Street? An’ th’ name — glory be to God!”

In a moment he was back, a look that might have betokened anger or amazement on his broad face. “I’ll say there’s sumpin’ devilish in this business, sors,” he told us. “That was th’ Bureau callin’ to report another suicidal hangin’. Right around th’ corner from the one I’d just been afther tellin’ ye about, an’ — here’s th’ payoff! — ’tis th’ first man’s brother who’s supposed to ’a’ bumped hisself off this time.”

The days of blistering heat were done, and September had come in like a cool and gracious matron. Although there was a hint of fall in the clear air it was still warm enough to enjoy coffee on the veranda that overlooked the side yard where the dahlias bloomed, and after a late dinner we were sitting in low wicker chairs enjoying that delightful languor that accompanies the mingling of eupepsia and slow poisoning by nicotine, caffeine and alcohol when Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, came to us wearing that peculiarly forbidding expression she assumes when anybody obtrudes on “her doctors” post-prandial period. “If ye plaze, sors,” she announced with something more than a thin rime of frost upon her voice, “there’s two people askin’ for ye; a man an’ woman.”

“Patients?” I asked, stifling a groan. I’d had five T. and A.’s at Mercy Hospital that day, and performed an emergency paracentesis on an aging woman — necessarily without anesthesia — and the fatigue of strained nerves had left me in a state of near-exhaustion.

Nora raised her shoulders in a shrug — a trick she’d caught from Jules de Grandin — and gave me a look that announced complete nescience. “I wouldn’t know, sor. They says as how they’d like to see yerself *an’* Dr. de Grandin. Shall I go back an’ say it’s afther hours?”

I was about to nod assent, but de Grandin intervened. “By no means, *ma petite*. If they desire to see Friend Trowbridge solely it is obviously a medical matter; but if they also wish to consult me that is another pair of sleeves. Tell them we

will see them, if you please.”

The couple who awaited us in the consulting room were not entirely prepossessing. The man was middle-aged, balding, heavy-shouldered, rather puffy at the waistline. He wore a neat, dark, formally-cut suit with narrow piqué edging at the V of his waistcoat. From his black-rimmed pince-nez trailed a rather wide black ribbon, and through their lenses he was studying my excellent copy of Renoir’s “Boating Party” with evident disapproval. (In passing I might state I studiously avoid “professional pictures” such as “The Doctor,” “The Study in Anatomy,” or even the slightly humorous cartoons of Hogarth and Hans Holbein.)

His companion was more difficult to catalogue. She was just an average female of indeterminate age with undistinguished features and an undistinguished hat and hairdo. Her dress, though well made and of good material, seemed somehow not urban. A man might find some difficulty saying what was wrong with her, but a woman would have known at once. She had, as Jules de Grandin would have put it, a total lack of *le chic*.

“Dr. Trowbridge? Dr. de Grandin?” the man asked as we entered.

“I am Dr. Trowbridge,” I answered, “and this is Dr. de Grandin.” I paused, awaiting an exchange of confidences.

Our caller cleared his throat and looked at us, rather expectantly, it seemed to me. “You know me, of course.” He did not ask it as a question, but made the announcement as a statement of fact.

De Grandin shook his head and looked distressed. “*Je suis désolé, Monsieur*, but I do not. I have lived in this so splendid country but a little quarter-century, and have not met all its celebrities. You are not George Washington, or *Général Pershing*—”

“I am Pastor Rodney Roggenbuck of the Complete Scriptures Congregation.”

The smile that hovered underneath the waxed tips of de Grandin’s small blond mustache gave way to something like a sneer. The shepherd of the flourishing new congregation was known to both of us by reputation. With calculating shrewdness he had filched doctrinal bits from such divergent sects as Whiteism, Christian Science, Russellism, fundamental Calvinism and the Eutychian heresy, spiced them highly with intolerance, and with this potpourri for creed and doctrine had begun crusading against the theatre and movies, medicine and Sunday papers, vivisection, vaccination, newspaper comics, liquor, coffee, tea and tobacco, the teaching of elementary geology in public schools and “graven images” — in connection with which latter he had attempted to enjoin the May processions of local Catholic churches and statuary in the city’s parks. That one professing such beliefs should consult a physician was, to speak

conservatively, amazing.

“And which of us do you desire to consult, *Monsieur*?” de Grandin asked. “Is it that you are *indisposé*?”

“I’ve come because Lieutenant Costello suggested it.”

“Ah?”

“He tells me you are skilled in magic, witchcraft, and such things.”

“A-ah?” de Grandin repeated, and there was something like cold-lightning flashes in his small blue eyes. I braced myself for an atomic explosion.

“Precisely, sir. He’s no more satisfied that Fred and Theobald committed suicide than I am. “

”And just exactly who, if one may ask, were Fred and Théobald, *Monsieur*, and why should they not have destroyed themselves, and what concern of mine is it if they did so? Were they, perhaps, your brothers—”

“They were.”

De Grandin sucked in a quick mouthful of air, but his look of angry suspicion did not soften. “Say on, *Monsieur*,” he ordered. “I am listening.”

“Frederick Roggenbuck was my younger brother. He lived at 1213 Quincy Street. Night before last he was supposed to have hanged himself from the window of his apartment. The coroner says it was suicide.

“Early this morning, or very late last night, my elder brother Theobald who lived with us at 1515 Belvedere Street, just around the corner from my brother Fred’s, is supposed to have hanged himself from a pipe in the basement. None of us heard him rise from bed, or heard him in the cellar, but when Lucinda, the maid who gets our meals and looks after the house, let herself in this morning she found him hanging by a length of clothesline.

“Both my brothers were good, religious men, sir, and well aware of the enormity of the crime of self-murder. Neither would have thought of doing such a thing. Besides, they both had everything to live for — they were well fixed financially, and were engaged in work they loved with holy zeal—”

“Were they, by any chance, associated with you in your labors, *monsieur*?” de Grandin interrupted.

“They were. Theo was a presbyter and Fred a deacon.”

“U’m?”

“What are you implying, sir? Why do you say ‘u’m’ in that manner?”

“*Pardieu, Monsieur*, why should I not say ‘u’m’ in any manner that I choose?” de Grandin shot back testily. “I shall say ‘u’m’ or ‘hè’ or ‘*sacré bleu*’ or anything I wish to say in any manner I desire, and if you do not like it there is neither lock nor bolt upon our door. You are at liberty to leave forthwith.”

“Oh, no offense, sir, I assure you,” Mr. Roggenbuck soothed. “Perhaps we do not understand each other. I wish you’d let me tell you—”

“Your wish is granted, *Monsieur*.” De Grandin dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette. “Begin at the beginning, if you please, and tell me why it is that you suspect your estimable brothers did not give themselves the happy dispatch. Have you, perhaps, physical as well as moral reasons for your supposition?”

“Lieutenant Costello tells me he informed you of his reasons for suspecting Brother Fred did not do away with himself. In Brother Theo’s case his suspicions are even more firmly founded.

“Theobald was portly, somewhat stouter than I, and just a little shorter, say about five foot six or seven. The pipe from which he is supposed to have hanged himself is eight feet from the floor, the rope by which he was suspended was just a little over two feet long from knot to noose. Theo’s feet swung four or five inches from the floor, and there was no stool or chair or other object which he could have stood on near them. It would have been physically impossible for him to have looped the rope around his neck while standing on the floor, and equally impossible for him to have hanged himself without standing on something, yet there was nothing underneath him, and no object on which he could have stood anywhere within such distance as he could have kicked it from under him while he struggled as he hung.”

“U’ m?” Jules de Grandin put his fingers tip to tip and pondered. “And how was Monsieur Théobald arrayed? In his *chemise de nuit*—”

“No, sir. The night-shirt is a garment feminine in form, and Holy Scripture says explicitly a man shall not put on a woman’s garment. He was wearing pajamas and a cotton bathrobe. His straw slippers had fallen from his feet as he hung from the pipe.”

De Grandin lit another cigarette and blew smoke from his nose. “Perhaps you have a point there, *Monsieur*. I could not say until I’ve reconnoitered the terrain. Have you other grounds for suspicion, or is there any person you suspect?”

“Yes, sir; I suspect one Amos Frye, my sister-in-law’s husband. I believe he drove them to self-murder by vindictive witchcraft — in fine, that he ‘put a hex upon them,’ as they say in the part of the country from which I come.”

“But this is of the utmost interest, *Monsieur*. Where may one find *Monsieur* your *belle-soeur*’s husband?”

“He is dead.”

“*Hein? Feu noir du diable*, do you say so? Proceed, *Monsieur*. Tell more; tell all. Like Baalam’s ass, I am all ears!”

“My wife has an afflicted sister named Eulalia,” our caller

answered. “For some years she has had the impression of tuberculosis, but stubbornly refuses to drink of the healing waters of faith, preferring to entrust herself to the worldly aid of physicians.”

De Grandin pursed his lips as if to whistle, but made no comment. His features gave no indication of his thoughts; his eyes were absolutely void of expression.

“She was a wilful, headstrong girl,” continued Mr. Roggenbuck, “and when the war came on as punishment for the sins of the world she insisted on becoming involved in canteen work. Strictly against our wishes, I may add. The Scriptures say specifically, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ and every soldier is potentially a murderer. However, she insisted on consorting with these men of blood, and finally she married one of them.

“We offered her a home while he was overseas, and would have made him welcome when he returned, although he was a Gentile — that is, not of our faith — but he insisted on her living with him in an apartment he provided. Then he secured employment as a traveling salesman, and was forced to be away from home much of the time. Eulalia’s impression of disease became stronger, and at last we took her to our house, where she could receive treatment in accordance with the tenets of true religion. When he returned from his trip we refused to let her go to him, or let him come to her. My wife Rosita is her sister, and I am like a brother to her, aye, more than a brother, since I have her spiritual welfare at heart — what’s that, sir?” he broke off as De Grandin murmured something *sotto voce*.

“*Pardonnez-moi, monsieur*, it is that I seem to recall a passage in the Bible that says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, since the twain are one flesh—”

“My dear sir! If you understood such things you’d know that Holy Scripture is to be received seriously, but not literally. Besides, the reference is to a man’s cleaving to his wife, not a wife’s cleaving to her husband; and in addition we are not Eulalia’s father and mother, but her sister and brother-in-law. I challenge you to find a passage in the Bible which says a woman shall desert her brother-in-law to follow her husband!”

De Grandin’s expression would have done credit to a cynical, blond Mephistopheles, but he answered with astonishing mildness, “You have me fairly there, *Monsieur*. I do not think that I can cite you such a verse. And now, as you were saying—”

“Amos made several attempts to see Eulalia, and was on the brink of bringing legal action when he was unfortunately killed in a highway accident. Most fortunately my brothers happened by while he lay dying by the roadside, and Theobald, who as a presbyter has power to loose or retain

sins, gave him absolution. We thought, at least we hoped, that he was saved, but it appears his vengeful, earthbound spirit has pursued my poor, dear brothers, hounded them to suicide; made them self-murderers.”

“What makes you think so, *Monsieur*?”

“Almost a year ago, shortly after Amos’s fatal accident, my brother Fred began to have strange feelings. Have you ever had the feeling you were watched intently by some evilly-disposed person, sir? That is the feeling Fred complained of — as if someone who wished him ill were looking at him from the back continually, waiting opportunity to pounce. Sometimes the feeling grew so strong that he would turn around to see if he were actually being stared at; but there was never anybody visible.

“Three months later Theobald began to suffer the same eerie sensations. They had no privacy. When they disrobed for bed or for the bath that feeling of surveillance was on them; when they walked along the street or drove their cars they felt another walked behind them or was sitting at their sides; when they wrote a letter or perused a book there was always the impression that another looked across their shoulders, watching every move they made, never taking their eyes off them, never ceasing to hate them with poisonous, suppurating hatred. It must have been a terrible sensation, and one calculated to drive them to madness and self-murder.”

De Grandin’s eyes had lifted as our caller spoke. Now they were fixed in an unwinking cat-stare on a point a little beyond Mr. Roggenbuck’s shoulder. For the first time the other seemed aware of the Frenchman’s intent gaze, and a tremor ran through his hard-shaven, rather fleshy face. His jaws seemed suddenly to sag flaccidly like the dewlaps of a hound, and his mouth began to twist convulsively. “What — who — is it?” he demanded in a voice that seemed to come from a clogged throat.

The little Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. “Who can say, *Monsieur*? Perhaps it was no more than a shadow.”

“What sort of shadow — what did it look like?”

“*On ne sait pas*? Perhaps it was like that of a man, perhaps that of a curtain shaken in the wind, perhaps a trick of the lamplight. *N’en parlons plus*. At any rate, it is gone now.”

“You’re sure?”

“Oh, quite sure, *Monsieur*.”

“Then” — Mr. Roggenbuck drew a silk handkerchief and wiped his brow — “what would you advise, Dr. de Grandin? Are you willing — can you help?”

“I am willing, and I think that I can help the cause of justice, *Monsieur* Roggenbuck. My fee will be a thousand dollars, in advance.”

“A thousand dollars!”

“Perfectly. In fifteen minutes it will be increased to fifteen hundred. In half an hour I am not for hire at any price.”

He pocketed the check, and, “Now, *Monsieur*,” he suggested, “suppose we go to your house and inspect the scene of your late brother’s *déces*.”

The house in Belvedere Street was a substantial frame dwelling, neither opulent nor unpretentious, with a wide portico behind the tall, white pillars of which shadows seemed to be imprisoned. No lights showed anywhere in it, and Mr. Roggenbuck had to feel for the keyhole before he was able to admit us. Inside the place was quite as uninspiring as it was outwardly. It seemed to have been ordered, straightened into complete impersonality. The furniture was of good quality and obviously expensive, and just as obviously chosen without taste. Mahogany of no particular period stood cheek-by-jowl with golden oak and maple patently of neo-Grand Rapids design. The floors were waxed and highly polished, and on them were some simulated Kashan rugs arranged without regard to pattern or color. Such pictures as adorned the walls were of the Landseer-Rosa Bonheur school. I almost expected to see “The Stag at Bay” or “Pharaoh’s Horses,” or an enlarged sepia print of the Colosseum.

“The basement first, if you will be so kind,” de Grandin asked, and led by our host we descended a flight of narrow stairs. The room ran under the entire house and was in nowise remarkable. In one corner was the gas furnace, flanked by the hot water tank, with stationary washtubs and a mechanical washer beside them. Odds and ends of cast-off furniture, rolled-up summer matting rugs and similar lumber lay around the walls.

“Here was where my brother was found,” Mr. Roggenbuck told us, pointing to an iron pipe that snaked between the joists supporting the first floor. “He hung, as I told you, with his feet almost on the ground, and there was nothing under or near him which he could have stood on while adjusting the noose—”

“Did you observe him before he was cut down?” de Grandin interrupted.

“Why, yes—”

“He wore no slippers, I believe?”

“They had dropped from his feet, I assume—”

“One does not make assumptions in such cases, *Monsieur*. Have you any reason to believe that they had fallen, rather than been slipped off?”

“No-o; I can’t say I have.”

“*Bien. Bon*. We begin to make the progress. Now, what, exactly, was his position?”

Roggenbuck was silent for a moment, then dropped to one knee. “I’d say he hung just about here, with his feet clear of

the floor.”

“U’m. And he was five feet and a half in height, the rope by which he hung was approximately two feet long, his feet lacked four or so inches of contact with the floor?”

“That is correct, sir.”

“H’m. Then something less than a foot high — something perhaps no more than six or seven inches would have been sufficient for him to mount as a scaffold—”

“But there was nothing there, I tell you—”

“Not even this, perhaps?” Wheeling as if on a pivot, the little Frenchman walked to the wall opposite the place where we stood, stooped and retrieved an object lying in the shadow.

It was a bowling ball of some eight inches diameter, black and highly polished, but overlaid with a thin film of dust. As he held it daintily, with thumb and forefinger in the grip-holes, we saw the dust upon its surface had been wiped away in two parallel patches roughly oblong in shape, and that a wavering diagonal of cleared space ran down one side. “Unless I am far more mistaken than I think,” he told us, “*Monsieur le Suicide* stood on this globe while he adjusted the loop to his neck, then kicked it from him so it rolled to the spot where I spied it. That we can readily determine. Your brother balanced barefoot on this ball, *Monsieur*. The slippery soles of his straw shoes would not have afforded a purchase on its smooth surface. *Alors*, he left the prints of his feet on the polished wood. See them?” He indicated the two spots where the dust was disturbed. “The ridges on the friction skin of hands and feet are as highly individual as the prints of the fingers. Your brother has not yet been buried. It is necessary only that we bring the prints on this ball out, make an impression of the pattern of the soles of his feet, and *voilà*, we can be sure that he stood upon the sphere before he did *la danse macabre*. Yes, certainly.” He wrapped his salvage in a newspaper taken from the pile that stood in readiness for the trash-collector, then:

“If you will be so kind as to conduct us to *Madame* your sister-in-law, we shall be obliged,” he said.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t permit her to be disturbed,” Mr. Roggenbuck refused.

“*Très bien*; just as you say,” de Grandin agreed. “I think that we have gleaned sufficient data for one call already. If you will be so good as to give me an order on the mortician permitting me to make prints of your brother’s feet we need not trouble you further at this time, *Monsieur*.”

“Where’ve you been?” I demanded as he came in sometime after eleven the next evening and began attacking the snack of turkey sandwiches, champagne, lemon pie and coffee Nora had left for him with a ferocity that would have made a famished wolf seem daintily abstemious by

comparison.

“*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, where have I not been, my old one?” he answered between mouthfuls. “Me, I have been up hill and down dale, and completely round the barn of Monsieur Robin Hood. I have visited the excellent mortician, the newspaper office, the office of the county clerk, the house of Monsieur Roggenbuck — *grand Dieu*, what a name! — and a dozen other places, also.

“And has my search been vain? *Par la barbe d’une pieuvre*, I shall say otherwise!” He finished the last morsel of sandwich, washed it down with the last sip of champagne, poured a cup of steaming coffee, and prepared to demolish a great wedge of lemon meringue. “My friend,” he leveled his fork at me like a weapon, “my old and fare one, I learned a number of most interesting things today. Some of them may have a bearing on *l’affaire* Roggenbuck, although at present I cannot make out their pattern. Consider, if you please:

“The Brothers Roggenbuck appear to have worked as a team for years, the estimable Rodney furnishing the invention, his less talented kinsmen attending to the details. Before the 1929 debacle their specialty was peddling securities, stock of goldless gold mines, oilless oil wells, real estate entirely under water, and the like. Their favorite clients were bereaved ladies left some small insurance, or, failing those, old couples who had laid away a little for their final years. Frédéric, the younger brother, went to jail, Théobald was fined, but not incarcerated; Rodney went free for lack of evidence.

“Let us, like surveyors, drive a peg down there, and proceed with our examination of the terrain. The present Madame Roggenbuck is not the first, nor second, nor third spouse of this *manqué* evangelist. He has, it seems, been married three times previously. It seems she was the elder of two orphan daughters of a *viellard* named Stretfuse.”

“Old Henry Stretfuse?” I asked. “I remember him. He had a farm out on the Andover Road—”

“*Précisément*. A very old, worked-out farm which was considered worthless when he left it to his daughters. But with the coming of the war, when the city commenced expanding like a blown-up bladder, it became most valuable for building sites. The boom in building had just begun when Monsieur Roggenbuck married Mademoiselle Stretfuse.’

“She was, as I have said, the elder of two sisters, and much flattered to receive attention from the reverend gentleman. Eulalia, her younger sister, was already suffering from incipient tuberculosis.” He paused, swallowed the last crumb of pie, and added, “According to the terms of the will, the sisters were named joint tenants in the land. Does that mean anything to you?”

I shook my head.

“Nor did it signify to me until I had consulted Monsieur Mitchell the *avoué*. Then I began to scent a little so small mouse. Joint tenancy, the lawyer told me, means that tenants hold the land in equal, undivided shares, but at the death of one the whole estate passes to the other instead of going partly to the heirs of him who dies. *Et puis?* No one will buy the share of one joint tenant unless the other also signs the deed, since he who buys is subrogated only to the rights of his grantor, and liable to have his heirs’ inheritance defeated if he dies before the other joint tenant. Do you also begin to smell the rodent?”

“H’m; can’t say that I do.”

“*Très bien*. Regard me: If Monsieur Roggenbuck married Mademoiselle Eulalia the chances are that she, the victim of an often fatal malady, would predecease her elder sister; but if he married Mademoiselle Sara, as he did, the chances are that she, though older, will survive and become sole owner of a valuable property. For that reason, and no other, I am convinced, he chose the elder of the sisters for his bride.

“However, complications rose when Mademoiselle the younger sister married Monsieur Frye. Under his loving care and cherishment she might outlive her elder sister, then *pouf!* where would the reverend gentleman be?

“Not to be caught napping, *pardieu!* Not he! When Monsieur Frye goes to the war he takes his sister-in-law to his house, sees that she has no medical attention, and hopes for the best.

“*Hélas*, the soldier-husband comes home from the battlefields, so stronger measures must be taken. He takes the young wife from her home and holds her virtually a prisoner, *incommunicado*.

“Now, listen carefully. *Monsieur* the husband is about to ask the court to give him back his wife when he meets death upon the highway. The accident occurs on a steep hill, and, quite fortuitously, two of the firm of Roggenbuck *Frères* are there at or about the time it happens.”

“Are you implying—?”

“I am implying nothing. I am merely marshalling the facts for our review. Two days before this fatal accident Monsieur Frédéric buys a motor car, a swift vehicle fitted with a driving searchlight, such as police cars carry. Moreover, he goes to garageman and has an even more powerful light installed. He is a city-dweller and not given to much driving on the country roads. Why should he desire so powerful a search light?”

“I haven’t the remotest idea.”

“Well spoken, my good, trusting friend. You would be the last to entertain unworthy suspicions. Me, I am otherwise.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“Not anything at present. This is just another peg we drive down in our surveying tour. But listen further, if you please:

“This afternoon I made it my business to watch Monsieur Roggenbuck’s house. By a ’phone call I ascertained that he was at his office. I saw *Madame* his wife go out; I telephoned his house and got no answer. ‘*Bien*,’ I tell me. ‘The house are empty; the domestic is not there.’ So, like the robber in the night, I break into that house. *Parbleu*, I tell you a most excellent burglar was lost when Jules de Grandin decided to be comparatively honest.

“I went through that house carefully. And in an upper room, a little so small sunless room set high beneath the roof, I find poor Madame Frye. She are locked in like any *félone*. She lies upon a narrow, unkempt bed, her *robe de nuit* is far from clean, she coughs almost incessantly.

“I speak to her, me. She answers feebly, between coughings. She tells me that her brother-in-law keeps at her constantly to deed her share of the farm to her sister. He tells her that her husband is dead, but she will not believe him. She stubbornly withholds her signature, for he, her husband had told her to sign nothing. Until he comes she will not sign. *Parbleu*, unless we intervene all soon she will assuredly succumb, and Madame Roggenbuck will be sole heiress. When that occurs, *cordieu*, I do not think that she will be a good risk for insurance. No. I ask to know if it is not a pretty pan of fish I have discovered?”

“It’s infamous!” I exclaimed. “We must do something—”

“*Précisément, mon vieux*, we must, indeed. Come, let us go.”

“Go? Where?”

“About a little piece of business that I have in mind.”

Peteros, read the small bronze tablet on the red-brick house before which we stopped half an hour later. As far as I could see it was the only thing distinguishing it from the other houses in the eminently respectable block. When de Grandin pressed the bell a neatly uniformed maid answered and led us to a parlor.

I glanced about me curiously. The place was rather elegant. A Chinese rug of the Kien-lung period lay on the floor, against the farther wall hung a Ghiordes prayer-cloth, the furniture was clearly of French manufacture, gilt wood upholstered in an apple-green brocade. The only picture in the room was a life-sized portrait of a blond woman with wide, brooding eyes and a sad mouth. A latch clicked, and a small, neat gentleman entered.

He was perhaps fifty, his hair was slightly gray at the temples, his rather long face was clean-shaven, the dark eyes behind the tortoise-shell spectacles were serious and thoughtful. His dinner clothes were impeccable, but of a slightly foreign cut. He might have been a lawyer or a banker, or perhaps the curator of an art gallery, but I recognized him as Gregor Peteros who, though

professionally a medium and clairvoyant, was so highly thought of that psychologists of reputable standing did not hesitate to consult him, and whose monographs on extra-sensory perception had been printed in a dozen scientific magazines. “Good evening, gentlemen,” he greeted. “I’ll be with you in a moment. If you don’t mind I’ll take a topcoat; I’m rather sensitive to chill.”

“As near as I could determine from studying the newspapers and police reports, this is the spot,” de Grandin told us as we drew up at a curve that twisted down a steep hill above Harrison Creek. The roadway had been widened recently, and where a hundred-foot drop led to the rock-studded, bawling waters of the stream a breast-high wall of stone and reinforced concrete had been erected. The spot had been a famous — or infamous — one for fatal accidents until this safeguard had been put up, I recalled.

“Can you put yourself *en rapport* with the past, Monsieur Peteros?” de Grandin asked. “I realize it may be difficult, for much traffic has passed since—”

“Do not tell me the details!” Mr. Peteros broke in. “When did the accident occur?”

“September eighteenth, two years ago.”

“I see.” The medium made a note on a slip of paper, did a quick calculation, and tapped his teeth with his pencil. “That would have been under the sign of Virgo in the decanus of Mercury.” He settled himself back on the cushions, closed his eyes, and seemed about to take a nap. For several minutes there was complete silence, and we could hear the ticking of our watches beating out a fugue; from the distance came the dismal wailing of a freight train’s locomotive, somewhere nearer a dog barked, and the mounting sound was slender as a strand of spider-web.

Abruptly Mr. Peteros sat up. His eyes were closed, but his face worked excitedly. “I see him!” he exclaimed. “He has swung around the curve at the hilltop and commenced the descent. He seems distraught; he is not watching the road. He should not rely on his brakes, he ought to put his engine into low gear.”

He swallowed with excitement, then turned his closed eyes down the road. “There is another car coming,” he announced. “It’s a small, open car, with two men in it. One drives, the other leans out. He is watching ... watching. He has his hand upon a driving searchlight set upon a rod beside the windshield. It is covered with some kind of cloth, a bag or sack of heavy felt through which no light can pass. The two cars are not more than fifty feet apart now. The man descending the hill swerves to the right, toward the guardrail. The other car swings to the left. They are approaching head-on. Ah! The man beside the driver of the second car has turned his hooded spotlight squarely on the driver of the first

vehicle. Now he snatches the hood off. A-a-ah! There is a beam of dazzling light shining full into the other driver’s eyes. It blinds him. He — his car is out of control! He will crash against the barrier. He has crashed through it! His car is turning over and over as it tumbles down the bank. *Kyrie eleison!* The glass of his windshield has shattered. He is pierced by a great splinter of it. He is bleeding, dying....”

He paused a moment, breathing hard, like an exhausted runner, then, more calmly: “The other car has stopped and its passengers have gotten out. They are slipping, sliding down the steep bank. They have reached the wreck, but they make no move to take its occupant out. One of them reaches in and feels his pulse, shakes his head, and steps back. They wait ... wait. Now they feel the wreck victim’s pulse again, and still they make no move to lift him out. Now they seem satisfied. They reach into the wreck and lift the victim out. He is dead. I see them nod to each other, then turn to scramble up the bank again....”

“Yes, yes, *monsieur*? What next?” de Grandin rasped as Mr. Peteros ceased speaking. “*Pour le chapeau d’un cochon vert*, what else is it you see, I ask to know?”

“Eh?” Mr. Peteros looked at him with the blank stare of a wakened sleeper. “What’s that?”

“*Mordieu*, what else was it you saw?”

“I don’t remember. I can never recall what I’ve seen in the trance.”

The little Frenchman looked as if he were about to spring on him, then raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug of resignation. “*Tenez*, it is of no real importance. I damn think you have told us quite enough.”

“*Je suis affamé*, I am hungry, like a wolf, me,” he told me as we reached the house. “Let us see what Madame Nora has concealed in the ice box.”

We rummaged in the frigidaire and brought out some cold roast lamb, some lettuce and a jar of mayonnaise. Also several bottles of beer.

“Now,” he asked, seating himself on the kitchen table with a sandwich in one hand and beer mug in the other, “what is it that we have? It seems that in the matter of eliminating Monsieur Frye the middle Roggenbuck brother was, as usual, the master mind. He planned the so clever assassination, his henchmen-brothers executed it,

“I am persuaded that they died self-hanged, and that they richly deserved hanging. Of Monsieur Théobald’s suicide there is no doubt. The prints upon the bowling ball exactly match the lines of his feet. That he stood on it, then kicked it away when he had draped the noose around his neck, there is no question. Concerning Monsieur Frédéric I cannot say with certainty, but I incline to think that Dr. Parnell is for once right, and the good Costello once unfortunately wrong.

“Why did they do it? Who can say? Perhaps it was their guilty conscience, though I do not think so, for *fripsons* such as they have little conscience. Perhaps it was the vengeful spirit of their victim seeking justice — forcing them to do that which the law could not. It could be so. At any rate, they are eliminated. Our problem now is Monsieur Rodney.”

“There’s nothing we can do about him,” I rejoined. “There’s no way we can bring the crime home to him. No court and jury in New Jersey would listen to such testimony as Peteros gave us tonight, and even if they did we can’t Prove Rodney planned the murder.”

“I agree with you, *mon vieux*, but we may do what the law cannot. His conscience — granting that he has one — is not clean. His brothers’ statements that they had a feeling of being watched troubled him. He is persuaded that his murdered brother-in-law has the power to bewitch him — to ‘hex’ him, as he puts it. When, to test his sensibility to suggestion, I pretended to see someone standing behind him last night, did not you see how frightened he was? I think that there we shall find the chink in his armor, and I shall work industriously to enlarge it. Yes, certainly. Of course.”

It was shortly before noon next day when he entered Mr. Roggenbuck’s office. The place swarmed with activity. A battery of typewriters, operated by singularly photogenic young women, filled in spaces in processed form letters and addressed envelopes; a boy and girl were busy at a multi-graphing machine, several curvaceous females stuffed the filled-in forms into envelopes.

“Yes, sirs?” challenged the young woman at the switchboard, who also evidently acted as receptionist. Advised of our errand she whispered something into an inter-office communicator, and in a moment looked up with a smile. “Straight ahead, please,” she directed. “The Bishop’s office is at the end of the corridor.”

“*Parbleu*,” de Grandin chuckled as we walked down the hall, “when he first came to see us he was a simple pastor. Today he is a bishop. We must hurry to take care of him, my friend, or he will assuredly become pope.

“*Monseigneur*,” he announced as we entered Roggenbuck’s dimly-lighted, softly carpeted sanctum, “I have the proof that both your brothers died by their own hands, and — *mon Dieu*, who is that!” he stepped back, both hands raised as if to ward away some horror.

“Who—where?” the other turned half round in his swivel chair.

“The one who stands behind you with his face all smeared in blood and points at you accusingly—”

“No!” Roggenbuck exclaimed. “It can’t be — he can’t say—”

“Friend Trowbridge, do not you see him?” de Grandin

turned to me. “Do not you see him standing there?”

I knit my brows and tried to sound as convincing as possible. “Yes, there’s someone there. He seems to have met with an accident. Shall we call an ambulance—”

“No! No!” Roggenbuck broke in hoarsely. “You’re lying, both of you!” He pressed a button on his desk, and in a moment there came the click of high heels on the floor outside.

“Did you ring, Bishop?” asked a young woman as she entered. “I — oh! who is it — what’s happened?” She stared across her employer’s shoulder, apparently wide-eyed with horror, then put her hands up to her face and dropped back a step, shuddering. “Oh, o-oh!” she moaned. “The blood — the blood!”

Sweat was streaming down Roggenbuck’s face, his full-lipped mouth began to work convulsively, and at its corners little flecks of foam showed. His eyes were bright and dilated as if under the influence of a drug. “Do you see it, too, Elsie?” he choked.

She made no answer, but nodded, her face still cupped in her hands, her shoulders shaking with repressed sobs.

“Oh, my God!” the frightened man rose from his desk and stumbled toward the rear door. “He’s come for me, too. He came for Fred and Theo, now it’s my turn — leave me alone, Amos Frye, I didn’t — I didn’t—” The door banged to behind him, and de Grandin patted the girl’s shoulder.

“Bravo, *Mademoiselle*,” he applauded. “The great Bernhardt at her greatest could not have done better. Here is what I promised you.” From his wallet he drew several bills and pressed them into her hand.

The girl giggled. “I wouldn’t ’a’ done it if he hadn’t been such a heel,” she confessed. “But he was always makin’ passes at us girls, an’ threatenin’ to fire us if we squawked. The pious old hypocrite!”

The Frenchman grinned delightedly. “You have given me a new word for my vocabulary, *ma chère*. It are entirely as you say. He was an eel of the first water, him.”

From the driveway beside the office we heard the rasp of gears and the roaring of a motor being started. In a moment, from the corner came the shrill, hysterical scream of a police whistle, the crash of metal smashing into metal and the ring of breaking glass.

We rushed into the street and raced toward the corner, with the shriek of the policeman’s whistle and a chorus of hoarse cries still sounding.

Telescoped until it was foreshortened by at least a third its length, Roggenbuck’s convertible stood at the intersection of the street and boulevard, while towering above it, like a bulldog straddling a luckless cat, was a ten-ton truck.

“Hullo, Dr. de Grandin,” greeted the policeman. “Good mornin’ Dr. Trowbridge. Gimme a hand with him, will you?”

He was comin' hell-bent-for-election down the street, payin' no more attention to the red light than if it wasn't there, when *zingo!* he barged into this here now truck, like he'd knock it outa his way. Yeah, the cemeteries is full o' birds that drive like that. He didn't have no more chance than a rabbit."

"One sees," returned de Grandin as, assisting the policeman, we lifted what was left of Roggenbuck from his car. Death must have been instantaneous. Certainly, it had

been messy. His whole face was bashed in as if it had been struck by a battering-ram. His skull, from frontal bone to occiput, had been smashed like an egg and almost denuded of scalp. "*Mort,*" pronounced de Grandin. "*Mort comme un mouton* — he is dead like a herring, this one." He nodded to the policeman. "This is for the coroner, *mon brave*. Do not disturb the internes at the hospital. They hate to have their poker playing interrupted by such fruitless calls."

The Body-Snatchers

STREET LIGHTS were coming on and the afterglow was faint in the west under the first cold stars as I let myself in at the front door. I'd had a hard day at the hospital, two T and A's in the morning and a cholitonotomy in the afternoon, and at my age surgery is almost as hard on the physician as the patient. "Thank heaven, no calls this evening," I murmured as I shrugged out of my overcoat and started toward the study where I knew Nora McGinnis would have a preprandial cocktail iced and waiting for me.

My heart sank like a plummet as the voices came to me from the consulting room. "I realize this is more a case for a lawyer than a physician, but I've known Dr. Trowbridge since I was thirty seconds old, and I *have* to talk it over with somebody. Just going to an attorney seems so sort of — well, common, if you understand, Dr. de Grandin. There's never been a divorce in our family, but—"

"Hullo, there young 'un!" I greeted with wholly meretricious cordiality as I paused at the door. "What's all this talk about divorce—"

"Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, I'm *so* glad you've come!" Nancy Northrop fairly leaped from her chair and threw her arms about me. "I—I've been so miserable, Doctor!" The held-back tears broke through her eyelids and in a moment she was sobbing like a little girl whose doll is broken.

"There, there," I soothed, patting her shoulder. "A dry Martini won't cure the trouble, but it'll help. Come into the study, both of you."

Nancy Northrop was a small, pretty woman with bright hair, a straight little nose and wide-set amber eyes "put in with a smutty finger," as the Irish say. For a long moment she was calm, immovable as the embalmed bride of a Pharaoh, staring broodingly into the tawny depths of her cocktail. "I just don't seem to have the proper words to tell it," she murmured finally. "You've known Norman and me all our lives, Doctor; you know we went together even in grammar school days, and when we married it was no more a surprise to anyone — including us — than setting down the sum beneath a column of figures would have been."

"That's so," I agreed. "You were childhood sweethearts, I remember. A lot of people thought it just one of those boy-and-girl affairs, but—"

"I said it was no more surprising than the sum arrived at when you add a line of figures," she broke in. "Well, someone made a mistake in addition, Doctor. Norman's left me."

"Eh? What d'ye mean, child?"

"Just what I said. He's — as the old song had it — 'gone

with a handsomer girl.'"

"*Tenez, Madame,*" de Grandin interrupted, "suppose we start at the beginning and work forward. How was it that *Monsieur* your husband left you, and when?"

"Last Monday, sir. There was a party at the Lakerim Country Club that evening, and Norman and I went. We had the first few dances together, then Norman went somewhere — he was on the committee, you know — and the next I saw of him he was dancing with a strange girl."

"A stranger?" I prompted as she fell into a thoughtful silence, turning the stem of her glass between her fingers, biting her lower lip to hold it steady.

"Yes, sir, a stranger. No one seemed to know who she was — just how she came to be at the party, or who brought her is a mystery — but there she was in his arms, and" — she offered us a pitiful, small smile — "I must admit she was attractive and danced extraordinarily well."

"Can you perhaps describe her, *Madame*?" de Grandin asked as the silence lengthened again.

"Can I? Was there ever a woman who couldn't describe her successful rival down to the last hair of her plucked eyebrows and final hook and eye of her gown? She was tall, as tall as a tall man, and built exquisitely — no, not exquisitely, grandly built is more nearly correct. She was more of a Minerva than a Venus. Her hair was dark, either black or very dark brown, and her eyes an intense blue, like the sea off Ogunquit or Hamilton. She must have just come back from Cuba or Bermuda, for her neck and arms and shoulders all seemed carved of smoky amber, and she wore an evening gown of red brocade, sleeveless, of course, and belted at the waist with a gold cord, Grecian fashion. Her sandals were gold, too, and the lovely sun-tan on her feet made them look gilded, except for the red-lacquered nails. Oh" — once more she gave a rueful little smile — "I couldn't any more compete with her than Hera or Pallas could with Aphrodite! I'd never felt a pang of jealousy before, but when I saw my husband dancing with that gorgeous hussy I was positively green-eyed."

"They were playing *Tales From the Vienna Woods*, and she and Norm were waltzing to it like a pair of ballroom professionals when a man came from the conservatory and cut in. As she danced away with her new partner I could see her signalling Norman, positively teasing him with her eyes."

"The strange couple circled round the floor once then danced into the conservatory, and I felt everything inside me coming loose as I saw Norman follow them."

"I hadn't any business doing it, I know, it was a cheap, unworthy way to act, but I went in after them. Just as I reached the entrance to the greenhouse I heard voices raised in angry argument, then a crash, and Norman and the strange girl brushed past me. 'Brushed' is the verb, too. I might have been just one of the potted plants for all the notice they took of me. As they passed she linked her fingers round his arm and laughed. I heard her say, 'How handsome you are—'"

Nancy paused in her recital, and a puzzled frown formed on her face, as if she were endeavoring to see something just beyond her vision.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"That's what's worrying me, Doctor. What she called him. It wasn't Norm or Norman nor even Mr. Northrop. It was some other name, some strange name I had never heard."

Her preoccupation with the trifle annoyed me. "What happened next?" I asked a little acidly.

"I went into the conservatory, and as I staggered between the plants I knew just how an injured animal that crawls away to die must feel. I was so blinded by my tears that I didn't see the other man until I stumbled over him. He was lying on his back, both arms flung out as if he had been crucified against the floor, and blood was running from a cut in his head where he'd struck it against a *jardinière* as he fell.

"The first thing I thought was, 'He's dead. Norman's killed him!' but when I bent down I could hear him breathing hoarsely, and knew that he was only unconscious. I don't know how long I waited beside him. You see, I wanted to make sure that Norman had a chance to get away before I gave the alarm, but finally I ran back to the ballroom and told Ed Pennybacker what I'd found. Of course, I didn't tell him anything about the struggle I'd heard, or even about seeing Norman and the strange woman in the greenhouse. Dr. Ferris was at the dance, and went to give the man first aid, but in a moment he came back looking serious and muttering something about concussion. They called an ambulance and took him to Mercy Hospital."

"And where was Norman all this time?" I asked as she lapsed into brooding silence once more.

"I don't know, Doctor. I haven't seen him since."

"Wh—what?"

"That's correct, sir. He didn't come to take me home. Our car was gone from the parking lot, and I had to ride back with Joe and Louise Tralor. He didn't come home that night. He hasn't been home since, nor has he been to the office. Oh!"

Her cry was a small sad sound that heightened and grew thinner, finally ravelled out to nothingness like a pulled woolen thread. "He's gone, Doctor; left me; deserted me!"

There are times when nothing we can say seems adequate. This was one of them, and so I had to content myself with patting her shoulder and murmuring, "There, there!"

She turned on me, eyes blazing with a sudden heat that fairly burned the tears away as she put her forefinger to her dimpled chin, made me a bobbing little curtsy and, like a little girl reciting, repeated:

"There, little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your heart, I know—"

Her voice cracked like a shattering glass, and her laughter was a ghastly thing to hear as she ran from the study and out the front door.

"There's a Mистер Northrop to see yez, gentlemen," Nora McGinnis told us as de Grandin and I sat over brandy, coffee and cigars in the drawing room after dinner that evening. "He says as how it's most important."

"*Tiens*," de Grandin murmured. "Is it that the errant husband comes to tell us his side of the story, one wonders?"

"Humph, it had better be a good tale he's cooked up," I answered. "The unconscionable young pup, treating Nancy that way—"

"Mистер Northrop," Nora interrupted from the doorway.

He was a very ugly little man, some sixty-five years old, I judged, for his face was criss-crossed by a network of deep wrinkles and his small mustache was quite white. His eyes were small, black and deep-set, and what we could see of his hair was also white, though for the most part it was covered by a Sayer's occipital bandage. His clothes were well cut and of good material, very neatly pressed, but obviously not new. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted as he paused at the door.

"Mr. Northrop?" I asked inquiringly. "I don't think that I've had the pleasure—"

The laugh that interrupted me was mirthless as the bark of a teased dog. "Oh, yes, we've met before, Doctor," he corrected. "It was thirty-two years ago, on the seventeenth of January, to be exact, in Mercy Hospital. I'm Norman Northrop."

I could feel a wash of angry blood in my cheeks. "If this is a joke—" I began, but once more his eerie, bitter laugh broke in.

"If it's a joke it's on me, Doctor. I don't understand it any more than you do, but *I'm Norman Northrop*."

"*Grand Dieu des porcs!*" I heard de Grandin murmur almost soundlessly, then aloud, "Come in, *Monsieur*; come in and tell us how it comes that you are strange to Dr. Trowbridge, and, I damn suspect, to yourself also."

"Thank you, Doctor," the caller bowed acknowledgement of de Grandin's invitation and came into the drawing room.

I noticed that he limped a little, as if he had suffered a slight stroke some time before, for his right foot dragged and turned in as he stepped.

“And now, *Monsieur?*” de Grandin poured an ounce or so of brandy into an inhaler, filled a demi-tasse and placed them at the stranger’s elbow, motioning toward the cigars as he did so. “You are, one takes it, the husband of Madame Northrop who called on us this after—”

“Nancy’s been here?” Our caller’s face, already nearly colorless, went absolutely corpse-gray, and the hand that held his brandy glass shook with something more than the slight senile tremor I had noticed. “What did she tell you?”

“*Tiens*, the story was not pretty, *Monsieur*. She told us that you had deserted her; that you fought with some strange man for the favors of a strange woman; that then you went with your new charmer without so much as one small backward look by way of valedictory.”

The caller seemed to shrink in on himself. The wrinkled skin around his mouth and on his neck seemed trembling like the dewlaps of a hound, and tears came in his small black eyes. “Please, gentlemen,” he begged, “be kind enough to hear me through. Before I’m half done you’ll call me a damned liar, and when I’ve finished you will think I’m drunk or crazy, maybe both; but what I have to say is true, every word of it.

“Nancy must have told you how we went to Lakerim Monday night. We had the first three dances together, and just as the band began playing for the fourth I saw Bob Eastman beckoning. Bob was on the committee, though why they put him there Lord only knows. If there’s any way of snafuing a deal he’ll find it. We’d gone all out on the refreshments, and Braunstein’s were to furnish baked Alaskas for dessert. They hadn’t come, and Bob was in a hissy. He’d called the caterer’s, and they’d told him their wagon had left half an hour before. What should we do about it?”

“I got Braunstein’s on the ’phone and found that Bob had given orders for the desserts to be delivered to the Lake View Club instead of the Lakerim. Lake View is over by Morristown, you know, and Bob had belonged there before transferring to Lakerim. I suppose it was a pardonable slip of the tongue, but it had certainly snarled our party up. After several minutes’ conversation I got ’em to promise to send another wagon out to Lakerim, and was hurrying to rejoin Nancy when I bumped into a girl.

“I mean that literally. The floor outside the steward’s office was slippery. She was hurrying one way! I was barging through the door, and we collided like a pair of kids on roller skates. Both our feet went out from under us, and there we sat on our respective fannies, not hurt but with the

wind knocked out of us. For a moment we grinned at each other, then I helped her up and apologized.

“She seemed to be taking inventory. ‘I’m not hurt,’ she told me, ‘but I seem to have broken something. Will you take me to the powder room where I can make a few repairs, please?’

“The quickest way to the powder room was across the dance floor, and the quickest way to cross the dance floor was to dance rather than trying to dodge between the couples. So we danced.

“She was a superb dancer; you’d have thought the music ran through her nerves like wind through an Æolian harp.

“Just as we reached the far side of the ballroom her hand tightened on mine ‘Don’t look now,’ she whispered, ‘but I’m being pursued by the Big Bad Wolf. He’s been trailing me all evening.’ She didn’t seem frightened, just a little nervous and annoyed, and I didn’t think much of it.

“‘Let’s circle round the floor again,’ she suggested. ‘Maybe he’ll get discouraged and go back to the bar.’ So we waltzed around the floor again, and she went on ‘He’s an old friend of my father’s, a widower who’s looking for a replacement. Honestly, he persecutes me! If he catches us he’ll want to cut in, and I suppose you’ll have to let him, but if you want to do your Boy Scout’s daily good deed please follow us. He’ll head for the conservatory — that’s his technique — and all you’ll have to do is wait a moment, then come barging in and say, “This is our dance, I believe,” or something similarly original. Can do?’

“‘Can do,’ I promised, and, as she predicted, there was her aged Lothario lying in ambush by the entrance to the conservatory.

“‘May I cut in?’ he asked as he tapped me on the shoulder, and as I resigned my partner to him she whispered, ‘Remember, Perseus, Andromeda’ll be waiting to be rescued!’

“I watched them circle the ballroom and noticed that though he danced quite well he dragged his right foot. Sure enough, he guided her into the greenhouse, and in a moment I followed.

“I don’t know just what I’d expected to find, but I was certainly unprepared for the tableau on which I stumbled. The little man had backed her up against the wall, and stood threatening her with one of those case-knives — those things that snap an eight-inch blade out when you press a spring, you know. ‘If I can’t have you, no one else shall,’ I heard him say as I entered the conservatory.

“I knew I had to do something, and do it in a hurry. The man was little, scarcely larger than a half-grown boy, but a crazy man armed with an eight-inch dirk is not a pleasant customer to deal with, and for a moment I was at a loss. Then the girl’s appeal sparked me to action. ‘Please, please!’

she begged. ‘He’s crazy — mad as a hatter—’

“‘Put that knife up,’ I told him. ‘You’re acting like a—’

“He turned from her and came at me, and I knew I really had a maniac to deal with, for there was no light of sanity in his eyes, and at the corners of his mouth I could see little flecks of foam. ‘So you’re the favored swain tonight?’ he rasped in a hard, gritty voice.

“‘Hit him; knock him senseless!’ the girl begged. ‘He’ll kill us if you don’t—’

“I hit as hard as I could, bringing my fist up from the hip and pivoting on my right foot to put my weight behind the blow. He went down like a pole-axed ox, but something seemed to go wrong with me at the same time. A paralyzing tingling, like the pins and needles we feel when a foot has gone to sleep, went up my arm as my fist struck his chin, and in a moment every nerve in my body seemed shrieking in agony.

“The pain was almost unendurable, but I couldn’t make a move, just stood there, trembling as with a galvanic shock and saw the girl go up to him, take his left hand in her right, then felt her grasp my right in her left. The man got up and put his free hand over mine, so in a moment we had formed a circle, and they were moving slowly round and round, dragging me after them.

“I don’t know what it was they said, or rather sang in a monotonous crooning tune, the words seemed meaningless — perhaps they were in some foreign tongue, perhaps they were just doggerel — but they kept repeating over and over, as near as I can remember:

“‘*Aristeas, Kartaphilos,
Ahasverus, Buttadaeus.*’”

“*Morbleu!*” ejaculated Jules de Grandin. “Are you sure that is what they said, *Monsieur?*”

“No, sir, I’m not. But that’s as near as can come to it.”

“*Très bon*, my friend. Continue.” The little Frenchman had leant forward, his small blue eyes fixed on our caller’s face intently as a cat pins its gaze on a rat-hole. “Say on, *Monsieur*,” he ordered. “We are listening.”

“Well, in a moment it seemed that the greenhouse was in motion, too; turning in reverse to the way we moved. That is, we moved from right to left, counter-clockwise, while it seemed to revolve from left to right, and somehow I was being twisted mentally.

“It’s hard to put in words, but somehow — don’t ask me how, I don’t know! — I seemed to be becoming someone else. The first thing that I noticed was that my right foot was dragging, and somehow I seemed smaller. I had to look up at the tall girl holding my right hand, and in a moment I seemed looking at myself — as if I saw my own reflection

in a mirror, yet held the hand of the man in the looking-glass. All images were rather blurred, like things seen under water. Then suddenly I felt a dull ache at the back of my head as my knees sagged under me.”

The caller stopped his narrative and looked at us in turn, as though expecting us to finish the story.

“And then, *Monsieur?*” de Grandin prompted when the silence had lasted at least a minute.

“The next thing I knew I was lying in a bed. The bed was white, the walls of the room were white, everything around me was white and sterile. It was a hospital bedroom, I realized, but how I’d gotten there I had no idea. For a moment I lay there, trying to gather my wits, then I put out my hand for the call-bell. That was the first shock I got. The hand I moved *wasn’t mine*. I’m thirty-two years old, as you know, Dr. Trowbridge. The hand that moved when I reached for the bell was that of an old man, thin, bony, high-veined, speckled with liver-spots.

“I lay there for a moment, wondering if I were delirious, then called, ‘Anybody around?’ and that was the second shock. The voice that sounded when I formed the words in my mind wasn’t mine. It was the thin, rasping treble of an old man. I recognized it! I had heard it in the conservatory when I found the old man threatening the girl.

“I don’t know how long I lay there after that, and the more I tried to make sense of the senseless business the less sense it seemed to make. At last a nurse came in and greeted me with that false cheeriness they always use on patients. ‘Good morning! Feeling better? That was a nasty crack on the head you had.’

“Nurse,’ I begged, and my fear grew into absolute panic as I heard the senile piping of the voice with which I spoke, ‘Please get me a mirror.’

“‘Oh, you’re not disfigured, gran’paw,’ she assured me as she took a hand-glass from the dresser and gave it to me. ‘You’ll be right as rain in a day or two.’

“There’s not much use in trying to describe my feelings as I looked into the glass. The face that gazed back at me was not mine, but that of the old man whom I had knocked out in the conservatory.

“‘That’s not — that isn’t I!’ screamed ‘That’s not my face—’

“The nurse took the mirror away. ‘Take it easy, gran’paw,’ she advised. ‘Who’d you expect to see, Charles Boyer, or maybe Mickey Mouse?’ She stepped out to the corridor and in a moment a young interne hurried in.

“‘Still pretty bad, eh?’ I heard him whisper. He swabbed my arm with alcohol and drove a hypo into it. The anesthetic acted almost immediately, and I was out almost before I had a chance to protest.

“When I woke up the sun was slanting in the window and there were shadows in the corners of the room that hadn’t been there when I first regained consciousness. My first thought was to ring the bell and ask to see the superintendent. Then I reconsidered. How I came to be in this old body I had no idea. It was like one of those dreadful things you read about in fairy-story books — or books of witchcraft and black magic — but one thing was sure: If I attempted to disclaim the body into which I seemed to have been thrust I’d get nowhere, except into the psychopathic ward. They’d given me a shot of dope that morning when they thought that I was still delirious from the blow on the head. Now, when I’d regained full consciousness, if I still insisted I was someone else — what would you have done if a patient acted that way, Dr. Trowbridge?”

“I’d be inclined to certify him—” I began, but he cut in sharply:

“Exactly. And you, Dr. de Grandin?”

Jules de Grandin pursed his lips as if he were about to whistle, and tweaked the ends of his small blond mustache. “I do not know, my friend,” he answered. “What you have told us sounds incredible. Such things just do not happen, as Dr. Trowbridge — or any jury of a lunacy commission — will assure you; but I withhold the judgment. Will you proceed?”

Our caller drew a deep, quick breath, whether of relief or excitement I could not determine. Then: “I realized that I had to ‘go along with the gag,’ so to speak,” he said. “If I continued to deny my body I was headed straight for the padded cell; the only chance I had to gain my liberty was to keep silent, get out of the hospital as quickly as I could, and get in touch with Nancy. I wasn’t sure that I could make her believe me, or that I could convince anybody, but it was worth a trial, while I was sure to be incarcerated if I fought against the form that had been thrust on me.

“So when the house physician came to see me I was meek as the proverbial Moses, making up a name and address for myself, answering all questions that he asked as promptly and with as much show of reason as I could. At four o’clock this afternoon they signed my release and I left Mercy Hospital.

“The only clothes I had were those I wore when I came to the hospital, of course, and they were a dinner kit. I couldn’t very well go marching round in that, but fortunately there had been considerable money in the pockets, so when all charges had been paid at the hospital I still had better than a hundred dollars left. I called a cab and had him drive me to South Second Street, where the second-hand clothing stores are, you know. In one of those I got a pretty good outfit for fifty dollars, and the dealer allowed me twenty in trade for

the clothes I wore, so I was not completely destitute.

“Next, I tried to get in touch with Nancy. I ’phoned her several times and got no answer, and when I went to the house it was closed and dark. I waited outside for a while, then when no one came, I thought of you and Dr. de Grandin, and — here I am.”

The look he turned on us was that sick, apprehensive, slightly hopeful glance I’d seen so many patients wear when they were waiting for a diagnosis in suspected carcinoma. Despite myself I felt a pang of pity. This was a clean-cut case of organic dementia, probably consequent upon a head injury. What the hospital authorities were thinking of to turn a man in his condition out of doors was more than I could imagine. The patient seemed in a bland humor, but—

De Grandin’s level voice broke through my thoughts. “I do not understand your case, *Monsieur*,” he told the caller, “but I believe what you have said. What we can do about it I am not certain, but what we can do will be done, I assure you. You say you have sufficient money to provide for your immediate wants?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very good. I would suggest that you find yourself lodgings and let us know where we can get in touch with you. Meantime, I shall make such investigations as seem necessary at the moment, and consult with you when I have completed them. Shall we say tomorrow afternoon at half-past four? Very well. Till then, *Monsieur*.”

“That was the cruelest thing I’ve ever seen you do,” I accused as the door closed behind the caller. “You know as well as I that he’s a dement, probably suffering organic dementia as the result of a head wound, possibly complicated by senile dementia. To pretend belief in his delusions—”

“Can you remember what it was he said the man and woman chanted in the conservatory?” he broke in irrelevantly.

“Remember what they chanted — what in the world—”

“There are so many things in the world, my friend, not all of them to be found in the medical textbooks. Attend me. Did he not say they repeated:

“‘*Aristeas, Kartaphilos,
Ahasverus, Buttadaeus*’?”

Do those words mean anything to you?”

“No more than hickory, dickory, dock, or eenie, meenie, mini mo,” I answered rather tartly.

“U’m? Are you familiar with the legend of the Wandering Jew.

“You mean the character of whom Eugene Sue wrote?”

“*Monsieur le Général*, among others. In Greek tradition he is known as Aristeas, the Jewish folklore calls him

Kartaphilos, another legend names him Ahasverus, while in the German lore he is called John Buttadaeus.

“*Le bon Dieu* only knows where the old legend started. It has been current throughout Europe for almost two thousand years, and has gathered many accretions in retelling, but one thing all the folk-tales have in common, whether they be Greek or Jewish, German, French or Italian: At the end of every century, or a cycle of approximately that length of time, the wretched man, accursed with immortality, falls into a stupor of some kind and wakes up as a young man of somewhere in the vicinity of thirty.”

“Are you suggesting that this man who calls himself Norman Northrop might be—”

“I am suggesting nothing, my old one. What I have tried to point out is the possible connection between the names of one who had his youth miraculously restored and this species of possession which we seem to have here. It is not likely, I admit, but it is possible that by some kind of black magic the man who wore the body of the one who just left us was able to exchange his aging frame for the young, vigorous body worn by Monsieur Northrop, much as a tramp might steal the garments of a swimmer and leave his own rags in their place. You comprehend?”

“I should say not!” I jerked back. “This is the most fantastic, incredible sort of nonsense—”

“Forrester!” he exclaimed. “*Morbleu*, I do remember now! *Pour la barbe d’un bouc vert*, that is it!”

“Whatever are you raving about?” I demanded.

“Her name, *pardieu*; I had forgotten it, now it is that I remember!”

Shortly after luncheon the next day he came into the office, pleased as Punch with himself. “Observe, peruse, read him, if you will be so kind, my friend,” he ordered, holding out a paper. “Does he not answer some, at least, of our so vexing, questions?”

“AGED WOMAN COMMITTED”

the headline read, and under it:

A jury in Judge Anslem’s court today ruled that an unidentified old woman was insane. The respondent in the lunacy inquiry had claimed to be Margaret Forrester, nationally known swimming champion, who disappeared near Port of Spain, Trinidad, while bathing in the sea some time ago. The respondent had a fixed delusion that the missing young woman’s soul had entered her body at the moment she was lost in the sea, and insisted that she be addressed as Miss Forrester, that the bank in which the missing swimmer’s account was honor her checks, and that all property of the vanished young woman was hers.

Miss Forrester, it will be remembered, was an orphan

without near kin, and her estate has been in the hands of a conservator since her disappearance.

“Well?” I asked as I laid down the photostat.

He shook his head. “I do not think that it is well, Friend Trowbridge. That one person should suffer such obsessions is no matter for remark, but when two — a man and woman — suffer from identical delusions there is a smell of fish upon the business. Nor is that all. Not by any means. On my way from the office of *le journal* I called at Madame Northrop’s and showed her a newspaper picture of the missing Margaret Forrester. What do you think she said?”

I drew bow at a venture, making as absurd a guess as seemed possible. “That the picture of Miss Forrester was that of the young woman with whom Norman went away?”

“*Mon Dieu!*” he almost shouted. “How did you know it, my friend? Has Madame Northrop been here?”

“Of course not. I was merely trying to be as crazy as you seem.”

“Crazy or not, I am convinced,” he answered in a level voice. “Me, I shall investigate this business of the monkey, and see what is to be seen.”

“I don’t doubt it,” I replied as I rose. “Run along and see what’s to be seen. I’ve got some calls to make.”

He was almost as ebullient as a freshly mixed Seidlitz powder when he came bouncing in a few minutes before dinner. “*Pardieu*, my old, we make the progress!” he told me as he sipped his third Martini. “That Madame Nancy, she is superb, so is her brother, Monsieur Wilfred. They are most cooperative.”

“How’s that?” I asked as we went in to dinner.

He sampled the pottage Bellevue approvingly took a sip of sherry before he replied. “It seems that Monsieur Norman’s watch was in a state of disrepair last Monday night, and so he borrowed Monsieur Wilfred’s for the evening. It was a fine timepiece, that; a fine Swiss watch which cost four hundred dollars.”

I looked at him in amazement. “I fail to see what connection there is between the value of a watch and—”

“Of course, you do, *mon ami*. I should have fallen in a swoon if you had. But listen, pay attention, regard me: When Monsieur Norman’s body walked off with the strange young woman it wore Monsieur Wilfred’s watch upon its wrist. To take away another’s property without so much as by-your-leave is larceny, at least such actions will support a charge of theft. And so we have a police lookout broadcast for them, the one as principal, the other as accessory. I do not doubt that they will be arrested, and when they are I shall be ready for them with the party of surprise. Yes, of course.”

“You speak of Norman’s body as if it were a thing apart from him,” I said. “Am I to understand that you believe that

crazy man's story — the dement who was here last night and claimed to be Norman? Is it your theory that both Norman and the aging man are victims of some sort of possession?"

He gave me a long, serious look. "It are entirely possible, Friend Trowbridge. Today we make fun of the old belief in demoniacal possession, and of the possibility of spirit-transference. But can we say with certainty that the old ones were wrong and we are right? We call it epilepsy, or manic-depressive insanity, or sometimes dementia. They called conditions which exhibited the same symptoms possession. The Biblical accounts are far from complete, but any modern psychiatrist examining a patient having symptoms similar to those of King Saul would have no hesitancy in pronouncing him a manic-depressive. Remember how Saul brooded in black melancholy, then flew into a sudden rage and flung a spear at David? Or take the story of the Gadarene demoniac who flew into such frenzies that no chain could restrain him. Has not that the earmarks of what we call acute mania? It may be that the old ones were not foolish, after all."

"But that all happened long ago—"

"*Et puis?* The ancients died of carcinoma and tuberculosis and nephritis, just as we do, why should not we be subject to possession just as they were? Do not mistake me, my friend. I do not say possession explains every case of so-called mental aberration, or even many of them. But in a proper case what we call lunacy might be possession in the strict Biblical meaning of the term. Remember, if you please, possession was no common thing, even in those days. The instances of it that have come down to us have been preserved in the records precisely because they are so unusual. Why should it not be met with occasionally today? Every psychiatrist will tell you he's had cases which defied both diagnosis and treatment, cases not to be explained by anything but the modernly rejected belief in demoniacal possession."

"Well — er—" I temporized, "I suppose it's barely possible, but hardly probable—"

"*Précisément, exactement, quite so,*" he nodded vigorously. "It is possibilities, not probabilities, with which we must deal here, my friend. Now—"

"Excuse me, sor, but Lieutenant Costello's on th' 'phone," Nora McGinnis interrupted. "He says as how th' pair ye wanted has been took up near Lake Owassa, an' th' s'bate troopers is bringin' 'em down. They should be here in half a hour or so."

"*Morbleu,* but it is magnificent, it is superb!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us hasten dinner, even at the peril to digestion. Either I am more mistaken than I think, or I shall show you something, me!"

Lieutenant Costello had assigned a room to de Grandin,

one of those bare, ascetic cells that characterize police headquarters, and implemented it according to the little Frenchman's orders. Two comfortable chairs had been placed in the center of the floor, and above them hung a powerful electric bulb whose coned-down light was enhanced by a powerful reflector-shade. The rest of the apartment seemed pitch-dark in contrast to the almost dazzling pyramid of light. At the far end of the room, hidden in the shadows, was a large metal clock that ticked with a sound like the beating of a hammer on an anvil and a deliberation like the surging of the surf upon the beach. *Tick—tock; tick—tock,* it told the seconds off slowly, and somehow, as absurd things sometimes pop into our minds, I was reminded of the clock inside the crocodile which followed Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*.

De Grandin looked about the bleak apartment with a smile of grim satisfaction. "All is in readiness, I damn think," he told us. "Bring them to me as soon as they arrive, *mon lieutenant.*"

It might have been fifteen minutes later when the errant pair were ushered in by a patrolman and seated in the chairs beneath the light.

I recognized young Northrop at a glance, and saw the woman with him fitted Nancy's description exactly. A "gorgeous hussy," Nancy had called her, and she lived up to the term in every particular. Boldly but beautifully formed, she was, with long slim legs, a flat back, high, firm breasts, and a proud head set superbly on a full round throat.

"*Bon soir, Monsieur, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin greeted pleasantly. "I take it that you know why you have been made arrested?"

Norman Northrop cleared his throat a little nervously. "Some absurd charge of larceny! Bring the complainant here; I'll make good any loss he claims to have suffered—"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's urbane voice had just the proper tone of incredulity. "Are you so utterly *naïf?* Could you not guess the charge of larceny was but an *attrape,* a hoax?"

"Then what—" Norman began, seemed to think better of the question, and lapsed into silence.

De Grandin made no answer, and the metal clock in its corner ticked loudly, deliberately. *Tick—tock; tick—tock!*

The little Frenchman reached into his waistcoat pocket, and took out his slim gold watch and swung it by its chain. Back and forth, pendulum-like, in perfect accord to the clock's deliberate ticking the watch swung, its brightly polished surface shining like a dazzling disc of radiance in the cruel white light from the electric bulb.

Tick—tock—swing—swing! I felt my head begin to move from side to side in rhythm with the ticking clock and swaying watch. There was an almost overwhelming

fascination in the synchronized sound and movement. I saw Norman and the girl look away, turn their gaze upon the floor, even close their eyes, but in a moment they again looked at the blindingly-bright watch as it swayed in time to the clock's slow tick.

"Would it astonish you to learn that the statute against witchcraft has never been repealed in this state?" de Grandin asked in an almost gentle voice. "It was an oversight on the part of the legislature, of course, but" — the watch swayed slowly and the clock ticked loudly — "but it is still entirely possible for one — or two — to be convicted of the crime today, and made to undergo the ancient penalty. The stake, the fire—" His soft voice paused, but still the clock ticked loudly, slowly; still the blindingly-bright watch swung in long, sweeping arcs.

The prisoners watched the swaying golden disc in fascination. First their heads turned slowly as it swung before them, then only their eyes moved in their motionless faces, finally the woman's chin fell downward to her chest. The man held out a few minutes longer, but finally his eyes closed and his head inclined toward one shoulder.

"Quickly, my friend," de Grandin thrust the watch back in his pocket as he rose. "Bid Costello have the cots brought in."

The lieutenant was ready, and as I opened the door two policemen trundled in a pair of wheeled stretchers of the kind used for emergency cases, lifted the unconscious man and woman on them and stood awaiting further orders.

"*Non*, not that way, *mes braves*," de Grandin told them. "Their heads should be to the west and their feet to the east, that the magnetic currents of the earth may flow through them. Ah, so! *Très bon*."

For a minute or so he stood at the foot of the cots, then, "Aristeas, Kartaphilos, Ahasverus, Buttadaeus, or by whatever name you are known, I order you to quit these bodies!" he whispered sharply. "Go, seek thy proper place, wherever that may be, but trouble Norman Northrop and Margaret Forrester no more! Begone!" He struck the unconscious man a sharp blow in the face, then to the woman he ordered, "Go thou, too, female counterpart of yon male wanderer. Go, get thee hence, ere I call down the ancient judgments on thee — the rack, the thumbscrews, the stake, the fire—" A sharp slap sounded. He had struck the woman in the face.

A silence we could fairly hear succeeded, for he had stopped the clock, and even the street noises outside were insulated from the little basement cell. There came a faint moan from the man on the wheeled litter. "Nancy!" he whimpered. "Nancy, dear, please try to believe me. I know you cannot recognize me, but this is I, your husband

Norman—"

"Who says you are not recognizable, Monsieur," de Grandin cut in jubilantly. "Come, rise; get on thy feet" — he held his hand out to Norman. *Madame* your wife is waiting in the corridor outside. She has been told much of your story, and while she does not understand — *eh bien*, did not the good St. Paul say it? 'Love believeth all things.' Go to her, take her in your arms and tell her that you love her, and her only."

He fairly pushed the young man from the room and tiptoed to the bier on which the woman lay. "*Mademoiselle*, *Mademoiselle* Forrester!" he called softly.

"Wh—what?" The girl half rose, dropped back upon the litter and gave a small mewling cry. "Oh, *don't* — I tell you I am Margaret Forrester—"

"Of course you are, and who says otherwise is an unconscionable liar!" the little Frenchman chuckled. "You are indeed none other. *Mademoiselle*, and you are in proper person, too!"

The girl sat up and looked about the barren room half fearfully. Then she looked down at her hands. "*O-o-oh!*" the exclamation was a squeal of ecstasy. "They are my hands — *my* hands; my very own!" She raised her long, slim feet and looked at them and at the shapely legs and ankles to which they were attached as if she'd never seen anything so beautiful. "My feet *my* legs—"

"And very pretty feet and legs they are, too," Jules de Grandin broke in gallantly. "Come, there is one outside who will be much surprised to see you. Monsieur Horace Hendry from the bank, who has been nursing your estate in your absence." He smiled and put a finger to his lips. "We shall not tell him everything we know, shall we? When he asks where you were — *tenez*, is it not woman's right to be mysterious?"

"Oh," the girl exclaimed, as she put both feet to the floor, took de Grandin's face between her large and well formed hands and kissed him first on one cheek, then on the other, and finally on the mouth. "Oh, you wonderful, wonderful little man! It's as if you'd brought me back from the dead! When you told me that you'd try this afternoon I hadn't any faith, but—"

"*Mademoiselle!*" his voice was filled with shocked reproof. "Remember, I am Jules de Grandin!"

"No, I shall not try to tell you it was simple," he assured me as we drove home. "It was most damnably complicated, and I was not at all certain of the outcome till the end. Two and two is always four, but what if one mistakes a 3 for a 2? *Pardieu*, the sum will not meet the requirements, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"I went about my adding thus: When Monsieur Norman

came to us last night I thought at first as you did. 'We have here a dement, bursting with delusions,' I tell me. But as he talked and I observed the youthful ardor of his speech in such strange contrast to his aged body, I began to wonder. And then all of a sudden a memory came to me. The journal's story of the strange old woman who insisted she was Mademoiselle Forrester, and kept insisting what was obviously not so till they clapped her into durance in the lunatic asylum.

"'Jules de Grandin,' I ask me, 'are it not odd that a man and a woman should have the same delusions, and at approximately the same time?'"

"'It are entirely extraordinary, Jules de Grandin,' I agree with me.

"So I go to the newspaper to refresh my memory, and there I borrow a picture of the disappeared young lady. I take it to Madame Nancy for her inspection, and without a moment's hesitation she identifies it as that of the woman who had gone away with her husband.

"Then, I ask you, what was it I did? *Parbleu*, I went to the asylum where they had that aged woman in confinement and talked with her. *Nom d'une barbe d'un chameau vert*, the story that she tells is strangely like that told by the old man who claims to be Monsieur Northrop!"

"She had been swimming in the sea near Port of Spain in Trinidad when she was accosted by an aged woman who met her as she emerged from the water and heaped insults and abuse on her. At last she could endure no more and struck her tormentor, whereat her whole arm seemed to be paralyzed, and she stood helpless on the sand.

"Then up there came a man, a man of sixty years or more, who took the woman by the hand and raised her, then seized the helpless young woman's hand and started to move round and round. And as they circled round upon the sand they crooned a song about Aristeas, and Kartaphilos and the rest of those queer names by which *le juif errant* has been known in different lands.

"Now I was sure that it was 2 and 2 and not some other figures that I added, and the answer must be 4!"

"Apparently their technique was unvarying. They induced someone previously chosen for his physical appearance to strike one of them, rendering him unconscious for a moment. Then they began their chant, their dance, their witches' incantation, and when the chant and dance were ended the stricken one had moved into the victim's body, leaving his old form to house the victim's soul or spirit or ego — whatever you may care to call it."

"Mademoiselle Forrester had been chosen as the new 'house' for the female of the pair; they left her in the old

body and came to this country, where they settled on Monsieur Northrop as a suitable dwelling-place for the male member of this pair of body-snatchers.

"You know the rest, or nearly all of it. You know how we sent out police alarms, how we had them arrested and brought here, how I induced hypnosis by the ticking of the clock and swinging of my watch, having put the fear of prosecution for witchcraft in them, thereby focusing their attention — forcing it into a single channel, as one might say.

"Apparently unconsciousness was a prerequisite to their leaving the bodies they occupied. I induced it by hypnosis, then, since they were unable to work their charm, they took their flight to *le bon Dieu* only knows where when I ordered them to depart. And when they left, the spirits of Monsieur Norman and Mademoiselle Margaret returned to their proper bodies."

"What became of the — er — old bodies?" I asked as we turned into my driveway.

He chuckled. "They will not be used again, my friend. I called the Avondale asylum before we left police headquarters, and was told the aged woman who had claimed to be Miss Forrester had died at just 8:55, which was the moment when I called *la Forrester* from her swoon. Another call I made also. To the rooming house to which Monsieur Northrop went when he left us. The landlady informed me she had found her latest lodger dead in bed a few minutes before. *Voilà tout*."

"But see here," I demanded, "who were these things, or demons, or whatever they were, who went around snatching bodies, living in them till they'd passed the climacteric, then trading them for others?"

He raised his shoulders in a shrug. "Who knows? Perhaps they were a wicked witch and wizard who had learned to make those vile exchanges, and thus acquire a pseudo-immortality. Perhaps they were a pair of elementals, that is, preadamite spirits who had never lived in human bodies, but somehow managed to get into them and liked them so well that they continued to tenant them, moving from one to another as a man may change his rented residence as it deteriorates or as he finds a more desirable dwelling.

"Who can say with certainty? Not I, the problem is too much for me."

He paused with a quick elfin grin as we entered the hall. "Is it not possible the ice box contains apple pie and beer to which we can give a more fitting home before we go to bed, Friend Trowbridge?"

The Ring of Bastet

IT HAD snowed earlier, then rained until the snow had melted into muddy slush; now a shrewish wind came scolding up from the Bay, and the sad black puddles that were the dregs of the storm began to glaze and shine with a thin film of ice beneath the street lamps' glare. Walking became hazardous, with the outcome of each step in doubt.

"*Parbleu, mon ami,*" Jules de Grandin muttered as he dug his pointed chin two inches deeper into the fur collar of his coat, "I do not like this weather. *Nom d'un poisson!*" his feet slipped on the icy pavement and he caromed into me. "Let us seek the shelter. I do not wish to nurse a broken arm; also I am villainously hungry."

I nodded agreement. I'd treated half a dozen fractures due to falls on ice-glazed streets that winter, and had no wish to spend the next six weeks or so encased in splints and bandages. "Here's the Squire Grill. They have good steaks, if you'd care to try—"

"*Morbleu,* I would attack a dead raw horse without seasoning!" he interjected. "My friend, it is that I am hungry like a lady-wolf with sixteen pups."

The Squire Grill was warm and cozy. Windsor chairs of dark oak were drawn up to the tables, shaded lamplight fell on red-checked tablecloths, behind the bar a man in a white jacket polished glasses and at the far end of the room there blazed an open fire quite large enough to have burnt a Mediæval heretic.

"*Une eau-de-vie, pour l'amour de Dieu,*" de Grandin told the waitress, then as she looked blank, "A brandy, if you please, and bring her with the speed of an antelope, *Mademoiselle.*"

The girl gave him a friendly smile — women always smiled at Jules de Grandin — then, to me, "And yours, sir?"

"Oh, an old fashioned without too much fruit, if you please, then two steaks, medium, French fries, lettuce and tomato salad—"

"And mugs of beer and apple tart and copious pots of coffee, *s'il vous plaît,*" the little Frenchman completed the order.

The look of pleased anticipation on his face became an expression of ecstasy as he cut into his steak, black as charcoal on the outside, and pale watermelon pink within. He raised his eyes and seemed to contemplate some vision of supernal joy. "*Ah,*" he murmured, "*Ah, mon Dieu—*"

The door swung open and a blast of frigid air came rowdying in, and with it came a party of young folks, healthy, obviously ravenously hungry, riotous with gaiety.

They made a noisy entrance, moved with more than necessary noise to the long table set before the fireplace, and began calling loudly for service. Evidently they were expected, for a waitress hurried up with a tray of Martinis, and was back with another before the first round was finished.

A young man who had plainly had more than a modest quantum of *pot-valiency* already, rose and held his glass up. "Lad-eez: an' gen'men," he announced a bit unsteadily, "to — to th' bride'n groom; may all their troubles be little ones, an'—"

"Hold on, there, Freddy, hold it!" warned a blonde girl whose pink cheeks glowed with something more than the cold. "They aren't married yet—"

The young man seemed to take this under advisement. "U'm," he drew his hand across his face. "Tha's so, they ain't. Very well, then: Lad-eez an' gen'men, *les fiancés.* May they live long an' prosper!"

"Speech! Speech!" the youngsters chorused, pounding on the table with their cutlery. "You tell 'em, Scotty!"

A tall young man in a crew cut, tweed jacket and tan slacks rose in response to the demand. He was a good-looking youngster, blond, high-colored, with a casual not-long-out-of-college look that labeled him a junior executive in some advertising agency or slickpaper magazine's editorial staff. "My friends," he began, but:

"The ring, Scott — put your brand on her!" his tablemates clamored. "Stand up, Bina, it won't hurt — much!"

The laughing girl who rose in response to the summons was small and delicate and looked as if she had been molded in fragile, daintily tinted porcelain. Her nose and brow and chin were aquiline but delicately proportioned, her skin exquisite. Framed by hair of almost startling blackness that fell to her shoulders and was cut across the forehead in straight bangs, her face had the look of one of those stylized pictures of a Renaissance saint. Coupled with the blush that washed up her pale cheeks her smile gave her a look of almost pious embarrassment. Demurely as a nun about to take the veil of a bride at her wedding ceremony, she held out a slim, fragile hand and the young man slipped a heavy ring on its third finger.

"Seal the bargain! Seal the bargain!" the demand rose like a rhythmed chant, and in obedience to it the girl lifted her face for his kiss. The flush deepened in her cheeks, and she sat down quickly as two waitresses came up with trays of

steaming food and in their wake the *cellérier* with an ice bucket and a magnum of champagne.

De Grandin grinned delightedly at me above the rim of his beer mug. “*C’est très joli, n’est-ce-pas?*” he asked. “*Dites*, youth is marvelous, my friend; it is a pity that it must be wasted on those too young to appreciate it. If—”

A shout came from the merrymakers’ table. “Look at Bina! She’s passing out!”

I glanced across the room. The girl on whose hand we had seen the ring placed had fallen back in her chair, but the look on her face was not one of alcoholic stupor. Her scarlet lipstick — the sole makeup on her face — seemed suddenly to stand out, vivid as a fresh wound, as if what little color she possessed had retreated behind it, changing the whole aspect of her countenance. Her lips hung open slackly, tried to move and failed, and in her eyes was a look of fascination such as might have been there if she saw a viper crawling toward her. “That girl’s ill!” I exclaimed.

“*Pardieu*, my friend, you are so right!” de Grandin agreed. “*C’est—*”

The girl rose slowly, like one who makes as little noise as possible before she takes to panic flight, and walked toward the door of the restaurant. Her patellar reflexes seemed to weaken as she stepped; her knees flexed and her feet kicked aimlessly, as if she suffered motor ataxia. Then suddenly her knees buckled and her legs twisted under her. She fell as limply, as flaccidly, as a filled sack from which the grain had run out, or a rag doll emptied of its sawdust. We saw the shape of total fear form on her face as we reached her. She turned wide, frightened eyes on us, and I noted that although her pupils were large and black they were rimmed by dark green irises. “My legs,” she whimpered in a voice that seemed to shake with chill. “I can’t move them — there’s no feeling in them; but they’re cold. Cold!”

“I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge,” the little Frenchman introduced us as we knelt beside the fallen girl. Then, “You have no pain, *Mademoiselle*? No feeling of—”

“No feeling in my legs at all, sir. They’re numb — and cold.”

“U’ m?” he raised the hem of her full, pleated brown wool-jersey dress and took the calf of one slim leg between his thumb and forefinger. “You do not feel?” he pinched the firm flesh till it showed white with pressure.

“No, sir.”

I noted that she wore no stockings and shook my head in disapproval.

De Grandin nodded. “Cold,” he pronounced. “*Froid comme une grenouille.*”

“No wonder,” I shot back. “You’d be cold as a frog, too, if you went traipsing out in sub-freezing weather with no

more stockings than a—”

“*Ah bah*,” he cut me off. “Do not let Madame Grundy sway your judgment, Friend Trowbridge. It may be cold outside, but it is warm in here, and she sat almost within arm’s length of that great fire. She should not have the chill.”

I knelt beside him and laid a hand on the girl’s leg. It was cold as a dead woman’s, though the skin was smooth and sleek, without a sign of goose-flesh.

“You’re sure you have no pain, *Mademoiselle*?” de Grandin asked again, leaning close to look into her eyes and nostrils. “No headache, no pains in back or sides or limbs—”

“No, sir. Nothing, till just now when my legs gave way under me.”

He took his clinical thermometer from his waistcoat, shook it and thrust it into her mouth, then placed his fingers on her wrist. At length. “Pulse and temperature are normal,” he reported. “It is not anterior polio-myelitis. Except for this localized chill and inability to walk—”

“Berger’s paresthesia?” I hazarded.

He nodded doubtfully. “Perhaps. At any rate, she cannot lie here. Let us take her home and see what we can do.”

Jobina Houston lived in one of those cubicles known as “efficiency apartments” — a single fairly large room with furnishings designed to lead a double life. The small round dining table could be made into a bench by tilting up its top, a minuscule kitchenette, complete with porcelain sink and electric grill, lay in ambush behind a mirrored door the divan opened out to form a bed, the chest of drawers did duty both as china closet and clothes press.

With the help of the blonde girl who had been ringleader at the party we got our patient into bed with hot water bottles at her feet and an electric pad under her.

De Grandin looked more puzzled than alarmed. “When did you first begin to notice this sensation of numbness, *Mademoiselle*?” he asked when we had made the girl as comfortable as possible.

She wrinkled her smooth brow. “I—I don’t quite know,” she answered. “It must have been — oh, no, that’s silly!”

“Permit me to be judge of silliness and sense, if you please,” he returned. “When was it that you first began to feel this chilly numbness?”

“We-ell, I *think* I first felt it just as Scott put the ring on my finger. You see,” she hurried on, as if an autobiographical sketch would help us, “Scott Driggs and I both work at Bartlett, Babson, Butler and Breckenridge’s advertising agency. He’s in copy, I’m in production.”

“Of course,” he agreed as if he understood her perfectly. “And then, if you please?”

“Well, we sort of drifted together, and — and suddenly we both realized *this is it*, and so decided to get married, and—”

One hand crept from the shrouding blankets as she spoke, and began to smooth the bedclothes gently. “So tonight we gave an engagement party, and—”

“*Mademoiselle*, where did that ring come from, if you please?” he interrupted.

“Why, from Scott of course. He gave it to me tonight—”

“*Bien oui*, one understands all that, but what I most desire to know is where did he get it — where did it come from originally?”

“Why, I really don’t know, sir. Scott and I don’t really know much about each other. All we know is we’re in love — that’s plenty, isn’t it?”

He nodded, but I noticed that his eyes were on the ring with a long, speculative stare. “You do not know who was his father?” he asked at length.

“Not really, sir. I understand he was some sort of scientist, an explorer or something; but he’s been dead a long time. Scott hasn’t any family. He finished college on his G.I. money and came to work at B.B.B.&B. about the same time I did. So, as I said, our work threw us together, and we—”

A small frown of annoyance gathered between de Grandin’s brows as he stared in fascination at the ring. It was a heavy golden circlet, heavy as a man’s seal ring, and set with some sort of green stone which might have been peridot or zircon, or even a ceramic cartouche. Certainly it could not have been more than semi-precious, for it had no luster, although its color was peculiarly lovely. The gem was deeply incised with what appeared to be a human figure swathed like an Egyptian mummy, but having a peculiarly malformed head. “You recognize him?” he asked as I completed my inspection. I shook my head. To the best of my knowledge I had never seen such a figure before.

“Tell me, *Mademoiselle*,” he demanded, “just what did you mean when you said you began to feel this so strange numbness at the moment your fiancé put this ring on your hand?”

“I don’t quite know how to put it, sir, but I’ll try. Scott had just put the ring on my finger when the dinner came, and as I took the cover off my *coq au vin* I happened to look toward the fireplace and saw—” she halted with a little shudder of revulsion.

“Yeah, what was it you saw?” he prompted.

“A cat.”

“A cat? *Grand Dieu des porcs*, you mean a puss? Why not? Most restaurants have one.”

“Ye-es, sir; I know. That’s why I chose the Squire Grill for our party. They haven’t one.”

He raised his slim black brows. “*Qu’est-ce que c’est, Mademoiselle?*”

“You see, I’m one of those people who can’t abide the sight of a cat. It terrifies me just to have one in the same

room with me. There’s a technical name for it. I forget—

“Ailurophobia,” he supplied. “*Bien*, my little, you are one of those who cannot stand the sight of a puss-cat. What next?”

“At first I thought I must have been mistaken, but there it was, coming right at me, snarling, and getting bigger with each step it took. When I first saw it, it was just an ordinary-sized cat, but by the time it had advanced three feet it was big as a large dog, and by the time it almost reached the table it seemed big as a lion.”

“U’m? That is what terrified you?”

“Oh, you noticed how frightened I was?”

“But naturally. And then?”

“Then I began to feel all funny inside — as if everything had come loose, you know — and at the same time I felt my feet growing numb and cold, then my ankles, then my legs. I knew that if I didn’t get away that awful thing would pounce on me as if I were a mouse, so I got up and started for the door, and then—” Her narrow shoulders moved in the suggestion of a shrug. “That’s where you came in, sir.”

He tweaked the needle points of his small blond mustache. “One sees.” Turning to the girl who had come with us from the restaurant, he asked, “Will you be kind enough to stay with her tonight? She has sustained a shock, but seems to be progressing well. I do not think that you will need do more than keep her covered, but if by any chance you should need us—” He scribbled our phone number on a card and handed it to her.

“O.K., sir,” the girl answered. “I’ll ring you if I need you, but I don’t expect I shall.”

“The trouble with today’s young folks is that they don’t know how to drink,” I complained as we left Jobina’s apartment. “That gang of kids had been pub crawling — stopping at every bar between their office and the Squire, probably — and Jobina thought she had to match Scott glass for glass. No wonder she thought she saw a monstrous cat. The only wonder is she didn’t see a pink elephant or crocodile.”

De Grandin chuckled. “*La, la*, to hear you talk one might suspect you wear long underwear and drive a horse instead of a car, Friend Trowbridge. I fear, however” — he sobered abruptly — “that her trouble stems from something more than too much *gaieté*—”

“D’ye mean to tell me that you think she saw that great cat?” I demanded.

“I think perhaps she did,” he answered levelly.

“Nobody else did—”

“Notwithstanding that, it is entirely possible she saw what she claimed—”

“Humph, when people see things that aren’t there—”

“Perhaps it was there, spiritually, if not corporeally.”

“Spiritually? What the devil—”

“Something not so far from that, my old,” he agreed.

“Suppose we call on young Driggs. He may be able to tell us something.”

I expelled a long, annoyed breath. When he was in one of these secretive moods it was useless to question him, I knew from experience.

“How’s Bina?” young Driggs greeted as he let us into his apartment something like a quarter-hour later.

“She seems recovering,” the Frenchman answered non-committally. “Meanwhile—”

“What was it? What was wrong with her?”

“One cannot say with certainty at this time. Perhaps you can enlighten us.”

“I?”

“*Précisément*. You can, by example, tell us something of the history of the ring you put upon her finger just before her seizure.”

The young man looked at him blankly. “I don’t see what connection there could be between the ring and Bina’s illness.”

“Neither do I?” de Grandin confessed, “but if there is, what you can tell us may prove helpful. Where did it come from, if you know?”

“It belonged to my father, Dad was assistant curator of Egyptology at the Adelphi Museum in Brooklyn.”

“Ah?” de Grandin bent a little forward in his chair. “It may be you can help us, after all, *Monsieur*. What of your father, if you please?”

“In 1898 or ’99 the Museum sent him to Egypt, and while there he went up the Nile to Tel Basta, where—”

“Where the worship of Ubasti and Pasht, the cat-headed goddesses, was centered in the olden days,” de Grandin interjected.

“Just so, sir. While Dad was poking round the old ruins he unearthed several little balls of what seemed like amber, except that it was much clearer, almost transparent. The Egyptian government had begun to clamp down on the exportation of relics, but Dad managed to smuggle three of the small spheres out with him. Two he gave to the Museum, the other one he kept.

“That little amber ball is among my earliest recollections. I used to look at it in awe, for buried in it was a gold ring with a green set, and when you held it to the light the stone seemed almost alive, as if it were an eye — a big green cat’s eye — that looked at you.

“I don’t know much about Egyptian antiques, my tastes all ran to other things, but I remember Dad once told me the ring had once belonged to a priest of Bastet, the cat-headed goddess who personified the beneficent principle of fire.”

De Grandin nodded eagerly. “Quite yes *Monsieur*. And then?”

“My father died while I was still in the Army, and Mother left the old house in Gates Avenue and went to live with some cousins out at Patchogue, and when she died that little amber envelope containing the old priest’s ring was about all she left me.”

He grinned a little self-consciously. “Any man can give his girl a diamond — if he has the price — but nobody but I could give Jobina such a ring as that I put on her finger tonight.”

De Grandin tugged at his mustache until I feared that he would wrench it loose from his lip. “How did you get the ring from its envelope, *Monsieur*?” he asked.

“I had a jeweler cut it out. He had the devil of a time doing it, too. I’d always thought the capsule that enclosed it was amber, or perhaps resin, but it proved so hard that he broke several drills before he could succeed in cutting it away from the ring.

The Frenchman rose and held out his hand. “Thank you, my friend,” he told our host. “I think that you have been most helpful.”

“You’re sure Jobina’ll be all right?” the young man asked.

“Her progress has been satisfactory so far,” de Grandin took refuge in that vagueness which physicians have used since the days of Hippocrates. “I see no reason why she should not make a quick, complete recovery.”

“What’s it all about?” I demanded as we reached the street. “You seem to see some connection between that ring and Jobina Houston’s seizure, but—”

“Your guess is good as mine, perhaps a little better,” he admitted as he held his stick up to signal a taxi. “My recollections of the cults of Bastet and Pasht are somewhat hazy. I must put on the *toque de pensée* — the how do you call him — thinking-hat? — before I can give you an opinion. At present I am stumbling in the dark like a blind man in a strange neighborhood.”

It must have been sometime past midnight, for the moon which had come out with the cessation of the storm had nearly set, when the ringing of the bedside telephone woke me. “Dr. Trowbridge speaking,” I announced as I lifted the instrument.

The voice that answered me was high and thin with incipient hysteria. “This is Hazel Armstrong, Doctor — the girl you left with Jobina Houston, you know.”

“Oh?”

“I’ll say it’s, Oh! She’s gone.”

“Eh? How’s that?”

“She’s gone, I tell you. Walked right out in her nightgown, and in this cold, too.” Her voice broke like a

smashing cup, and I could hear the sound of high-pitched sobbing over the wire.

“Stop crying!” I commanded sharply. “Stop it at once and tell me just what happened.”

“I—I don’t know, sir. I think she’s gone crazy, and I’m scared. I did just as you told me, kept her covered up and kept the water bottles hot, but after a while I fell asleep. About ten minutes ago — maybe fifteen — I heard a noise and when I woke up I saw her standing by the door, about to go out. She’d pulled her nightgown down off the shoulders, and had a perfectly terrible look on her face. I said, ‘Jobina, what in the world are you doing?’ and then I stopped talking, for she looked at me and growled — growled like an animal, sir. I thought she was going to spring at me, and held a pillow up for a shield, but finally she turned away and went out the door. I didn’t try to stop her — I was afraid!”

“Do not be frightened, *Mademoiselle*,” de Grandin’s voice came soothingly over the extension. “We shall go seeking her at once. Be good enough to leave the door unlocked.”

“Unlocked? With a crazy woman on the rampage? Not me, sir. If you find her you knock three times on the door like this” — three sharp taps sounded as she struck the telephone with her nail — “I’ll let you in, but—”

“Very well,” he agreed. “Have it that way, if you wish, *Mademoiselle*. We go in search of her at once.”

“She can’t have gone far in her night-clothes in such weather as this,” I volunteered as we set out. “I only hope she doesn’t develop pneumonia—”

“I greatly doubt she will,” he comforted. “The inward fire—”

“The what—”

“No matter, I was only thinking aloud. To the right, if you please.”

“But she lives in Raleigh Street, down that way—”

“We shall not find her there, my friend. She will be at Monsieur Driggs’ unless I am far more mistaken than I think. When the cat goes mousing one goes to the mousehole to find her, *n’est-ce-pas?*”

I shook my head. This talk of cats and mice seemed utterly irrelevant.

The automatic elevator took us up to the floor where Scott Driggs lived, and the heavy carpets on the hall floor made our footsteps noiseless as we hurried down the corridor. “Ah?” de Grandin murmured as we turned the corner and came in view of his apartment entrance. “Ah-ha?” The door hung open and a little stream of pallid lamplight dribbled out into the corridor.

Through the door leading to Scott’s bedroom, which stood ajar, we saw them like the figures in a tableau. Scott lay motionless upon the bed, and standing by him, seeming more

a phantom than a person, stood Jobina Houston.

But how changed! She wore a night-gown of sheer silver-blue crêpe, knife-pleated from the bosom, and flaring like an inverted lily-cup from the waist, but she had torn the bodice of the robe, or turned it down, so bust and shoulders were exposed, and she was clothed only from waist to insteps. Her straight-cut uncurled black hair hung about her face like that of some Egyptian woman pictured on the frescoes of a Pharaoh’s tomb, and as we stepped across the sill she turned her face toward us.

Involuntarily I shrank back, for never on a human countenance had I seen such a look of savage hatred. Although her lids were lowered it seemed her eyes glared through the palpebrae, and the muscles round her mouth had stretched until the very contours of her face were altered. There was something feline — bestial — about it, and bestial was the humming, growling sound that issued from her throat through tight-closed lips.

The glance — if you could call it that — she threw in our direction lasted but a second, then she turned toward the man on the bed. She moved with a peculiar gliding step, so silently, so furtively that it seemed that she hardly stepped at all, but rather as if she were drawn along by some force outside herself. I’d seen a cat move that way as it rushed in for the kill when it had finished stalking a bird.

I opened my mouth to shout a warning — or a protest, I don’t know which — and de Grandin clapped his hand across my lips. “Be silent, species of an elephant!” he hissed, then stepped across the room as silently as the form moving toward the bed.

“Jobina Houston,” he called softly, yet in a voice so cold and distinct it might have been the tinkle of a breaking icicle. “Jobina Houston, attend me! Do not be deceived, Jobina, God is not mocked. The Lord God overcame Osiris, threw down Memnon’s altars and made desolate the temples of Bastet and Sechemet. Those Olden Ones, they have no being; they are but myths. The fires upon their altars have been cold a thousand years and more; no worshippers bow at their shrines, their priests and priestesses have shuddered into dust—”

The woman faltered, half turned toward him, seemed uncertain of her next step, and he walked quickly up to her, holding out his hand imperatively. “The ring!” he ordered sharply. “Give me the ring thou wearest without right, O maiden of the latter world!”

Slowly, like a subject under hypnosis, or a sleep-walker making an unconscious gesture, she raised her left hand, and I could have sworn the green stone of her ring glowed in the lamplight as if it were the living eye of a cat.

He drew the heavy circlet from the girl’s slim finger and dropped it into his pocket. “Quick, Friend Trowbridge,” he

ordered, “take a blanket from the bed, envelope her in it as in a *camisole de force* — what you call the strait-jacket! Quickly, while her indecision lasts!”

I obeyed him mechanically, expecting every moment she would resist me ferociously, but to my astonishment she stood quiescent as a well trained horse when the groom puts the harness on it.

“*Bien*,” he ordered, “let us take her home and see that she is rendered docile with an opiate.”

Half an hour later Jobina lay tucked in bed, sleeping under an injection of a half-grain of morphine. Hazel Armstrong had gone home, the city’s noises had sunk to a low, muted hum, and in the east the stars were paling in the light of coming day.

“Now maybe you’ll condescend to tell me what it’s all about?” I asked sarcastically as we drove home after turning Jobina over to the nurse for whom we’d telephoned the agency.

He raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug that no one but a Frenchman can achieve and made one of those half-grunting, half-whinnying noises no one but a Frenchman can make. “To tell the plain, ungilded truth, I am not sure I know, myself,” he confessed.

“But you must have had some idea — some relevant clue to it all,” I protested.

“Yes and no. When Mademoiselle Jobina, first showed signs of being overcome last night I thought as you did, that she had been taken ill, but the more I examined her the farther from a diagnosis I found myself. The sudden onset of her symptoms did not seem to match any disease I knew. Then when she told us about seeing the cat-thing almost at the moment Monsieur Scott put the ring on her finger I was till more puzzled. As you were at such pains to point out, no one else had seen the thing; the vision, if it may be called such, had been entirely subjective, something visible to her alone. It did not seem to me that she had drunk enough to see nonexistent animals, yet.... Then I observed the ring, and suddenly, something clicked in my memory. ‘Where have you seen a ring like that, Jules de Grandin?’ I asked me, and, ‘At *Le Musée des Antiques* in Cairo,’ I replied to me.

“‘*Bien*, and what about that ring, Jules de Grandin?’ I asked me.

“I searched my memory, trying to recall all that I knew about it as one struggles to recall the tune of a forgotten song.

“*Eh*, then I had it! It had been a priest’s ring from Bubastis, the city of Ubasti or Bastet, the cat-headed goddess!

“Now Bastet, or Ubasti, was the sister and the wife of Ptah, who shaped the world and had his shrine at Memphis.

She typified the benign influence of heat, the warming sun that made the grain to grow, the fire that gave men comfort. She was a mild and rather playful goddess, and therefore was depicted as a woman with a cat’s head — the kind, affectionate and gentle pussy-cat we like to have about the house.

“*Eh bien*, she had a sister variously known as Sechmet and Merienptha who was her antithesis. That one represented the cruel principle of heat — the blazing sun that parched the fields and threw men down with sunstroke, the fire that ravaged and consumed, more, the blazing heat of savage, maddened passion. Now, strangely, though they represented bane and blessing to be had from the same thing, the sisters were depicted exactly alike — a woman swathed in mummy-clothes with a cat’s head and wearing an uræus topped by the sun’s disc. Their temples stood nearby each other in the city of Bubastis, on the site of which the modern mud-village of Tel Basta stands.

“Good. When the Persians under Cambyses swarmed over Egypt in 525 B.C., the city of Bubastis was among the first they took. *Parbleu*, they were the *boches* of their day, those Persians; all that they could not steal they destroyed. So when the priests of Bastet and Sechmet heard they were about to come they hid their temples’ treasures. Some they sunk in the Nile, some they buried, some few they took with them.

“As part of his ecclesiastical vesture the priest of Bastet and Sechmet wore a gold ring set with a green stone like a cat’s eye. Many of these they enclosed in capsules of balsam resin, which was also an ingredient of their embalming. The rings thus held in their protective envelopes were buried in the earth — it was much easier to find a sphere larger than a golf ball than to hunt for a ring buried in the shifting sand.

“And then what happened I ask you? *Mordieu*, the Persians came, they pulled the city’s walls down, razed the temples to the ground, killed all the people they could find, then went upon their way of conquest.

“The years went by, the Romans came, and after them the Arabs, and still those priestly rings lay buried in their envelopes of hardened balsam. Explorers delved among the ruins of the once great temple-city and dug these rings up and took them to museums. Young Driggs’s father was one such. He brought back three rings of Bastet, two for his museum, one for himself, remember?”

“Yes,” I nodded, “but what connection is there between the ring and Jobina’s seizure, and—”

“Be patient, if you please,” he interrupted. “I shall explain if you will give me time. Like priests of every cult and faith, the priests of ancient Egypt were a class apart. They were vowed to their gods, none others might serve at the altar, none others invoke divine aid, none others wear the priestly

vestments. You comprehend?"

"I can't say that I do."

"*Eh*, then I must make the blueprint for you. As far as can be ascertained, such priestly rings as came to light were either melted down for their gold or taken to museums; none were ever worn. Jobina Houston seems to be the first one not initiated into the priesthood to wear a ring of Bastet on her finger.

"*Tiens*, those olden gods were jealous. They took offense at her wearing that ring. Bastet, or possibly Sechmet, appeared to her as in a vision, paralyzed her with fright, and finally took possession of her mind and body, driving her to make a makeshift imitation of an Egyptian priestess's costume and go to young Drigg's house to wreak vengeance on him for the sacrilege he had committed when he put the sacerdotal ring on a profane finger."

"Oh, pshaw!" I scoffed. "You really believe that?"

"I do, indeed, my friend. Jobina Houston had a morbid fear of cats, therefore she was doubly sensitive to the influence of the cat-headed goddess. In ancient days that ring had soaked up influences of the old temples when it adorned the finger of some priest of Bastet or Sechmet; it had lain sealed in resin for a full thousand years and more. Those influences could not be dissipated because of the hermetic sealing of the balsam envelope that held them. Then when they had been released from their integument those forces — those psychic influences with which the ring was saturated — were released from it as water is released from a squeezed sponge. The malefic forces took possession of Jobina like a tangible mephitic vapor. She was helpless under their influence."

"U'm-h'm," I agreed doubtfully. "I've heard of such things, but how was it you managed to arrest their working? When you called to her in Scott Driggs' flat she seemed like a sleep-walker and made no effort to resist when you demanded the ring. How was that?"

"Ah, there I took the chance, my friend. I played the hunch, as you would say. I knew that girl had been brought up religiously. She believed firmly in the power of God — of good. She was like a person in light hypnosis, unable to control herself or her movements, but able to hear outside voices. So I called to her, reminding her of the great power of God — reminded her how He had overcome the heathen world and made a mock of all the pantheon of heathen gods and goddesses. In effect I said to her, 'What are you, a Christian woman, doing when you listen to the blandishments of heathen deities? Don't you know that they are powerless before the might of the Lord God?' A child may dread its shadow, but when its father tells it that the shadow has no substance, *pouf!* that fear is gone. I told her that the forces that enthralled her had no being, that they were but myths and memories — just the shadows of old dreams that vanished in the brightness of the face of God. And so it was. For just a little moment she rebelled against their malign power, and in that moment I took off the ring. Then *pa!* the charm was broken, the spell dissolved, the powerhouse of their influence put out of commission. *Voilà.*"

"What about the ring?" I asked. "Will you give it back to Scott?"

"Of course," he answered, "but only when he promises to give it to some museum. That thing is far too dangerous to be left where unwary young women may slip it on their fingers. Yes."

Dawn came, heralded by an ever-widening crimson glow, as we turned into the driveway. "*Tiens*," he raised a hand to pat back a great yawn. "I am a tired old man, me. I think I need a tonic before I climb into bed. Yes, certainly; of course."

"A tonic?" I echoed.

"But yes. I prescribe him. Four ounces of brandy, the dose to be repeated at five-minute intervals for the next quarter-hour."

Sources for The Compleat Adventures of Jules de Grandin

VOLUME 1

1. "The Horror on the Links," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1925.	3	48. "The Heart of Siva," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1932.	753
2. "The Tenants of Broussac," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1925.	13	Cover by Brundage	752
Cover by Doolin	12	49. "The Bleeding Mummy," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1932.	770
3. "The Isle of Missing Ships," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1926.	27	50. "The Door to Yesterday," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1932.	783
4. "The Vengeance of India," <i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1926.	44	51. "A Gamble in Souls," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1933.	800
5. "The Dead Hand," <i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1926.	51	52. "The Thing in the Fog," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1933.	817
6. "The House of Horror," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1926.	57	Cover by Brundage	816
7. "Ancient Fires," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1926.	66	53. "The Hand of Glory," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1933.	838
8. "The Great God Pan," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1926.	77	Cover by Brundage	837
9. "The Grinning Mummy," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1926.	83	54. "The Chosen of Vishnu," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1933.	854
10. "The Man Who Cast No Shadow," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1927.	95	Cover by Brundage	853
Cover by Petrie	94	55. "Malay Horror," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1933.	871
11. "The Blood Flower," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1927.	106	56. "The Mansion of Unholy Magic," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1933.	883
12. "The Veiled Prophetess," <i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1927.	116	57. "Red Gauntlets of Czerni," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1933.	899
13. "The Curse of Everard Maundy," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1927.	125	Cover by Brundage	898
14. "Creeping Shadows," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1927.	138	58. "The Red Knife of Hassan," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1934.	914
15. "The White Lady of the Orphanage," <i>Weird Tales</i> , Sept. 1927.	147	Cover by Brundage	913
16. "The Poltergeist," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1927.	157	59. "The Jest of Warburg Tantavul," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1934.	927
17. "The Gods of East and West" <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1928.	168		
Cover by Senf	167	VOLUME 3	
18. "Mephistopheles and Company, Ltd.," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1928.	181	60. "Hands of the Dead," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1935.	1003
19. "The Jewel of the Seven Stones," <i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1928.	195	61. "The Black Orchid," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1935.	1015
Cover by Senf	194	62. "The Dead-Alive Mummy," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1935.	1024
20. "The Serpent Woman," <i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1928.	210	63. "A Rival from the Grave," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1936.	1034
21. "Body and Soul," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1928.	221	Cover by Brundage	1033
22. "Restless Souls," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1928.	232	64. "Witch-House," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1936.	1048
23. "The Chapel of Mystic Horror," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1928.	245	Cover by Brundage	1047
24. "The Black Master," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1929.	262	65. "Children of the Bat," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1937.	1063
Cover by Senf	261	Cover by Brundage	1062
25. "The Devil People," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1929.	275	66. "Satan's Palimpsest," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1937.	1077
26. "The Devil's Rosary," <i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1929.	292	Cover by Brundage	1076
Cover by Rankin	291	67. "Pledged to the Dead," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1937.	1090
27. "The House of Golden Masks," <i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1929.	307	68. "Living Buddhess," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1937.	1102
Cover by Rankin	306	Cover by Brundage	1101
28. "The Corpse Master," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1929.	320	69. "Flames of Vengeance," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1937.	1113
Cover by Senf	319	70. "Frozen Beauty," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1938.	1127
29. "Trespassing Souls," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1929.	329	Cover by Finlay	1126
30. "The Silver Countess," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1929.	342	71. "Incense of Abomination," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1938.	1140
31. "The House Without a Mirror," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1929.	353	Cover by Brundage	1139
32. "Children of Ubasti," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1929.	367	72. "Suicide Chapel," <i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1938.	1152
33. "The Curse of the House of Phipps," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1930.	380	Cover by Brundage	1151
Cover by Senf	379	73. "The Venomed Breath of Vengeance," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1938.	1165
34. "The Drums of Damballah," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1930.	392	74. "Black Moon," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1938.	1176
Cover by Senf	391	75. "The Poltergeist of Swan Upping," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February 1939.	1191
35. "The Dust of Egypt," <i>Weird Tales</i> , April 1930.	410	76. "The House Where Time Stood Still," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1939.	1207
Cover by Rankin	409	77. "Mansions in the Sky," <i>Weird Tales</i> , June-July 1939.	1223
		78. "The House of the Three Corpses," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1939.	1235
		79. "Stoneman's Memorial," <i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1942.	1250
		80. "Death's Bookkeeper," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1944.	1264
		Cover by Tilburne	1263
VOLUME 2		81. "The Green God's Ring," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1945.	1274
36. "The Brain-Thief," <i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1930.	503	82. "Lords of the Ghostlands," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1945.	1287
Cover by Senf	502	Cover by Tilburne	1286
37. "The Priestess of The Ivory Feet," <i>Weird Tales</i> , June 1930.	516	83. "Kurban," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1946.	1299
38. "The Bride of Dewer," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1930.	533	Cover by Tilburne	1298
Cover by Senf	532	84. "The Man in Crescent Terrace," <i>Weird Tales</i> , March 1946.	1311
39. "Daughter of the Moonlight," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1930.	546	85. "Three in Chains," <i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1946.	1322
40. "The Druid's Shadow," <i>Weird Tales</i> , October 1930.	561	86. "Catspaws," <i>Weird Tales</i> , July 1946.	1334
Cover by Rankin	560	Cover by Fox	1333
41. "Stealthy Death," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1930.	574	87. "Lottë," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1946.	1344
42. "The Wolf of St. Bonnot," <i>Weird Tales</i> , December 1930.	591	88. "Eyes in the Dark," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1946.	1354
Cover by Rankin	590	89. "Clair de Lune," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1947.	1364
43. "The Lost Lady," <i>Weird Tales</i> , January 1931.	604	90. "Vampire Kith and Kin," <i>Weird Tales</i> , May 1949.	1373
Cover by Senf	603	91. "Conscience Maketh Cowards," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1949.	1382
44. "The Ghost Helper," <i>Weird Tales</i> , February-March 1931.	621	92. "The Body Snatchers," <i>Weird Tales</i> , November 1950.	1391
45. "Satan's Stepson," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1931.	630	93. "The Ring of Bastet," <i>Weird Tales</i> , September 1951.	1401
46. "The Devil's Bride I-VI" <i>Weird Tales</i> , February-July 1932.	658		
Cover by Senf	657		
47. "The Dark Angel," <i>Weird Tales</i> , August 1932.	736		